



C o v i d - 1 9
M a n i f e s t o
o f P o l l e n z o

P r e f a c e



Università di Scienze
Gastronomiche di Pollenzo
University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo



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University
By Faculty
Members

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In the first half of 2020, the planet has been shocked by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to its global reach, it has been presented as a potentially paradigmatic event and/or transformative catalyst for the beginning of a new historical era with regards to the economy, politics, and the critical relationship between humanity and the environment. As far as we are concerned as food scholars, this pandemic has illuminated the centrality of food and food cultures to global food systems, and therefore also the importance of gastronomic studies to the understanding current events and to the speculation of future developments.

In fact, scholars have agreed in locating the origin of the infection and the epidemic—in turn developing into a pandemic as a direct consequence of the global interconnections inherent in the structure of contemporary society—in the passage of the coronavirus from animal species to man, which was in no small part facilitated by the practices of the large-scale food industry. Due to densely concentrated populations of animal species that have been removed from their natural environment and fed on industrially produced feed, intensive industrial feedlots and farms by their very nature favor the replication of bacteria and viruses. To combat the latter, it is necessary to administer high doses of antibiotics and antivirals, which can lead to the development of mutant and resistant bacteria and viruses. In addition to promoting climate change, intensive livestock farming and agricultural practices rely on land grabbing and deforestation, which damage the natural habitat of wild animals, such as those suspected of having been the point of transmission of Covid-19 to humans, thereby forcing them to alter their migration patterns. The natural boundaries between urban and rural contexts have consequently been blurred, which results in closer proximity to human populations and strains of other viruses, and these species becoming carriers and diffusers

of disease. Human populations depend on agriculture for their survival, but this activity currently occupies over a third of the available landmass and endangers the existence of a large number of living species. However, it is possible for the agricultural landscape to support, rather than threaten, biodiversity if we take an agro-ecological approach and proceed to transition towards sustainable forms of agriculture and food production.

These issues of environmental sustainability highlighted by the pandemic also had immediate repercussions which reflected underlying issues of social sustainability. Social inequality and poverty are relevant factors in determining both the rate of infection and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people's health and living conditions. Particularly acute racial discrimination in diverse societies resulted in a higher number of infected and dead among racialized populations, such as black and other non-white communities in the United States, indigenous peoples of Brazil, and people of lower castes in India. Women have borne a proportionately greater burden of the effects of the pandemic and the consequent physical isolation by virtue of school closures and limited access to welfare agencies, effectively doubling the weight of unpaid domestic and care work, coupled with the resurgence of gender-based violence in the home.

As researchers, as educators, and as democratic citizens, we must recognize, first of all, that the pandemic and the respective measures implemented by government and health authorities in response to it, i.e. quarantine and physical distancing, have generated significant psychological, economic, and social traumas, at both the individual and collective level. Such trauma may have potentially far-reaching political consequences, such as jeopardizing the survival of democratic political systems in the face of the simultaneous increase of both social inequality and demagogic propaganda inciting popular outrage.

Physical isolation, the main measure governments and healthcare systems adopted to prevent and contain the spread of the virus, has generally resulted the interruption of free mobility of people, the suspension of personal relationships and gatherings, and the closure of commercial and recreational activities, leading to the consequent collapse of the economic indices and the loss or endangerment of millions of jobs. It is quite probable that this trauma will endure in the psyche and memory of the individuals and generations who have lived through it. A significant example of this is represented by school and college students: many have seen their lectures, conferences, and graduation ceremonies cancelled; some have been forced to return to their families or remain separate from their loved ones in this difficult time; young people are living with profound uncertainty their prospects for continuing their studies or entering the world of work, whether in their own or in another country.

The redefinition of the relationship between the consumer and food necessitated by the outbreak of the pandemic and the subsequent limitations to the mobility of people and food has also been traumatic in nature, at least initially. Both the fragility and the critical importance of the food supply chain in advanced societies (in which agriculture represents, in terms of employment, a relatively smaller sector of the economy) were dramatically evidenced through stark images, depicting the same story around the world: deserted markets in contrast to endless queues in front of supermarkets, and empty shelves juxtaposed to the hoarding of food products considered to be basic necessities, like flour. But the recognition that food security is not a given, together with the immobility imposed by quarantine, has led to new socio-culinary developments: a renewed interest in cooking at home, the rediscovery of mealtimes as shared and convivial experiences (even surpassing the restraints of social distancing by going “online”), and reconnection with the source of food through cultivation on

balconies or in urban gardens and other nearby spaces. In other words, in response to this emergency, the kitchen has stripped itself of many of its hedonistic and grandiose aspects projected by the media, and has returned to being experienced as a fundamental practice of everyday life, one which is intimately connected to a person's identity, their physical and mental health, and their very survival.

The pandemic had a similar impact, at the same time disruptive and potentially revolutionary, on the realm of food production and distribution. In a highly interconnected food system, where subsistence farming has been gradually replaced by a “crop economy” regime (in which different areas of the world specialize in the production of products to be traded in the global capitalist market), the mobility of food has been significantly reduced, although production, processing, and transportation of food continued to operate by virtue of its essential nature, as declared by all governments. As a result, workers involved in all aspects of the agri-food sector were redefined as “essential workers,” and therefore continued to operate in situations at high risk of contracting the virus. Many workers in these global food chains are migrants whose mobility has been reduced or impeded, and who now face even greater uncertainty regarding their socio-political and human rights. With respect to distribution of food, large-scale distribution systems have achieved a relative advantage, particularly in urban points of sale and through online commerce, and in general have seen steady growth. As a consequence of the quarantine and physical distancing measures, the food service and culinary tourism have almost entirely collapsed, hardly mitigated by the offer of services like home delivery and take-away, which had a further negative impact on local companies that supply small-scale or artisanally produced goods to restaurants, bars, and other high-quality food retailers, as well as halting all means of export to foreign countries. The profound crisis in this sector

has found a partial reprieve in the development of e-commerce platforms, the actual long-term impact of which remains to be evaluated. As for consumption, some positive trends and practices have emerged as a consequence of the crisis, many which may be starting points for future action. In the field of food justice, various associations, spontaneous activist groups, and NGOs have worked to provide health and food assistance to the weakest and most at risk sections of the population in the fight against hunger. Many of those unemployed sought work in agriculture for the first time, sometimes replacing migrant workers who were unable to reach the countryside, causing the “back to earth” movement to shift from an elitist concept to widespread practice. Above all, this crisis has demonstrated the importance of protecting local food chains and has sparked a real renaissance for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and other practices that encourage the creation of food communities, connecting local producers and consumers directly—one might even say, spiritually—thereby ensuring the safety and health on both sides, even during an emergency. The general improvement of environmental conditions during the slowdown of industrial activity and the reduction of transport powered by non-renewable energies shows the importance of reinforcing localized food systems with low environmental impact. The reduction of these conventional production and distribution practices saw an immediate and significant improvement in water and air quality, followed by the return of several animal species to their native habitats.

This series of events with respect to food in the time of Covid-19 sheds light on the broader connections with feasible and far-reaching political, economic, and technological changes. It is clear how the pandemic has signaled a significant “revival of the state,” both as a singular entity with the power, resources, and mandate to support public health—those states boasting a universal healthcare system faring better than those without—as well as a sovereign power

that dictates rules of conduct, such as the closure and regulation of specific private businesses, the limitation of free movement of citizens and implementation of border blockades, and, most importantly, the enactment of emergency social policies in order to support struggling people, communities, and economies. The European Union is currently deliberating on an unprecedented plan to provide economic aid and support loans to EU states and continental economies, particularly aimed at supporting sustainable development, public health, and digitalization. In this historical moment, when neoliberalism seems to be in profound crisis, this renewed presence of the state seems to provide support for economists arguing that post-neoliberalism will be marked by a public initiative that is not only devoted to bail out struggling private industrial-financial businesses, but also to direct the flow of investments and produce wealth. Such investments may also concern higher education and the technological sector, in particular those which the pandemic has revealed to be essential, such as information technology, communications, and telematics. Large multinational IT corporations, ranging from software and social media to smartphones and computers, together with e-commerce corporations, have made substantial profits and seen their share value grow exponentially.

The push towards teleworking and distance learning, one of the most significant outcomes of restriction of movement due to the pandemic, has given us a glimpse of scenarios that will affect the university in the near future: the increased use of e-learning platforms will allow large companies in the IT sector to make extraordinary profits, especially through partnerships with the world's most prestigious universities, that, in turn, will be able to greatly expand and diversify their student base without compromising prestige and appeal. To respond to this trend towards corporate cybernetization, elitization, and monopolization of higher education and research, liberal arts colleges and

independent universities such as Pollenzo will have to employ creativity and vision, by designing a well-structured academic offer that is experiential, community-based, and participatory regardless of whether on campus or via distance learning platforms, and maintain a distinct focus on local resources (such as landscapes, anthropological contexts, models of development, and lifestyles), all of which are, by definition, irreplicable.

We can conclude that the endeavor of understanding the role of food in the world and of understanding the world through food, the objective of the research, teaching, and third mission of the University of Gastronomic Sciences as outlined in the Pollenzo Manifesto, is reinforced by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, and calls for further development regarding the study of and effective impact on various topics:

- the containment and reduction of unsustainable farming and intensive agriculture practices, which, given their contribution to climate change, deforestation, pollution of aquifers, impoverishment of soils, threaten to provoke further global crises for public health;
- the defense of biodiversity, of the relationship between ecology and the landscape through alternative agroecological models, of organic agriculture, of a vision of the economy that is regenerative as well as circular, and of the use of botanical biodiversity for food and medicinal purposes;
- the global transition to agroecological production, with respect in particular to the implementation of agri-food policies recommended by European strategies;
- the study and socialization of an ethical relationship with food that captures its meaning in the form of memory, identity, pleasure, well-being, and conviviality, and orients itself towards

an awareness of the political, social, and cultural characteristics of food, which has been reinvigorated, in part, by the Covid-19 pandemic;

-the exploration and promotion of local agricultural, rural, and gastronomic heritage, which the pandemic and the restrictions of movement have revealed to be essential in terms of food security and environmental and social sustainability, and which have been particularly affected in the economic sector;

-the identification, documentation, and definition of regenerative processes of “localized” productions and micro-productions—that is, those built through specific social and environmental interaction with the place itself—which simultaneously enhance the agricultural and environmental role and the economic, tourism, and cultural value, of these products, practices, knowledge, and production systems;

-the study and testing of different aspects of food sovereignty through new associative models and a renewed use of collective resources such as local markets;

-support, in terms of justice and food sovereignty, for indigenous, rural, and urban communities suffering (also due to racial discrimination) from an inadequate level of food security, as manifested dramatically during the emergency;

-support for fair wage and trade union rights battles of workers in the food supply chain, for both migrant workers and citizens, the importance of whom was also revealed by their transformation into “essential workers” during the crisis;

-access to newly-available resources and participation in public, national, and community discourse, mainly through research, about topics related to the mission of the University (sustainability, sovereignty, security and food justice) and its operative frameworks (digitization etc.);

-the ideation and implementation of IT systems and platforms for remote communication and sharing to develop educational and academic methods, for research, for dissemination of information, and for activism in order to reach larger and more comprehensive audiences, without compromising on the university’s founding principles of experience and closeness.

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