

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".

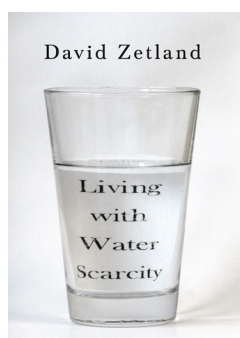
The book should certainly be read by everyone since it illuminates an issue that concerns all people. It is especially interesting for those who wonder what is behind their food (through all above-mentioned lenses) and are willing to stop and think twice when it comes to their food-related decisions. 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

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ISBN: 978-0615932187

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,