



# Food security in welfare capitalism: Comparing social entitlements to food in Australia and Norway



Carol Richards <sup>a,\*</sup>, Unni Kjærnes <sup>b</sup>, Jostein Vik <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Management, Business School, Queensland University of Technology, Queensland, Australia

<sup>b</sup> National Institute for Consumer Research, Oslo, Norway

<sup>c</sup> Centre for Rural Research, Trondheim, Norway

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 2 March 2015

Received in revised form

28 October 2015

Accepted 8 November 2015

Available online xxx

### Keywords:

Food security

Australia

Norway

Welfare capitalism

Social entitlements

## ABSTRACT

The concept of food security is often anchored in popular understandings of the challenge to produce and supply enough food. However, decades of policies for intensive agriculture have not alleviated hunger and malnutrition, with an absence of food security featuring in both economically developing and developed nations. Despite perceptions that the economic growth in advanced, capitalist societies will ensure freedom from hunger, this is not universal across so-called 'wealthy nations'. To explore the dynamics of food security in economically developed countries, this paper considers institutional approaches to domestic food security primarily through responses to poverty and welfare entitlements, and, secondarily, through food relief. Through the lens of social entitlements to food and their formation under various expressions of welfare capitalism, we highlight how the specific institutional settings of two economically developed nations, Australia and Norway, respond to uncertain or insufficient access to food. Whilst Norway's political agenda on agricultural support, food pricing regulation and universal social security support offers a robust, although indirect, safety net in ensuring entitlements to food, Australia's neoliberal trajectory means that approaches to food security are *ad hoc* and rely on a combination of self-help, charitable and market responses. Despite its extensive food production Australia appears less capable of ensuring food security for all its inhabitants compared to the highly import-dependent Norway.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

It is often taken for granted that inhabitants of advanced capitalist nations are universally food secure, the primary conditions being economic prosperity and the ability to grow abundant food. However, economic inequalities are rising across the world – including in economically developed countries (Jaumotte et al., 2013; Piketty, 2014). It has been argued that broadening social inequalities, and in particular poverty, lead to food insecurity and that food security is first and foremost a matter of unequal distribution of resources (Burns, 2004; Carolan, 2013; Sen, 1981).

Food security research predominantly focuses upon economically developing nations within Africa, Asia and South America – where poverty and hunger are most severe. This paper contributes to an emerging literature that examines food security in economically developed nations, for example: Dowler and Lambie-Mumford

(2015) and Kirwan and Maye (2013) on the United Kingdom (UK); Heynen et al. (2012) and Anderson (2013) on the United States (US); and Miewald and McCann (2014) on Canada. Given indications that food insecurity is also experienced by people in relatively wealthy nations this paper focuses on the formal status of public responsibilities for food and welfare in two economically developed nation states, Australia and Norway. Our approach is to compare two country cases that are modern capitalist states of a Western type, but which represent contrasts in both welfare and agricultural policies due to different governance structures. Norway is a typical example of a Scandinavian, social democratic welfare state with a protected and domestically-oriented agriculture, whereas Australia represents a liberal, Anglo-Saxon state both in terms of welfare and agricultural policies, with a highly export-oriented agricultural industry.

Drawing upon sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) work on 'welfare capitalism' and economist Amartya Sen's (1981) work on 'poverty and food entitlement', we explore the social, political and economic underpinnings of domestic food security. Interestingly, neither Australia nor Norway has a specific policy to deal with domestic food security, but we find that other, more indirect, policies

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [c6.richards@qut.edu.au](mailto:c6.richards@qut.edu.au) (C. Richards).

addressing agriculture, pricing and social security are decisive for the outcomes, which are quite different in the two countries. By comparing two countries with generally different political traditions with regard to social rights and redistribution the aim is to identify key institutional and political factors influencing societal responses to uncertain or insufficient domestic food availability at the individual and household level. Of the two countries, Australia clearly has a much higher productive output due to the climate and volume of land but, as we show in this paper, availability of food does not necessarily equate to universal food security within a nation. To explore this matter in depth we ask the following questions: i) How are responsibilities for food security allocated between the nation state, market and civil society? ii) In which ways are formal entitlements to food established in terms of universal rights, means-tested<sup>1</sup> relief or, instead, dependence on private sources? and iii) How can the overall arrangements be explained in view of institutional processes?

The paper firstly addresses the problem of food insecurity in developed nations, challenging the (often implicit) assumption that all citizens are food secure. The literature demonstrates that food insecurity and poverty are intrinsically linked, suggesting that food insecurity cannot be *a priori* ruled out in times of growing social inequalities and increasing numbers of poor. Next, we present the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of our study. The formal and legal conditions for people's access to food are discussed through the concept of 'entitlement' (Sen, 1981), a concept that captures the close links between food policies and social policies. We then apply theories of welfare capitalism as a basis for comparing policies of food and welfare in Australia and Norway and their implications for entitlements to food. Using these perspectives the paper identifies key features of how the two countries are addressing food security, including agriculture, food and welfare policies. We conclude that, while entitlements obtained through employment represent the primary foundation for access to food in the two countries, entitlements in the form of social rights are crucial in addressing food insecurity. Low food prices are not solely determinate of food security, as without sufficient wages or compensation through benefits, food may still be unaffordable for the economically marginalised.

## 2. Food security

According to Carolan (2013), the term 'food security' has been around for at least 40 years, first emerging at the World Food Congress in 1974. Earlier uses of food security referred not only to availability of and access to food but also to its sustainability, nutritional value and sustainable livelihoods for food producers. In 1996 the World Food Summit emphasised the need to address the household level, with food security referring to "a condition where all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 1996). Still, others contend that the term has been hijacked (Carolan, 2013) or captured (Carney, 2011) by corporate actors advocating privatised, market-driven and often technologically-driven solutions to the global food supply, such as genetically modified food. However, the main challenges remain in that food security needs to be addressed through social, economic and distributive justice (Carolan, 2013; Patel, 2007)<sup>2</sup>; if people do not have the means to purchase food, it does

not matter how much food is produced and distributed via market mechanisms, food security cannot be achieved.

Whilst poverty can be severe in developing countries there is evidence that all inhabitants of developed nations do not equally attain food security. In Downtown Eastside Vancouver, Canada, for instance, residents experience multiple barriers in accessing nutritious food (Miewald and McCann, 2014). These barriers include low incomes, homelessness, poor quality housing, disability and drug use, leading people to seek food through a mix of charity (such as community kitchens) and cheap, store-bought fast food. In the UK, Dowler and Lambie-Mumford (2015) report that household food security has suffered under austerity measures, requiring an increased reliance on charitable assistance such as food banks. Rising food and fuel prices, coupled with static or falling incomes have reduced food affordability by 20% for the lowest income households (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2015). In writing about food justice and hunger in the US, Heynen et al. (2012) draw attention to how the modern industrial agriculture complex produces empty calories cheaply, whereas the most nutritious food has become the most expensive and less accessible. They argue that the characteristics of food distribution in poorer areas of the US are responsible for both hunger and obesity, with urban "food deserts" selling mostly unhealthy fast food.

Various contemporary definitions of food security, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) definition, tend to omit notions of power and control in the food system, as ownership of inputs, processing, distribution and retail become increasingly concentrated (Patel and McMichael, 2009). In the context of such critiques the concept of 'food sovereignty' is now favoured by many non-government organisations (NGOs), human rights organisations and small-scale farmer groups, giving priority to participation by food-insecure groups and individuals. First defined by the transnational peasant organisation *La Via Campesina* in 1996 as the people's right to food and autonomous food systems, support for agro-ecological practices and resistance to trade agreements and policies, food sovereignty restores food security as a rights-based goal and is critical of development trends that focus the concept of food security on food production only (Carney, 2011; Carolan, 2013).

Yet, both food security and food sovereignty approaches tend to overlook institutional aspects in the fair provision of food for all sectors of society. Specific regulatory and welfare institutions as well as food distribution systems need to be factored in; that is, how food needs are ensured through formal and informal systems on an ongoing basis as well as in times of crisis. This involves understanding not only local community-based systems and market structures but also the arrangements linking the regulation of food prices, employment structures and social security systems – systems that often come together at a national level. A few contributions have addressed such institutional and structural issues (e.g. Pritchard et al., 2014 on India), but they rarely focus on food security in developed nation contexts.

## 3. The state, welfare capitalism and food rights: a conceptual framework

A social and political analysis of domestic food security should start with the question of the ways in which people acquire or access food, through their own production, purchase or otherwise. Important modern determinants of hunger include a lack of purchasing power and poorly developed public policies (Rashid, 1980; Sobhan, 1990, p. 87). Further, Nally (2011) observes that since the 17th and 18th centuries a shift has occurred from a 'moral economy' to a 'political economy' of hunger, the latter promoting market mechanisms as a response to hunger rather than focussing

<sup>1</sup> Means testing refers to a method for determining whether someone qualifies for a financial-assistance program based on their income, assets and possessions.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that we disregard other vulnerabilities in the food system. For instance, scholars are now drawing attention to the impact of climate change on food security (Burton et al., 2013; Lawrence et al., 2013; Sundström et al., 2013). Further, peak oil, or any disruption to the oil supply, will have a profound effect on the current food system which is heavily oil-dependent.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545519>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545519>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)