Public Policies for Food Sovereignty

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Public policies for food sovereignty

Public policies play a determinant role in shaping the future of agricultural and food systems: they can underwrite legal frameworks to protect, respect and fulfill the Right to Food; bolster the investments made by small-scale food producers; and mobilise societal resources in support of sustainable food systems based on notions of resilience, decent work, environmental integrity and the provision of healthy food.

These outcomes are however far from assured. In the current neoliberal juncture, public policies skew heavily towards a highly competitive, specialized and industrial form of agriculture that favours exclusive development and an exploitative macro-economic model. Often these policies build on a much longer history of uneven development in which agriculture and rural areas are viewed as sectors and spaces to be transitioned out of, as urbanization, industry, services and the financial economy are prioritized.

This makes clear that public policies are tools, not ends in and of themselves. Without proper grounding in a solid theory of change linked to notions of a just transition democratic decision making, and a social and solidarity economy, public policies will be unable to confront the challenges facing food and agriculture in the 21st century.

Such a vision is offered by the political project of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is based on the right of peoples to define their own food system and to develop policies on how food is produced, distributed and consumed. It is above all a political call for action that it is based on empowerment processes and the generation of critical knowledge in support of the collective and popular construction of alternatives.

These alternatives take their inspiration from three main sources: i) the defense of peasant economies[1], and the production, distribution and consumption systems connected to these; ii) agroecology, conceived as both a way of producing food and a movement for change encompassing both socio-economic and socio-political dimensions; iii) equitable and sustainable food systems that guarantee the right to adequate food for all.

1. What is the political significance of leveraging public policies in support of food sovereignty?

From a food sovereignty perspective then, there is a demonstrable need to identify some of the key elements of an analytical framework for the design and implementation of public policies that strengthen food sovereignty and are based on the Right to Food. This discussion paper sketches out some of these elements. It does not attempt to be exhaustive or definite in this regard but rather offers some initial insights meant to stimulate further discussion and elaboration. Three basic elements need to be aligned with food sovereignty principles in order to deliver progressive public food and agricultural policies, mainly:

The content of the policies is in accordance with food sovereignty. That is, they must grapple with the trend to reduce natural resources to commodities and address the structural causes of hunger, poverty, and food insecurity. This means adopting a Right to Food approach whereby accountability and decision making are put in the hands of those most affected by food policy decisions who can then also ensure that governments are accountable to their commitments and fulfilling their obligations. This has real practical and policy implications. For example, despite the fact that small-scale food producers are responsible for most of the food consumed worldwide and are the largest investors in their agriculture, they often remain marginalized in policies which favour entrepreneurial farming styles and agribusiness value chains. This means that their needs, interests and visions for future development are overlooked. There is thus a need to prioritize public policies that defend and support their investments as well as territorial markets that benefit smallholders and local food systems. As one peasant leader stated, "We need policies that help us to access land and water for territorial markets".

The process of developing and implementing food policies. As a political project, food sovereignty will not succeed without building alliances between peasants and other social classes. The Nyéléni movement for food sovereignty, which comprises a diverse range of constituencies and social groups within the food system, is one such example.[2]

It is only through active social mobilization and pressure from below that public policies that strengthen food sovereignty and are based on the Right to Food will crystalize. In this sense, it is important not to limit the understanding of public policies to a strictly legal, administrative or technocratic point of view but rather to view public policies as the outcome of a constant process of negotiation, contestation and state-society (duty bearers-rights holders) interaction. The outcome of this process is then contingent on the balance of social forces and the power of reform and radical minded groups within government and society to push through progressive agendas.

Multi-level perspective that fosters linkages across local, national and international policy levels. To be coherent, public policies that strengthen food sovereignty and are based on the Right to Food must engage with and operate across all scales of policymaking, from local to global. While the local level is often the scale where most food sovereignty activism and attention is placed, it is important to be attentive to how different policy making levels interact and cohere. Elevating the local at the expense of these kinds of articulations between policy levels leaves out a more profound analysis of how social relations, markets, and policies operate and influence one another across local, national, regional and transnational scales. Engaging in the active construction of new deliberative spaces at different levels – whether it be at the local/municipal level as in the case of the creation of the Toronto Food Policy Council[3] or at global level with the reform of the UN Committee on World Food Security[4] in 2009 - can open up opportunities for promoting public policies in support of food sovereignty and drive wider innovations in the food system.

2. Fighting for inclusive, participatory, transparent and democratic policy processes

Winning access to and a strong, meaningful voice in decision-making forums in which food policies are determined is an essential part of the food sovereignty project and the application of human rights principles at all levels. In the current state of affairs, the governance of food systems is far from transparent. On the contrary, it is a complex and murky maze of formal and informal rules and regulations that are adopted and executed by different actors and at different levels. Increasingly, regulatory functions are being privatized and voluntary commitments in the form of 'corporate social responsibility' or corporate safeguards are replacing the duty of public actors to protect, respect and fulfill human rights obligations. This makes it harder to develop an overall strategy for change and to hold public authorities accountable for how well or poorly the system is working.

Civil society organizations - especially small-scale producers, urban food insecure and other marginalized groups - have been battling to exercise their rights in the design, implementation and oversight of policies that affect them. Indeed, over the past decade there has been a tendency to open up policy decision-making beyond public authorities and to include other actors.

The problem is: which actors should be seated around the table? And with what roles and responsibilities? Increasingly such 'inclusive' policy processes are taking the form of multistakeholder platforms, roundtables and dialogues in which different actors – from large corporate agricultural investors, to governments, to representatives of small-scale producers' and consumers' organizations – are all welcomed into the room on the same footing, ignoring differences in interests and responsibilities and negating power imbalances. Like housing chickens and foxes in the same coop. These policy processes do not address power dynamics among food system actors. They give undue priority to the most powerful – the corporate actors. They do not encourage a real dialogue between rights holders and duty bearers. Instead, they have become spaces for discussion without action or, worse still, for legitimating and reinforcing corporate power and conflict of interest.

Thanks in good part to strong engagement by the food sovereignty movement, the reform in 2009 of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security has turned it into a global laboratory in conducting much better than average inclusive, participatory, transparent and democratic policy practices. Here are some of the important lessons that can be learned from almost a decade of civil society experience in using this space.

Inclusive, participatory, democratic, transparent policy processes: lessons from the Committee on World Food Security

In policy processes at all levels it is important to:

• Defend the public nature of spaces intended to determine public policies.

• Achieve clarity about different roles and responsibilities of actors, following the Human Rights framework: governments as duty bearers, people and their organizations as rights-holders, others as third parties.

• If corporations and agribusiness actors are in the room it is essential to put in place a robust framework to guard against conflicts of interest whereby they take advantage of their influence over policy to advance their own profits.

• Give priority to the effective participation of representatives of most affected and marginalized rights-holders.

• Ensure an autonomous space for civil society actors to organize themselves and prepare to engage in dialogue with state authorities,

• Provide support for capacity building so they can strengthen their effectiveness in policy negotiations.

• Ensure free and transparent availability of information/documents in accessible forms/languages, and interpretation where necessary.

• Put in place effective mechanisms for monitoring the application of public policies and for holding governments accountable.

This table appears in Nora McKeon (2017), 'Are equity and sustainability a likely outcome when foxes and chickens share the same coop? Critiquing the concept of multistakeholder governance of food security'. Globalizations, Vol. 14, issue 3, pp. 379-398.

Finally, civil society actors should remember that the conflicts that need to be addressed are not limited to those between the food sovereignty movement and the corporate food system. As people, communities, movements and territories are diverse, so are the strategies, priorities and approaches to issues. And while this can often create convergence and strength to advocacy, it can also be the sources of conflict and dissonance. Thus transformative policy processes have to foresee internal dialogue and reflection to ensure that the movement doesn't divide on issues like that of producer prices vs cheap food for workers. Instead producers, workers, and consumers need to unite in opposition to the entire logic of 'low wages – cheap food for cheaply paid jobs'.

3. Territorial approaches and the rural–urban divide

In international spaces and negotiations for food, agriculture and land- territories has always been a word and concept supported and put forward by actors in the food sovereignty movement, in particular indigenous peoples. This term is one that is used to better describe the lived spatial reality of many communities, which transcends artificial borders or restrictive regulations. It is a term that also reflects the way in which the food system is actually built and understood by many small-scale food producers, which is a interaction and interdependency between many different communities and sectors, from all components of the food system- production, processing, distribution, retail, purchasing, etc. Territory is used to put forward a more holistic and comprehensive vision of how the food system should be conceptualized, and how the rights of people and communities can be realized.

This concept was often met with resistance in international spaces, as it implied sovereignty over resources, autonomy, and acknowledged the real agency of communities and peoples vis-à-vis globalization. However, recently there has been a significant shift: what used to be resistance to this concept- at least semantically- is now actively promoted by governments and UN agencies at international, regional, national, and local levels.

In the past few years, there has been increasing work and analysis by UN agencies and national governments on more comprehensive spatial approaches to governance and operational work within the food system within a "territorial framework". This is evidenced by UN-wide commitments such as the Habitat III New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, as well as dedicated work by FAO and IFAD[5] on territorial development, as well as a shift towards the promotion of decentralization and decentralized governance and the role of local governments.[6]

One issue that has emerged with this shift in terminology and concepts has been the increasing relationship, and even interchange, of territorial planning, urban-rural linkages and urban planning. What used to be urban-rural linkages is now often "territorial approaches" – and while urban areas sometimes have an important role and impact in a territory, it goes far beyond, and is much more dynamic than this linear conception of a food system, or more broadly the functions of communities and ecosystems.

Within this urban-centred paradigm, also evidenced and reaffirmed the by New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, there is a huge tendency towards natural resources not as part of the commons, but rather services for urban areas, or assessed in terms of climate impact or biodiversity offsets. As urbanization is more and more positioned as a development opportunity rather than an outcome of underdevelopment of rural areas, there is a huge risk of policies to further contribute to the emptying of rural areas. The dominant discourse of urbanization and feeding cities is one that has yet to make clear the role of peasants and other small-scale producers, and specifically the clear need to keep land and other natural resources in their hands.

There is not a static concept of "territory" or "local", and there is further work to be done in agreeing on principles of how to understand territories, while allowing for fluidity based on context, cultural norms, and community needs. However, given the space and process to ensure rural communities and meaningful rural development are part of the discussion, territorial planning of food systems can support the implementation of policies that align with food sovereignty and the right to food and that tend to food systems as a whole. Territorial planning exercises are also an opportunity that can support building convergence and solidarity amongst movements across sectors, and can resist replicating the dynamics that take place at national and international level within multi-stakeholder spaces, as discussed previously.

This approach to food system planning, and even food system advocacy, has become part of the dominant approach, but still needs to be built up and defined by the grassroots community- something that is in process as evidenced by this paper. And as these approaches, if advocated for strategically and carried out with a human rights approach, could counter the dominant urban trend and resist the reduction of peasant production systems and rural areas to resource reserves for urban areas, preserve biodiversity and support the realization and implementation of the right to food and food sovereignty.

4. Territorial markets

Markets are at the very heart of constructing coherent sets of public policies that can support territorial food systems. Strategizing about what kinds of markets can best strengthen peasant agriculture, agroecology and food sovereignty is not just about 'local markets'. It's a much broader question that involves social relations, the construction of prices and communities, and building alliances among actors within the social economy.

Feeding the cities is both a big challenge and an opportunity for small-scale food producers. Big retail chains can cut small-scale producers – as well as neighborhood grocery shops - out of the market. But at the same time, territorial markets in a food sovereignty framework can be effective instruments for building food systems in which both rural and urban social actors and interests are accommodated. In one mountain town in Spain, for example, the livelihoods of local livestock breeders were endangered by public policies that prioritized industrial dairy farms and individual

interests over collective interests. The urban community has become an ally of the small-scale producers in fighting to retain a slaughter-house in the town for the local market rather than facilitating export of industrial dairy products and meat out of the territory.[7]

Official policies tend to support formalized agribusiness value chains and corporate retail chains because they are perceived as the most efficient mode of food provisioning. Social movements have worked for two years in the Committee on World Food Security to get recognition that this is not true. The markets that channel 80% of the food consumed in the world are, rather, the territorial markets embedded in local, national and regional food systems. These markets, most often ignored by public statistics and policies, also provide a range of social and cultural functions other than just economic. They provide prices that are more remunerative for producers and nutritious food for consumers, are more inclusive of women and young people, and make it possible to retain and redistribute value added within the territorial economy.

The CFS has adopted global policy recommendations urging governments to support these markets, for example through public procurement privileging local producers and appropriate food safety standards and infrastructure (see Box on next page).[8] These recommendations should be used by government actors to build more supportive public policies, and can be used by civil society organizations to defend their positions in policy processes at all levels.[9]

Territorial markets are very diverse since they are embedded in different social, cultural and economic contexts. There is no single model that suits all circumstances. In Guatemala indigenous peoples' territorial markets are a way of building networks that can reach many communities and confront the colonized view that people can only exist within the

BOX 2
Some key CFS recommendations on markets – addressed principally to governments

- Collect comprehensive data on markets linked to local, national and/or regional food systems to improve the evidence base for policies;

- Promote fair and transparent prices that adequately remunerate smallholders' work and investments;

- Support affordable mechanisms for smallholders' access to useful, timely and transparent market and price information;

- Promote institutional procurement programs for public institutions, food assistance and school feeding;

- Establish policy and institutional arrangements that empower smallholders to have an effective and equitable role in the design and implementation of contractual arrangements;

- Invest in processing and storage equipment and facilities and their availability and accessibility across rural and urban areas;

- Improve access to inclusive financial systems, adapted to the needs of smallholders;

- Develop smallholder-targeted infrastructure for processing and packaging and infrastructure that links rural areas with urban markets, such as feeder roads, and market places for direct sales;

- Promote integrated and balanced approaches between policies and broader national strategies, to facilitate their support of markets linked to local, national, and regional food systems;

- Promote smallholder products with specific quality characteristics;

- Empower smallholders, especially women and youth, by strengthening their access to and control over productive assets and resources.

category of 'states'. They are places for recuperating traditional knowledge and practices and for political education. In the Philippines, where many small-scale producers are dependent on export rather than food crops, damage wrought by typhoons has stimulated the construction of domestic food production and marketing networks and partnerships with local authorities for healthy school feeding. In Turkey and in other coastal contexts around the world, fishers are fighting to create territorial markets for their fish, cutting out the middlemen who take most of the profits and establishing direct contacts with consumers.

The interests that oppose efforts to build markets in a food sovereignty framework rather than that of global 'free' trade are powerful. Peoples' markets must be recognized and supported. The 'data gap' on where they are located and how they function has to be filled as a basis for sounder public policies.[10] But this does not necessarily mean formalizing them and certainly should not involve subjecting them to rules that block access by small-scale producers. As territorial markets begin to come into their own it is important to promote horizontal and vertical linking and exchange of experience and to understand that local initiatives are part of a broader political battle.

5. Urban food policies

Cities have recently emerged as key sites to develop food policy innovations, among others due to the lack of action at the national level. These new urban food policies are characterized by two main tenets, on the one hand taking a holistic or integral approach to food – addressing sustainability, justice and health challenges across the food chain- and on the other hand creating new spaces of deliberation and participation such as food policy councils where stakeholders working in different parts of the food system come together. Recently, new alliances are being built between urban spaces. These include international processes such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact[11] which gathers 160 cities from all over the world where more than 450 million people live and national processes such as the Sustainable Food Cities Network connecting 50 UK cities.

These innovations occur in a context of growing urbanization that the dominant narrative considers as inevitable, but also amidst a historical urban bias, where national policies have supported for decades processes of deagrarisation and urban industrialization which result in depopulation of rural areas, fewer people growing food, larger numbers living in urban poverty and an emphasis on delivering cheap food accessible to low- and middle-income populations. Under a food sovereignty lens it is thus key to critically discuss and unpack further this urban agenda. This is particularly important now when cities are starting use food sovereignty as a frame to develop new policies and plans, for example in Barcelona. In this context, there are four interrelated themes that require special attention.

First, there is a need to acknowledge the diversity of urban spaces. There are mega-cities and small cities, some cities are surrounded by productive agricultural areas and others are being built in the desert. The urban is diverse, and therefore cities connect differently to their hinterlands. Indeed, some urban food policies and particularly social movements have been very active in creating short food supply chains and/or territorial markets as highlighted above. Examples range from collection of food waste to make compost in local farms around Madrid - an activity that used to be the norm in many cities at the beginning of the 20th century – to the reintroduction of traditional wheat seeds to make pasta and bread by producer-consumer groups in Italy. However, if we embrace a territorial approach, we need to start acknowledging as well how cities shape territories that are far away. For example, how food is consumed in London shapes livelihoods of Kenyan green beans growers.

Second, many urban food policies are built around a broad consensus on terms such as sustainability that help to bring people around the table for example in urban food policy councils but, in many occasions, might sideline discussions around structural causes of injustice. Furthermore, there are many grey areas where taking sides is highly challenging, for example should we support local but non agroecological foods? Or vice versa? Another contentious issue is how to engage with the private sector and how to distinguish different types of private actors. In this regard, a territorial approach becomes key again to define what does food sovereignty mean for a particular place – what types of markets, landscapes, public institutions – and how we make this project a reality.

The third aspect is the importance of acknowledging that we are not the same, and that indeed, the current food system is built on unequal power relations. In this regard, equity is about fairness and not necessarily about giving the same standing in a food policy council to a farmer as to a supermarket, as exemplified at the global level through the experience of the Committee on World Food Security. Similarly, these unequal power relations have a spatiality that cities need to acknowledge, from the legacy of historical colonial relationships to neocolonial processes underway. These extractive relationships are not only restricted to North-South interactions but in many instances also apply to how cities relate to their countryside. In many instances, urban spaces have relegated rural areas as merely production spaces, places to locate dirty-developments (from mining to waste sites) or spaces of consumption for urban elites (in the form of second home residences or exploitative tourism activities that displace indigenous population). One way forward is to create alliances between different but interconnected movements addressing current inequalities, such as anti-eviction campaigners, feminist, civil rights and environmental justice movements.

Finally, the new urban food agenda raises an old but timely debate on the relationship between governments and civil society. Spaces such as food policy councils aim to develop participative food policies by coordinating different actors and interests. If we fully acknowledge the complexity of our food system, these spaces present massive challenges and potential conflicts, as well as an opportunity to reflect about what type of relationship between social movements and local governments can contribute to deliver food sovereignty and the right to food. Among other opportunities, these multi-stakeholder spaces can contribute to institutionalise key values, such as participatory decision-making, transparency and accountability. Also, the emergence of these policy arenas call for a redefinition the role of the state – for example through new forms of municipalism - and the relationship with civil society to create multiple sovereignties.

Further resources
On building inclusive, participatory, transparent and democratic policy processes:

Final Declaration of Nyéléni (2007): https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf

Final report of the second pan-European Nyéléni forum for food sovereignty (2016): http://www.nyelenieurope.net/sites/default/files/2017-04/Nyeleni%20Europe%20Report%202016_web.pdf

Background Thematic Paper on Policy Convergence for second pan-European Nyéléni forum for food sovereignty (2016) - https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7nn6yduQxrPcm9Edlh6Q3NMU2M/view

On territorial approaches and markets:

Thomas Forster and Emily Mattheisen, "Territorial Food Systems: Protecting the Rural and Localizing Human Rights Accountability", Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2016, http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/Watch_2016_Article_4_eng_Territorial%20Food%20Systems.pdf

"Declaration for the Defense of our Territories", Quito, 20th October 2016, https://resistenciapopularhabitat3.org/declaration-for-the-defence-of-our-territories/

Connecting smallholders to markets: an analytical guide - http://www.csm4cfs.org/connecting-smallholders-markets-analytical-guide/

Background Thematic Paper on Food Distribution for second pan-European Nyéléni forum for food sovereignty (2016) - https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7nn6yduQxrPdTVpMlRRaEd2aTA/view

Ongoing work of the CSM Working Group on Urbanization and Rural Transformation: http://www.csm4cfs.org/working-groups/urbanization-and-rural-transformation/

On urban food policies:

A letter to build food sovereignty from our municipalities: http://www.economiasolidaria.org/files/manifiesto_; soberania_alimentaria_ingles.pdf (in Spanish, Catalan, English and French: http://www.economiasolidaria.org/carta_soberania_alimentaria).

Urban food strategies the rough guide to sustainable food systems : http://www.foodlinkscommunity.net/fileadmin/documents_organicresearch/foodlinks/publications/Urban_food_strategies.pdf

Local government food policy database (Growing connections – University of Buffalo, US) http://growingfoodconnections.org/tools-resources/policy-database/

Food policy resources (Johns Hopkins University, US) http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/food-policy-resources/

Urban Food Actions Platform http://www.fao.org/urban-food-actions/en/

Endnotes

1   In this context "peasant" also includes other small-scale food producers in the sectors of fisheries, livestock, and pastoralism.

2   Nyéléni is a name associated with the international movement for food sovereignty. It comprises a diverse array of actors including peasants, fishers, pastoralists, indigenous people, consumers, trade unions, environmental justice, solidarity, human rights organizations, community-based food movements, journalists, and researchers which have come together periodically in various fora throughout the world to build common strategies in order to re-organise the way we structure our society around food and agriculture today. See: https://nyeleni.org and https://nyelenieurope.net.

3   The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) was established in 1991 as a subcommittee of the Board of Health to advise the City of Toronto on food policy issues. The TFPC connects diverse people from the food, farming and community sector to develop innovative policies and projects that support a health-focused food system, and provides a forum for action across the food system. TFPC members identify emerging food issues that will impact Torontonians, promote food system innovation, and facilitate food policy development. See: http://tfpc.to/about

4   The UN Committee on World Food Security was reformed in 2009, following the 2007-2008 food price crisis, and has become the foremost global, multi-actor forum for shaping food security and nutrition policies. Thanks in good part to social movement engagement supported by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), producer organizations and other civil society actors – with priority voice for those most affected by food insecurity - can organize autonomously and participate in negotiations on the same footing as governments.

5   See for example IFAD's December 2015 report on Territories and rural-urban linkages https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/36a5e671-b321-4ba9-9d60-49b3cee1c0d2; UN-Habitat's territorial planning guidelines https://unhabitat.org/books/international-guidelines-on-urban-and-territorial-planning/; and an FAO / OECD publication on Territorial Approaches for Food Security http://www.fao.org/3/a-bl336e.pdf

6   This is evidenced by the creation of new city networks for food issues such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and AgroEcoCities, among others, as well as dedicated attention to food issues from existing networks such as UCLG, ICLEI, and C-40

7   Communication at the ICAS-Etxalde Colloquium in Vitoria, Spain in April 2017.

8   http://www.fao.org/3/a-mr177e.pdf

9   http://www.csm4cfs.org/connecting-smallholders-markets-analytical-guide/

10 An FAO project with small-scale producers organizations is just now getting underway to work on this issue in follow-up to the CFS recommendations.

11 See http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/

The 'Food for Thought' series brings together an exciting collection of papers that touch on different dimensions of public food policy making.

Recent evolutions in pubic food policy - from efforts to democratise, politicise and open up food policy making from municipal to international level, to the reshaping of new food geographies in the form of territorial approaches and the development of tailor made urban food strategies - raise new questions regarding the prospects and pitfalls of such policies. This series seeks to engage with these questions, providing 'food for thought' for all those interested in thinking through and working on public food policies such as food policy councils, territorial planners, and the whole array of producers, researchers, and activists that make up the broader community of food system analysis.

The process for developing this series reflects the dynamism and innovation present in the sphere of public food policy. The three different papers in the series lean on the varied inputs from academia, practitioners, civil society organisations and social movements gleaned during dedicated workshops, conferences, and fora taking place throughout Europe in 2016 and 2017. The papers crystallise the main points emerging from these key moments, complementing them with additional input from original fieldwork and expert interviews.

The Hands On the Land for Food Sovereignty (HOTL4FS) alliance is a collective campaign by 16 partners, including peasants and social movements, development and environmental NGOs, human rights organisations and research activists aiming to conduct activities in Europe to raise awareness on issues related to the use and governance of land, water and other natural resources and its effects on the realization of the right to food and food sovereignty.

www.handsontheland.net

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http://www.terranuova.org/

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