

Food prosumers in Almere: small-scale but omnipresent

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The concept of prosumption is as of yet not used much in the world of food. This is remarkable, as there have always been people who produce (part of) the food they consume. Moreover, literature that discusses alternatives to the global food system describes many forms of food production that would qualify as prosumption, such as community gardening, home growing, gleaning and foraging.

In this contribution we explore the usefulness of the concept of prosumption in relation to food. We start the presentation with a reflection on sociological conceptualisations of prosumption. We look at the work of Toffler and Ritzer, but also at literature discussing food self-provisioning – a concept that could potentially be termed prosumption.

Our empirical research was carried out in Almere, a medium-sized city in the Netherlands. We examined food prosumption by using an online survey (N = 835) and semi-structured interviews with prosumers (N = 12). We place these results in the broader context of Almere's new neighbourhood Oosterwold, where inhabitants are obliged to devote part of their land to food growing.

Prosumption is omnipresent amongst our respondents. Two thirds of them produce food for their own consumption in some way. Notably, however, this is often small-scale and little time consuming. More heavy forms of prosumption, such as community or allotment gardening, are much less present in our sample. Respondents have mostly personal and pragmatic reasons for growing their own food, such as the enjoyment of gardening and the pleasure of producing food. They are hardly motivated by profound concerns about sustainability or a wish to create a 'radical' alternative food system. Inhabitants of the urban agriculture neighbourhood Oosterwold can be divided into those who are highly committed to growing food, and those who do so because of municipal regulations.

Seeing the often pragmatic motivations for prosumption (e.g. fun, pleasure, regulations), we conclude that a pragmatic approach to the concept of prosumption in the field of food is more appropriate than sociological interpretations linking prosumption to such grand themes as power, capitalism and activism. While these last themes may be present and may link to other motivations, they should in no way be assumed.

This presentation will mainly focus on the session's proposed question 'Who are prosumers and what can be learned from them?', and to a lesser extent to the question 'What different understandings of prosumerism exist, and in which ways are these complementary or contradictory?'