

Sitopia: how food can save the world

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We live in a world shaped by food. Our cities and hinterlands were shaped by it. Our daily routines are structured around it. Politics and economics are driven by it. Our ecological footprint is determined by it. Our sense of identity is inseparable from it. Our survival depends on it. How, then, have we come to consider food as just another commodity: something to be made as cheap and convenient as possible, while we get on with the 'more important' things in life? Our profound disconnection with food, our most vital necessity, is the curious legacy of industrialisation. It is also the symptom of a way of life we can no longer afford. With a rapidly increasing global population, urbanisation, climate change and peak oil, we face a 'Neo-Geographical Age', in which our way of life and use of resources will matter as much to us as they did to our ancient ancestors.

Food is not only the most powerful human agent shaping our world, but is nevertheless one that we can harness as a design tool to rethink how we live and create new dwelling models. My term *sitopia* (food-place) describes this approach (from the Greek *sitos* + *topos*, place). The primary focus of *sitopia* is to rethink the urban-rural relationship, the basic dynamic of human civilisation. We live in cities, but if our food comes from somewhere else, to what extent do we really dwell there? I call this dilemma the 'urban paradox' – the fact that cities could not exist without countryside, yet few of us living in cities today can see the landscapes that feed us.

Today, we urgently need to rethink the way we live – and food is a powerful medium through which to do that. By thinking and acting through food, we can address such questions as how to rebalance our relationship with nature, how to build more resilient, equitable societies, how and where to build cities, how we should feed and live in them, and how we might 'post-fit' existing ones to make them more sustainable. Most importantly, we can use food to reimagine our idea of a good life. Food is the great connector: by thinking, not just about food, but *through* it, we can gain vital insights into the structures of our lives, and change them for the better.