

# Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives

A book review by CYNTHIA ESCOBEDO

Author: Carolyn Steel

Book title: *Hungry city: How Food Shapes Our Lives* (383 pages; £ 9.99)

Published in 2008 in London by Vintage

ISBN: 978-0-099-53168-5

*Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives* is a book that attempts to make readers wonder and reflect on the perpetual question "Where does our food come from?". This question is being interpreted through different lenses: awareness of food mileage, workers' input and wages, ingredients and processes involved, real prices, cultures and lifestyles, and one of the most important questions "How are big cities (metropolises) in non-auto-sufficient countries being fed?".

Carolyn Steel, as an architect and writer, has been interested not only in how cities live day to day, but also on how buildings are designed and constructed. This focus on everyday life considers the "mundane" things such as lifestyles and eating habits as the essential factors of how a city is built. The author suggests throughout the book to use food, rather than infrastructure, as a way to compare and see how cities are built and fed.

Steel takes the readers throughout history to show the evolution of food distribution among different locations in the world. This evolution starts with ancient cities supplying food to feed themselves without any railway system, and ends with the actual systems and routes that allow cities and countryside to work better together, even between different countries and continents. Although this city-countryside bond would allow communities to be somehow independent, nowadays we find countries and

companies deciding and supplying the food most of us consume. These modern food systems, for the first time in history, no longer take into account product demand, but the profit resulting from the products. While these systems allow our cities to be fed, they also contribute to some of the world's biggest issues: malnutrition, food security and loss of genetic variety as well as loss of our own food culture.

Between the history of how ancient cities were built and examples of changes in the food system through several years, the author might somehow lose the reader's attention. When reading the book's content one might get the impression that the author has contradicted herself, since as opposite to its title, it is not food per se which shapes our cities but the way it is distributed and by whom. Afterwards the author redeems herself, emphasizing that food has not changed but people's attitude towards it has; thus creating not only environmental but also social issues which are then addressed as "urban issues".

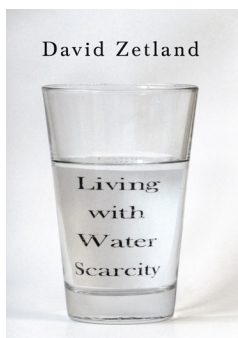
The book should certainly be read by everyone since it illuminates an issue that concerns all people. It is especially interesting for those who wonder what is behind their food (through all above-mentioned lenses) and are willing to stop and think twice when it comes to their food-related decisions. As the author mentions in one of her chapters, it is only us, consumers, who can

make a difference on how the actual food systems affect and shape our cities. It is through our conscious decisions about the food we choose (either to grow, buy, cook, eat, throw away, etc.) that the whole system can be greatly influenced. The questions “What if WE were to use food dif-

ferently?” and “What if we could return to ancient customs and choose sites for our cities?” give the readers an opportunity to reflect on their actions and hopefully lead to a change of attitude towards their own food culture. This book can be seen as a guide to see where we come from and correct some

### Author information:

Cynthia Escobedo is from Mexico and obtained a bachelor degree in Food Science in Monterrey. She is currently studying International Food Business and Consumer Studies as a master degree program at the University of Kassel, Germany. She has work experience in research and development of new products, focusing on sensory science.



## Living with Water Scarcity

A book review by LJUBOV LAPATINA

Author: David Zetland

Book title: *Living with Water Scarcity* (116 pages, 10.00 USD)

Year of publication: 2014

Publisher: Aguanomics Press

ISBN: 978-0615932187

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David Zetland is an experienced resource economist with a PhD in Agricultural and Resource Economics from University of California, Davis. He has engaged himself with political economy of water policies for ten years working as a consultant, speaker, teacher and blogger. He has published this book with a hope that people would implement the ideas presented and aims at getting readers to “think differently about problems, causes and responses” (Zetland 2014: 6).

As the title implies the emphasis of the book is centred around the problem of water scarcity –

its origins, costs and ways to tackle it. It draws on economic perspectives on the topic, backed up by environmental and political dimensions. The book is divided into two parts with the first one dedicated to economics and the second one dealing with politics. Further, each of two parts consists of 5 chapters focusing on private and social topics, respectively. The author starts by discussing water for private use first because, as he explained, these uses “are simpler to understand” (Zetland 2014: 109). David Zetland tried to keep his book short and simple so as to be understandable for a reader without the corresponding scientific background,

but for those interested in references and case studies the author recommended visiting [www.livingwithwaterscarcity.com](http://www.livingwithwaterscarcity.com) website to learn more. The book addresses important areas in understanding the topic of water scarcity issues such as rights to water, water regulations and water management, insurance for companies against dangerous spills and environmental-performance bonds, bottled water, recycled water, dams and many more. The author stressed that in order to ration our water demand we should not rely on prices and markets solely, but also integrate values that water supports in our lives, namely cultural, social and environmental. The origins of scarcity discussed in the book cover issues such as high demand driven by taste and price and often far exceeding supply, subsidies, inappropriate water management and regulation and corruption, just to name a few. Several times throughout the book the author emphasised inappropriate water pricing that does not include the scarcity cost of water and hence results in extremely cheap water that is affordable, highly demanded and as a result, overused. Furthermore, another crucial origin of scarcity is addressed – rights that have been issued by politicians without acknowledging physical limits which has led/ is leading to catastrophic consequences.

Through examples of both positive and negative managerial practices and regulations worldwide the author draws a clear line between what is right and what is wrong in the times when water becomes a scarce resource in many places around the globe. Besides, the examples of good practices prove that it is possible to regulate and allocate properly – all it takes is honest bureaucracy and management, correct allocations and fair pricing for water. David Zetland emphasises that regulations

and management systems that were established and used to work for centuries in the era of abundance are inappropriate for the time of scarcity. David Zetland has managed to write about a complex topic in an easy and accessible way, applying common sense economics and providing understandable comparisons. The author stressed that water scarcity is inevitable, be it a quantity or a quality scarcity, however what is important is learning the ways to live with it, finding appropriate solutions and adopting best practices.

At some point the reader might think that the book is addressed rather to politicians, bureaucrats and water managers than to a common citizen, however a careful reader will notice important messages left by the author several times throughout the book – calls for actions on an individual level and active participation instead of indifferent silence and ignorance, because the problem is dramatic and affects everyone at all levels in one way or another – today or tomorrow. After reading this book David Zetland wants his readers to become aware of the problem, prioritise the dimensions relevant in a particular community and start discussing options. And here the author's key message to his readers is: "Don't wait for others to do it. You have the right and an obligation to determine your future" (Zetland 2014: 109).

Undoubtedly the book should be a "must-read" for politicians and water managers to assist them in setting appropriate regulations, finding solutions and strategies, but the target audience is not limited to those in the decision-making process – everyone can benefit from reading it because a change can come only when everybody takes an action on his/her level, getting engaged and acting responsively.

### Author information:

Ljubov Lapatina studied Plant Protection and Quarantine at St. Petersburg State Agrarian University (Russia) and obtained her Master's degree in International Food Business and Consumer Studies at Kassel University and Fulda University of Applied Sciences in 2012. From January 2013 until March 2014 she has worked as a research associate at Kassel University, Department of Organic Food Quality and Food Culture, with research focus on organic food quality and sustainability. Since April 2014 - teaching assistant at Kassel University and Fulda University of Applied Sciences.



# Altering Attitudes - From a Culture of Consumerism to a Culture of Prosperity

A report review by CRISTINA P. RODRÍGUEZ TORRES

Authors: Meinhard Miegel, Stefanie Wahl, Martin Schulte with the collaboration of Elias Butzmann

Report title: *Altering Attitudes -From a Culture of Consumerism to a Culture of Prosperity* (72pages)

Year of publication: 2011

Publisher: Denkwerk Zukunft -Stiftung Kulturelle Erneuerung

Place of Publication: Bonn, Germany

ISBN: 978-0615932187

Many people are convinced that happiness, life satisfaction and wellbeing can be reached through material wealth. This is a consequence of the traditional production and consumer patterns from early industrialised countries and lately from developing countries. Additionally, the focuses on financial success, economic growth, social status etc. are other drivers to a materialistic lifestyle. However, have you ever wondered what involve the production and usage of products and services in terms of sustainability? And not only that, but also how consumers are making use of them as well.

Hence, this culture of consumerism has been causing negative impacts on the environment such as, global warming, increase of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, exploitation of natural resources, contamination of rivers, forests etc. (Miegel et al. 2011, p.15). In response to this concern, in 2011 a report was published by Denkwerk Zukunft, in which it recommended a cultural transformation. It emphasised the need for an urgent shift of society from a culture of consumerism towards a culture of prosperity. Furthermore, a change in attitudes, consumer patterns and behaviours are required to reach a non materialistic lifestyle. Therefore the term "non material wealth", in this context, means the internal enrichment of people with values for living and enjoying life on a sustainable way with more awareness and consciousness about nature.

Nonetheless, the authors identified small groups of people who support at different degrees, the adoption of sustainable economic practices and the

recognition of the necessity to change attitudes. In contrast, there are few ones who have a lack of interest or do not have enough knowledge about sustainability. This is associated, on the one hand, to the difficulty to change behaviours and the challenge of leaving material comforts aside. On the other hand, there is misinformation, lack of governmental action, greenwashing, few role models, among other reasons (Miegel et al. 2011, p.16ff).

What is also pointed out is the force of the mobilisation of individuals and groups and how can it be stimulated through adequate information and education. Especially, more support from the media, advertisers and celebrities is necessary to communicate and motivate people, for example through sustainable campaigns. In regard to the educational sector, schools programmes and projects are a key to develop social skills from childhood.

In addition, further education for teachers and parents by means of sustainability promotion is fundamental (Miegel et al. 2011, p.25ff). The state has to be more active in implementing environmentally friendly policies and reducing environmentally harmful subsidies. Moreover, the international cooperation among countries can be decisive for the placement of broad standards (Miegel et al. 2011, p.45ff). Lastly, the coordination of efforts between societies, public and private institutions can facilitate the development of more sustainable practices with the management of resources and less intense production and consumption.

### Author information:

Cristina P. Rodríguez Torres is from Ecuador and obtained her bachelor degree in Nutrition Science in Argentina. At the present, she is studying a master program in Germany, called International Food Business and Consumer Studies at University of Kassel. She has experience in the field of clinic nutrition and food management, especially in catering services and hospitals in South America. Her aspiration for the moment is to complement her knowledge abroad in the food business sector, with focus on food technology, quality management and organic food system.

## The Farmer and his Prince



Photo credit: Denkmal Film Verhaag

Director and Producer : Bertram Verhaag

Production year: 2013

Length: 84 Minutes

Production company: Denkmal Film Verhaag, Germany

Distributors: Barnsteiner-Film (Germany), Denkmal Film Verhaag (World-wide) (DVD)

A film review by AZADEH FARAJOUPUR-JAVAZMI

Industrial agriculture is the main driver of climate change, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation and water pollution. Organic agriculture takes a long-term approach towards sustainability, food security and

human health. Organic agriculture recognizes the multi functionality of agriculture, like maintaining a prosperous environment, fertile soil and pure water while producing healthy food to feed the world.

“Der Bauer und sein Prinz - The Farmer and His Prince”, a 84 minutes colorful and harmonious movie, has been produced in 2013 by Bertram Verhaag . His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and his farm manager David Wilson are the most prominent actors in this documentary. Bertram Verhaag, born 1944 in Poland, has been filming documentaries for over 30 years and he is one of the few filmmakers, who are consequently, persisting and sustainably engaged exclusively in

A long time before the word “sustainability” was used , His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales realised the importance of organic agricultural practices, but he was still uncertain about the right way. After seeing the ‘best practices’ that Prof. Dr. Vogtmann from Kassel University showed him, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales decided to adopt these approaches in his own farm. “Duchy Home Farm” was converted to organic agriculture to encourage farmers to give up using poisons and

Photo credit: Denkmal Film Verhaag



“I call him ‘my friend who is the peasant Prince’, because I think he thrives most on the land. His heart and soul is totally with the Earth.”

**Dr. Vandana Shiva**

scientific, environmental and social subjects. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales born 1948 in England, is the eldest child and heir apparent of Her Majesty the Queen. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has sought to raise world awareness of the dangers facing the natural environment, such as climate change. As an environmentalist, he was awarded numerous awards and recognition from environmental groups around the world. He is the owner of Duchy Home Farm.

His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has a vision: he wants the world to be fed by organic agriculture. To make his vision come true, he and his charismatic farm manager David Wilson have been pursuing this goal for the last 30 years. Bertram Verhaag followed them for more than five years and portrays this unique collaboration with impressive images. “Der Bauer und sein Prinz- The Farmer and His Prince” illustrates interesting insights of the cooperation between His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and his farm manager. Well-balanced and peaceful nature impressions and landscapes give an additional detailed insight in the principles and operation of organic agriculture.

to cultivate their land in harmony with nature. This example was and is a story of success, and farmers from all over the country travel to the Duchy Home Farm to see and learn the principles of organic farming and how to convert their own farms.

As well, this documentary demands viewers to rethink our way of treating nature and animals. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and Wilson demonstrate the importance of healing the environment and ecosystem of regional farms. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales tries to elaborate the crucial role of natural resources on people’s life. “His nails will always have a little dirt underneath” commented Dr. Vandana Shiva towards His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. Dr. Shiva believes that he is a prince who has the soil integrated in his physical being as well as his soul. Human beings are part of the nature which they exploit to increase yield for human consumption. However, spectators cannot only take from nature without an appropriate service in return. Almost extinct animals have to be recovered in the regional fields to increase biodiversity.

Another important function of this movie is to raise social awareness of the importance of small scale farmers, who are driven away from their land. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales illustrates the urgent need to incline the development and the protection of small scale farms. Small scale farmers live in rural areas and are more vulnerable due to fluctuating local market prices. Due to a low quality of infrastructures in rural areas, the local agricultural prices would be affected. The consequences are poverty among farmers. In conclusion, "Der Bauer und sein Prinz-

Farmer and His Prince" gives interesting insights in the cooperation between His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and his farm manager David Wilson. Peaceful and harmonic nature impressions support the central message, to reform agricultural practices and to maintain an intact environment in order to cope with big challenges like climatic change and feeding a growing global population. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales is presented in an entirely new light, which forces the viewers to throw all prejudices towards him and organic agriculture overboard.



Photo credit: Denkmal Film Verhaag

### Author information:

Azadeh Farajpour-Javazmi is from Iran and completed her Bachelor Studies in Agricultural Engineering in Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman, Iran. In her Bachelor thesis research, she conducted an interesting research study about Microbial Proteins that has been reviewed the procedures of producing, the effect of microbial proteins on food digestively in ruminants and procedures of increasing. Currently she is pursuing her Master studies in Sustainable International Agriculture from University of Kassel and Göttingen University, Germany.