

Editorial

Global Processes, Local Change and Agricultural Geography in Israel and Sweden: An Editorial Introduction

Anders Wästfelt*
Stockholm University

Environmental concerns actualized by climate changes together with recent urban and peri-urban agriculture studies have rendered new interest to the research field of agricultural geography. Together with this renewed interest in future global provision of food, and how food is produced there is a lot of research on topics related to agriculture but seldom framed as geographical.

Today it is not any longer possible to treat agriculture as something separated from urbanisation, industrialisation or global market developments, as they are all intertwined in a complex web of existence. The global megatrends have after the second world war heavily impacted on the conditions for farming everywhere; concentration, specialisation and economies of scale have together with technical and biotechnic developments forced farmers to change their practices. Combined with the liberalisation of world markets, the pressure to restructure farming to uphold competitive advantages has increased. Intensification and the search of profitable solutions to the classical problem of land and labour costs have pushed for change on farms and farmers everywhere. However, the changes never look the same in two different geographical places. Further, different locations have different comparative advantages and are affected by global change differently.

Hence, there is a need to theoretically investigate the geographical processes behind restructuring of food-chains and farming worldwide. In this context, this special issue tends to this need by featuring six studies in agricultural geography, five of them based on studies in Israel and one in Sweden. These articles analyse different change processes, which are united by the fact that to a large extent they are driven by global mega processes such as urbanisation, specialisation, industrialisation, labour migration, and environment regulations. The examples in this issue stretch

* Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University, Sweden. anders.wastfelt@humangeo.su.se

from cultivation of a desert environment in southern Israel to abandonment of land in northern Sweden.

This editorial introduction bears the sign of seeing Israel's agricultural development through the eyes of a Swedish scholar. Israel's special location close to the historical Fertile Crescent at the crossroad between Asia, Africa and Europe along with its unique post-WW II political history, have affected farming. From the first establishment of the state of Israel and through time up until today farming has had a special status and still has so. However, the last decades of development have to a large extent been affected by the same global processes as other countries.

The complicated relationship "...with Palestine" on the West Bank and the Bedouin groups who used to uphold traditional pastoralism in southern Israel is not covered by this issue, but both would be worth specific scholarly attention. This special issue has its primary focus on the internal agriculture change processes and not the state frontiers.

Articles in this special issue show:

- How the establishment of agriculture in the young state of Israel and its land rights regime still has clear impact on farming activities and agriculture's role in society.
- That location matters as distance to markets has extended which affect both the local regional urban-rural relationships and the global centre-periphery relations.
- In what way state de-regulation policies in the 1980-1990 has resulted in increased market pressure on producers, which results in structural adjustment of farms and increased labour migration. In other terms, how both land and labour become marginalised on the global scale when the market becomes globalised.
- How new forms of soft governance have arisen in relation to market demands and specific international certificates and regulations on the global scale.

The establishment of agriculture in Israel before and after 1948 has been driven by a socialist state strongly influenced by Zionist ideology. The establishment of agriculture was centrally planned and a combination of cooperative and private user rights were practised in the *kibbutzim* (plural of *kibbutz*) and *moshavim* (plural of *moshav*). Both types have been open for volunteers coming from abroad and work for free or for food and lodging. The overall ambition was, and still to a large extent is, to feed the growing population. To make the desert "bloom" is discursively on the agenda in the south but is nowadays growingly related also to forest afforestation. The Israeli state is the owner of most land, and a majority of land is on lease with contracts running for between 48 and 98 years.

As Kurlander writes in her article "Zionist vision of a commitment to the land for the sake of all Israeli people and not just the farmers", is a reflection of the ideal goal of blooming the desert and make it possible to feed the Israeli people. Even if

this ambition is clear and there are elements which reflect these aims in all papers in this issue, new forms of production have developed and affected the rural areas heavily in the last 40 years.

Daniel, Shafran and Sofer's "Land use Changes in the Rural-Urban Fringe: A case study of the Tel-Aviv Metropolitan Area" shows how agricultural areas around the metropolis of Tel Aviv have been transformed through a sub-urbanisation of the surrounding countryside. Increased intensity in agricultural production and the attractiveness of other labour markets in the city have resulted in less active agricultural societies. The article shows how the system within moshavim has had a significant impact on holding back a complete abandonment of rural livelihoods in the rural urban fringe. The distance to the cities has an important effect on the extent of the transformation. The transformation processes shown follow general patterns known from peri-urban areas around the world. However, this paper also explains how the Israeli system and the moshav system's significant cultural dimensions decrease the speed of transformation.

Greenberg, Gimon and Farja present how a double tier business system has developed in more distant rural areas, which combine local and regional business networks with more distant networks in the creation of long-distance business customer relationships. This creates a new kind of rurality in which agriculture is not only the main source of income. It results in the possibility to diversify income which attracts both business developers and local agricultural producers. The origin of this development follows general trends in the western world with declining population in rural areas due to modernization of agriculture and intense urbanization. The privatization of the moshav cooperatives which was very common in Israel also sparked the change processes in the 1990's.

Givon, Meir and Braun-Levensohn analyze the relationships between the industrial complex of Dead Sea Works (DSW) and the later established growth of commercial winter vegetables in the Sodom Square moshavim close to the border of Jordan in south east Israel, which was established in the 1970's. A complex relationship developed which in the long term resulted in a neighboring collaboration between growers and DSW. The reason behind the co-existence is, as the authors argue, a shared Zionist-influenced ideology of developing the desert into a productive space growing awareness on both sides of the environmental hazards of DSW.

The above studies from Israel start from a pioneer settler history, telling wish to develop and expand agricultural production. The case from Sweden concerns, on the contrary, the extensification of land use and the increase of land on zero-lease (land on informal lease without transfer of any money). Wästfelt and Zhang show how land in peripheral areas of Sweden in northern Europe has become devalued for production purposes, whereby in the most northern part of Sweden the amount of zero lease is as high as close to 50%. Land use models based on the use of large machineries lead to the increased scale of farms, where the number of farms decreases in favor of fewer farms holding larger areas. Scale and location are the main

explanatory variables for why land comes under zero lease. Other explanations are cultural and social, as the owners often want land to remain possible to cultivate and not be overgrown. In this case they are pushed out of the globalized food production processes because of often being too small and located at places where it is not profitable to add them to neighboring enterprises. It is hard to say what will happen in the future, but the current stage can be seen as a waiting stage, where now one knows the future value of land in this location.

Kurlander discusses how labor migration became an important part of agriculture in Israel's post-war period, especially so after 1967. It began first with daily commuting Palestine workers and voluntary people from abroad most often working at *kibbutzim*. The economic crises in the 1980's and neoliberal reforms in the 1990, together with the first Intifada, resulted in the state opening up for temporal visas for over five years for workers from Thailand. These patterns follow general global patterns that guest workers comes from long distant places.

Calvao-Chevach, Ashkenazy, Tchechnik and Blass present a case in which pepper growers in the Arava desert adapt to internal pest management (IPM) partly because local pest has become resistant to pesticides. The IPM has also been adapted to fulfill good agriculture practices (GAP) which make it possible to sell produce on the EU market and withstand competitive advantages. This means that large retailers outside Israel set the standard for production and not the state. As much as 60 % of all vegetable export comes from production in the Arava region. Pest control as well as pollination of plants is essential for high efficiency in production. The authors argue that this example is a type of soft governance and a non-state market driven mechanism which forces a specific segment in the international food-chain into a revolution in production methods.

From a geographical point of view both the long-distance migration of labor and the food chain of large quantities of pepper from the Arava region to European markets shows spatial market expansion which has characterized the last 30 years of transformation of agricultural geography of Israel. When the Israeli state follows general western world patterns the importance of agriculture for internal cohesion is lessened. Despite the fact that many small farmers have made the desert bloom, they struggle with economy. In parallel the abandonment of land continues in the northern peripheries of Europe.

What has not been explained in this special issue is how these processes in Israel and Sweden are interlinked. This is a question for future studies of agriculture geographers to answer. The theoretical models which can explain this is also lacking, models which need to rely on broad different drivers such as ideological, social, economic, cultural and level of global integration.

This special issue shows that by putting together a set of scholarly papers in rural and agriculture geography with different focus, general patterns of geography can link local processes to global megatrends.