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EDITORIAL

Editorial

ANA ZAZO MORATALLA ¹

For the constitutional right to food for Chilean cities: healthy, sustainable and local. ²

In May 2021, Chile democratically elected the people who will be part of the Constituent Assembly, whose mission is to write a new constitution. Over recent months, several issues have emerged as proposals from the candidates to be debated and introduced into the future Chilean Constitution. Among these, is the right to food, which is a human right found in article 12 of the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in matters of economic, social, and cultural rights, the "San Salvador Protocol", that indicates that not only does everyone have a right to suitable nutrition, but that the States "commit to perfecting the food production, supply and distribution methods, so that they commit to promote a greater international cooperation in support of the national policies on the matter". Chile signed up to the agreement, although it has still not been ratified in Congress. Its ratification or inclusion in the future constitution would make this right into an obligation of the State, one that is demandable, and thus, can be tried in court.

With the events that emerged from the social uprising and the Covid-19 pandemic, the Chilean society has been the spectator of how Chile passed from being openly recognized for its good performance in its development indicators, to being greatly criticized for basing its development on a neoliberal model that has abandoned the people, who were used for its operation. In food security and nutritional health, the latest report of the FAO and other international organizations indicate that more than 15% of the Chilean population are facing moderate to severe food insecurity, and that around 70% of the adult population is overweight or obese (FAO, IFAD, WHO, PMA, and UNICEF, 2020). In this framework, the inclusion of the right to food in the constitution seems to be not just necessary, but urgent.

What would having a constitutional right to food imply? In general terms, it would mean that the State would be in charge of providing food security, i.e. ensuring permanent physical, social, and economic access to safe nutritious food for everyone, to be able to lead an active and healthy life (FAO). But also, this incorporation should go slightly further and include the concept of food sovereignty, namely, giving people the right to define their food consumption, distribution, and production policies, recognizing the traditions, the local, geographical, and ethnic differences, prioritizing local production and promoting the decolonization of agriculture.

The right to food has become very relevant in Chilean cities, that concentrate 65% of the population, and at the same time, it has become a great challenge, due to the heterogeneity and spatial segregation of its socioeconomic fabric. The current distribution of fresh produce food supply points in the urban space is not homogeneous, which implies that in the urban space, food deserts can be found where the population does not have access to fresh and healthy food. Likewise, the main two urban food supply systems, street markets and supermarkets, have a spatial complementarity directly linked to the different socioeconomic segments, segregated in the urban space. Those places where it is not profitable to locate a supermarket, are replaced by street markets: ephemeral distribution systems, held weekly and vulnerable to weather conditions. Urban and metropolitan policies must return to the principles of the right to food

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Figure 1, 2 Felipe Soto, Concepción 2019

and to ensure the social, economic, and spatial access to fresh and healthy food, so that they respond to the specific needs of every neighborhood. These premises lead to recovering the city and its infrastructure in food terms, like Paris was in the 19th Century and which, in the times of Covid-19, has been called “the 15-minute city”, from a food perspective.

Additionally, to be able to guarantee right to food in the cities, it is necessary to look at them from another scale and understand them as a great metabolic entity that demands and “ingests” food resources, and that expels waste. In this sense, it is necessary to focus on three aspects of the food chain: origin, consumption, and waste. The first of these, origin, is related to the distance; traceability; the spatial, social and environmental (in)justice in the production space, with the decolonialization of the production. It is necessary to balance the proportion of food that could come from a local agrarian space, allowing cities obtain their supply locally. The second one, consumption, implies understanding that this is a political act where people choose the type of impact they wish to generate on the other side of the food chain, on deciding on the products to buy, or through which systems they do so. The third, waste, refers to how these may be reduced, reused, or recycled. Waste management can no longer be the sole responsibility of the consumer, so it is necessary to have urban policies that facilitate the separation, transportation, and transformation of materials, fostering their reintegration into the life cycle, to progress towards a most sustainable relationship with the immediate surroundings. Although each one of these three elements affect different people, policies, and regions, they are connected through food as part of the metabolic entity, which it is why a comprehensive view needs to be kept, that allows generating coherent policies at an urban, metropolitan, and regional scale.

Finally, it is necessary to ask how to achieve a the right to food in cities. In this direction, there are two parallel and complementary paths. On one hand, the top-down, which would introduce the right to food in the constitution, so that policies could be made and laws could be passed that would allow generating specific actions from the State. On the other, the bottom-up, which would imply setting off on the road alongside the local agents and councils that promote a real transition of the urban foodsheds and accessibility for all citizens to wholesome, safe, healthy, and local food. The purpose of this path would be generating governance models focused on developing local food policies, capable of being replicable in other cities, based on the local particularities, and that, little by little, could be scaled up to help to generate the policies and legal frameworks that allow applying this as the rule, and not the exception, in Chilean cities. However, the ideal scenario to fully develop the constitutional right to food in the cities would involve a complementary development of both paths, and would imply that these local models would fall within pertinent policies and regulations, suitable to the urban contexts that were covered under the right to food.

