

Reflection on Food and Air Quality in the Environment/Health Interface

Abstract

Following the approval of the *"Reflection about the Environment and Health National Action Plan (2007-2013)"*¹, the CNADS (National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development) decided that due to the relevance of the theme, some of the environmental aspects deserved a deeper analysis, as well as creating proposals and priority action to consider in the future definition of politics. Therefore, **food** and **air quality** were selected as priority domains to be analysed, due to their importance as determining the environment/health interface and the visible relation between lack of air quality and nutrition and the increase in health risks for individuals and populations.

The auditions resulted, apart from a valuable information and needs identification set, in the clear notion that public politics for a sustainable development imply commitment and compatibility between the economic, social and environmental dimensions, ensured by an institutional structure capable of ensuring public interest in the following fields: (i) reinforcement of the scientific and technological knowledge base, (ii) adoption of a scientifically valid decision process, (iii) training and information actions that generate the technically-supported commitment of the civil society in the decision-making processes ; (iv) integration and coherence of the politics; (v) timely, supported and articulated regulatory action; and (vi) a systematic and well endowed supervision of the practices of the several agents involved.

It is briefly underlined that in the Reflection several knowledge lacks were shown, whether about the characterisation of the air and food environmental domains, whether about the effects that their lack of quality can have on human health and, whether, still, about the interactions between the two considered domains (and others equally pertinent, for instance, transportation, water and soil). I&D national strategies should be started in this matter, using already tested methods, including the interested parts and with direct and measurable consequences in allocating resources for their execution. The research results should be disseminated near the society segments, through the most suitable means for the uniqueness of each target-group, promoting their scientific culture and the information about the environment/health interface in these domains, as well as the improvement of their political, social and professional performance or, more simply, as citizens.

The web of complex and reciprocal relations between food and environment is still far from being fully characterised, needing scientific and technological knowledge in several domains, especially on the national reality, implying the development of this scientific knowledge:

- To bear in mind that the local consumer deals increasingly with global food production.

¹ Visit www.cnads.pt

- To understand that foodstuff are not mere suppliers of nutrients in proper hygiene and sanitary conditions and to also consider the act of eating as a cultural action and gastronomy as an integrant value of the Portuguese cultural patrimony (*see* Minister's Council Resolution no. 96/2000, of July 26th).

- To put in practice this food-environment integration, it is important to stimulate obtaining more information and knowledge for the national reality beyond predicted in several levels, such as: food ingestion habits; food consumption habit - shopping place, transportation, packages, shopping periodicity; energy inputs throughout the life cycle of food products consumed by the population and other information allowing to help to evaluate the environmental impact of the production, transportation and consumption of different food products; citizen knowledge, attitudes and actions regarding food consumption and environmental impact.

- To understand that changes in the food consumption patterns suggested or imposed by climate change and by the need to contribute for environmental preservation, will be more easily accomplished and transformed in conscious participant processes as more integrated they are in common ancestral food practises compromised in our Mediterranean-based food culture.

- Air pollution is a problem that affects the "planet's health" and negatively reflects itself in all the ecosystems and the biological communities that occupy them. Therefore, minimising air pollution and its effects imposes the adoption of local, regional and global politics and measures. Achieving these politics and measures implies cooperation on all levels with other socio-economic sectors beyond environment and health.

- The action programs aiming to protect environment and health are essential for the future of Man on Earth. As the Environment and Health National Action Plan is available for public consultation, it is desirable to give coherence and make means available to actions regarding environmental monitoring and bio-monitoring of populations exposed to certain environmental risks in inner and outer air domains and throughout the food chain. The success of an effective integration of sector policies with urban planning and architecture, science and technology, amongst other, depends on their articulation with regional and global programs, as well as of the quality and dimension of the resources that are mobilised to perform their evaluation, periodic revision and achievement.