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EDITED AND REVIEWED BY

Albie F. Miles,
University of Hawaii–West Oahu,
United States

*CORRESPONDENCE

Michele F. Fontefrancesco
✉ michele.fontefrancesco@unicatt.it

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Editorial: Traditional knowledge in food activism and governance

Michele F. Fontefrancesco^{1*}, Ina Vandebroek² and
Andrea Pieroni^{3,4}

¹Department of Sociology, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy, ²Department of Life Sciences and Caribbean Centre for Research in Bioscience (CCRIB), Faculty of Science and Technology, The University of West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, ³University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo, Bra, Italy, ⁴Department of Medical Analysis, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Traditional knowledge in food activism and governance

“Traditional Knowledge” (TK) refers to the knowledge, insights, practices, abilities, skills, beliefs, worldviews, and perspectives passed down through generations by Indigenous and local communities and traditional societies. For specific natural places, “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” (TEK) encompasses local communities’ understanding of the environment and their methods for managing it to meet their needs while maintaining its dynamic equilibrium (Berkes, 2012). Therefore, TK and TEK are deeply embedded into the co-evolution of specific environments and their inhabitants, serving as a crucial asset for environmental stewardship and cultural preservation.

Still in the recent past, TK and TEK were marginalized in public discourse under the weight of a universalistic imposition of the modern Western scientific model of science and academic knowledge (Latour, 2013). More recently, however, awareness of the value of TK and TEK have grown significantly. Several initiatives have emerged through which institutions and enterprises have begun incorporating TK and TEK into their policies and projects (Zocchi et al., 2021). This outlines an emerging process of knowledge pluralization, which promises greater participation in developing a collective vision for the future (Couee, 2024).

TK and TEK have found practical applications in food and food systems. Numerous initiatives have been launched to preserve and develop traditional foods and their underlying knowledge. These initiatives have demonstrated TK’s and TEK’s value in conserving biodiversity and cultural diversity and paved the way for sustainable development. This practical aspect of TK in food and food systems makes it a compelling topic for study.

Scientific discourse has extensively examined TK and TEK in terms of perceptions, utilization, and management of various environmental and biological food resources, local food processing methods, and their associated socio-cultural significance (Pieroni et al., 2021). However, there needs to be a better focus on how TK and TEK connect groups of individuals, communities, social movements, and economic and political institutions, as well as networks of practices involving entrepreneurship, production, consumption, and governance. Understanding these connections is essential for fostering concrete applications of TK and TEK and, ultimately, for achieving food sustainability and sovereignty. This Research Topic seeks to address this gap by bringing together insights from the global community to illuminate the diverse ways in which TK and

TEK related to food can serve as a vital tool for entrepreneurship, management, and development planning. Specifically, the contributions to this Research Topic revolve around three main overlapping themes: (1) food sovereignty, (2) indigenous governance, and (3) sustainable development.

Food sovereignty is the right of communities to define their food systems, ensuring access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and sustainably produced foods (IFSM, 2007). In their paper on “*Embroidering care and reciprocity*”, Pontes et al. examine the contributions of rural farmer feminism and agroecology to food sovereignty among female coffee growers in Veracruz, Mexico. The authors use embroidery as a metaphor to illustrate how TK and practices related to health, food gathering, and bartering extend from families to territories, thereby promoting general Earth stewardship.

From a different perspective, Hanke et al. illuminate the link between food sovereignty and TK in their article “*Supporting inuit food sovereignty through collaborative research of an at-risk caribou herd*.” The authors investigate the issues concerning caribou herding in the Canadian Arctic, a critical component of Inuit food systems, utilizing the lens of Inuit TK. They provide a novel account of six dimensions of environmental health relating to caribou in support of Inuit food sovereignty, laying the basis for a collaborative approach to caribou conservation.

These two articles also revolve around the concept of Indigenous governance, which consists of strategies and practices of Indigenous management that emphasize self-determination, TK and TEK, and sustainable resource management. Paul et al. also investigate the intersection between Indigenous governance and TK. In their article “*Blackfeet innovation pathways to food sovereignty*,” they focus on the Blackfeet Nation’s Agriculture Resource Management Plan in northwestern Montana, USA, highlighting how Indigenous-led sustainable agriculture can provide a way forward to prioritize economic development, health, and ecological sensitivity, and achieve food sovereignty through community-based planning and strategic partnerships.

In another contribution, Young et al. also explore the link between TK and TEK, food sovereignty, and governance. In their paper “*Indigenous values and perspectives for strengthening food security and sovereignty*,” they collaborate with Canada’s Bloodvein River First Nation community. Employing qualitative methods guided by Indigenous research protocols, the study centers on Indigenous values and teachings, underscoring the significance of language revitalisation, intergenerational transmission, and local leadership involvement in achieving Indigenous food governance, sovereignty, and revitalisation of their Indigenous food systems. The authors reiterate the importance of documenting oral history in Indigenous communities to identify challenges in achieving food security and sovereignty and to pass on the teachings of elders to younger generations.

The concept of sustainability, specifically sustainable development, is also a recurring theme in this Research Topic collection (WCED, 1987). Grenz and Armstrong explore this concept in their article “*pop-up restoration in colonial contexts*.” The authors look at the limitations of current mainstream restoration

strategies, which they describe as “pop-up restoration,” widely deployed by environmental NGOs to mitigate environmental injustices and disproportionate harms to Indigenous communities in Canada. They advocate for integrating Indigenous food systems and knowledge into ecological restoration planning and aligning it with community values to effectively confront and counter settler colonial impacts.

Finally, Kalenjuk Pivarski et al. explore the link between TK and development in their article “*Traditional food products on the local market - consumption conditional on the characteristics of management and restaurant facilities in tourism of Vojvodina (Serbia)*.” Using a survey of restaurant workers in managerial positions and statistical analysis, the authors examine the role of traditional food products in Vojvodina’s hospitality and tourism industry. They identify management attitudes toward these products and the key factors influencing their procurement, including the field of education and management.

The various contributions and insights in this Research Topic provide an entry point for those interested in exploring TK’s and TEK’s role in contemporary governance and entrepreneurship. These papers reaffirm TK’s and TEK’s multiple values for future development while underscoring the ongoing need for social justice.

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