

**Diversity of Family Farming Around the World: Existence, Transformations and Possible Futures of Family Farms**, by P.M. BOSC, J.M. SOURISSEAU, P. BONNAL, P. GASSELIN, E. VALETTE, J.F. BÉLIÈRES (Eds.), Cham, Springer, jointly published with Éditions Quæ, 2018, xx + 341 pp., € 155,99 (hardcover), € 118,99 (eBook), ISBN 978-94-024-1616-9 and 978-94-024-1617-6

Globally, large-scale agribusiness remains the predominant model. However, family farmers have withstood it, and for those interested to understand the complex dynamics behind this resistance *Diversity of Family Farming Around the World* is a suggested reading.

There is a growing awareness about the crucial role of family farmers to feed the planet and protect the environment, as well as the necessity to address their vulnerability caused by global food markets. Critical moments at the United Nations have been the adoption in December 2018 of the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, and the launch of initiatives such as the 2014 Year of Family Farming, followed by the Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028.

Yet, despite this renewed attention, there is little knowledge around the meaning of family farming, and our common representation is often limited to the one dating back to the 1980s and associated to localized communities. The main contribution of this collective work is to improve such understanding and depict an updated and realistic picture of family farmers inclusive of their complexities and varieties.

The analysis delves into the evolution of both «family» and «farm» terms. On one side, through 18 extremely different and emblematic case studies from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, the volume emphasizes the diversity of family farms. On the other, it identifies transformations in the familial component, such as replacements or strengthening under new dynamics of family traits. The variety of family forms of agriculture is examined through the common approach of the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) framework, therefore the book also intends to suggest some methodological revisions of it.

This contribution is highly insightful because it brings together dimensions that the existing body of literature has generally considered separately, such as livelihood strategies, food security, self-sufficiency, integration with markets, territorial development, labour migration, collective actions and the role of public policies. These topics are transversally examined in five parts: the logics behind non-commercial agricultural production; the interdependence between local rural areas and migration based on complex activity systems; the boundaries of this form of agriculture; the diversification of strategies both to survive and accumulate capital; the family organization between individual freedom and obligations towards the collective asset; the impact of political and territorial issues.

Throughout these subjects, it clearly emerges that diversity is the common thread lying at the root of family farmers' extraordinary ability to innovate, transform and adapt to the most diverse circumstances. The case studies reveal that family farming can thrive in favourable contexts as well as in adverse conditions, where industrial agriculture does not succeed, and this feature often revolves around three patterns: a tendency to gravitate activities to cities, those in the proximity to rural areas but also remote ones, while maintaining ties with the territories of origin; a persistent role of non-agricultural activities, especially in safety net strategies; the relevance of self-consumption that, far from being an 'archaism' in rural logics, still constitutes a central concern (p. 2).

On a methodological level, from the diversity of the exposed situations the authors identify some common aspects requiring to be further analysed and integrated within the SRL framework. Looking at the «interior» of the family unit, this work sheds light on overlooked intra-family inequalities and the impact on the family organization of new territorial boundaries created with migration. Moreover, it raises some critical issues such as the difficulty that may occur to distinguish between different types of capitals; the relevance of their interaction; the necessity of long-term analysis and of taking into consideration also the «collective» and «intangible». Likewise, towards the «exterior» of the household, while studies mobilizing the SRL framework have generally been based on a local focus, the volume

demonstrates the weight of the institutional context and collective action. In this regard, SRL approaches need to consider the role played by domestic and transnational organizations and networks, as well as global trajectories of the economy and agricultural sector.

From a conceptual perspective, the authors observe that it is difficult to draw a coherent image of family farmers summarizing the findings of all the cases, therefore these are split into «three sequential canvases»: existence, transformations and possible futures (pp. 309-310).

Concerning the existence, the situations discussed in the book bring convincing evidence of family farming worldwide persistence and social, economic and environmental relevance, even in surprising sizes and contexts. Most case studies demonstrate that this form of agriculture generally mobilizes limited means of production and allows only rather modest levels of income; however, these are compensated through diversification and complex activity systems, encompassing non-agricultural activities and emigration remittances, short-term or stable strategies.

Another major aspect is the importance of self-consumption, which is commonly considered an anachronism, associated to subsistence agriculture and stigmatized as a manifestation of poverty. The volume proves in great detail that, in reality, this function bears many economic advantages: among others, it continues to cover a central role to manage risk in contexts characterized by wide fluctuations in agricultural commodity prices or where these are high; it contributes to inclusive growth; it allows a certain degree of independence from markets, letting farmers choose the food to grow in accordance to their preferences, and part of it can be sold on short supply chains.

Overall, it is noted that governments have not adopted adequate measures to protect farmers against risks, and even if the case studies seem to suggest that solidarity within local communities has weakened compared to the past, this still represents the foundation in livelihood strategies.

The second canvas stresses the ever-changing nature of family farming unfolding some of the processes behind the capacity to adapt. Thus, it is possible to see that transformations can be linked to natural or anthropogenic factors, be conservative and reversible or radical and irreversible, short-term or long-term (p. 314). The book goes through a number of factors that nowadays frequently trigger these changes: temporary wage work, handicraft and tourism related activities, or more structural modifications such as the introduction of cash crops, low remuneration producing migration and consequently remittances, land issues, education chances, population growth. However, the most significant feature is that this polymorphism does not impair the organic relationship between the family and the farms founded on solidarity and fungibility of working capital and family patrimony.

Finally, the third canvas depicts four possible scenarios, which can also combine one another. These are the endurance of family farming with its current or similar characteristics; the entire or partial transition to entrepreneurial farming or family business farming; the decline of this form of agriculture due to migration to cities and the choice by younger generations to abandon it; the strengthening of family farming in parallel with the acknowledgement of its social, economic environmental and cultural functions (p. 318).

Providing this accurate triptych, the work encourages to expand the knowledge on the topic by better exploring a number of key factors. In particular, it calls for a critical reconsideration of the view conceiving family farming as an archaism destined to be replaced by market rules and of the indiscriminate pursuit of public policies promoting agricultural specialization at the expense of diversity. In this regard, a crucial aspect surfacing throughout the volume is precisely the influence of public policies. In some cases, these are modest, in others outdated, therefore have little impact; in general, they tend to be subordinated to global markets, in any event inadequate to support family farmers and in some situations can even make them more vulnerable. In discussing the four potential developments, the authors come back to and point out the importance of public policies, arguing that on how these are implemented will depend the future of family farming. However, despite one of the prospects envisages the strengthening of family farmers, the book lacks to emphasize the considerable transformative effects of policies and collective actions promoting agroecology, that are increasingly gaining ground and

empowering farmers all over the planet. Moreover, a greater attention on the agroecological character of this form of agriculture would squarely fit into the volume, given that agroecology embeds the same underlying principles of diversity, self-consumption, resilience, and has been strenuously supported by grassroots movements.

Nevertheless, *Diversity of Family Farming Around the World* is surely a compelling effort in the reorientation of common representation and public policies towards a conception of family farmers not as declining and residual entities, but as valuable resources to face some of our most urgent global challenges.

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