


Terroir to Non-Place

Defining Future Food Territories

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ABSTRACT: This investigation aims to break down the complexities of our global food system making them relatable and accessible to the end user, thereby adding value to food spaces that link user and system. This is accomplished through examination of the concepts: Terroir – in practice, cultural understanding, and theoretical implication; and Non-Place – as seen in the anonymous spaces of the global food system. The theory, technologies, and territories of these concepts are scrutinized revealing the relationship between city and supporting land. Terroir is established within the context of contemporary agricultural territories and technologies as a new tool for landscape design.

Agricultural territories are the middle point between global and local urban context, and are potential connectors between human participant and the global food system. Additionally, they are the basis for our conceptual understanding of landscape. Traditionally situated at the urban edge,

they mark the transition point on the urban-rural divide. Terroir is defined as the influence of all environmental factors, and cultural practices on the development of specialized food products. As a modern concept that harkens back to a traditional relationship between human and environment, Terroir is a practice that aims for maximum manipulation of environment while retaining maximum consideration for natural systems. Non-Place, a term coined by Marc Augé, describes the anonymous and disconnected agricultural territories of the global food system – the vast, repetitive fields, or increasingly automated and robotized production and distribution facilities.

This investigation poses the questions: Do agricultural territories have something to teach us about our relationship to the landscape and environment, about spatial organization, or about the potential connectedness between urban and rural environments? And, can Non-Places of the global food system be redefined as potential settings for the development of Terroir?

Various typologies of agricultural territories and technologies are examined as comparison samplings, allowing for the determination of the degree to which a landscape is defined as Terroir (place), or Non-Place. It is determined that current standard agricultural territories and technologies exemplify Non-Place, while many traditional agricultural territories and technologies display aspects of Terroir. The role of typologies is re-evaluated, and the relationship between human participant, territory, and environment is reassessed.

The findings of this investigation are presented as a breakdown of the major themes of focus, which build a comprehensive impression of the research. The basic definition of terroir is developed into an expanded analysis, affirming the territorial implications of this concept, and revealing terroir as a tool to be utilized within landscape design at all environmental scales. Additionally, the role of technology is affirmed as a cross-scale intermediary and a key element of the data collection process and sensory experience. Technology and Terroir join to yield new perspectives that enhance both character of place and cultural value previously absent from Non-Places. This implementation leads to a shift in the territorial outcome of agricultural land use prompting the reconsideration of accepted values – valuation of socio-cultural impact of agricultural territories. The relationship between human participant and environment is re-established.

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