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FOOD ADDICTION AND THE CONTROVERSIAL OUTCOMES OF THE FOOD-TAXATION POLICIES

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The global food scenario has changed a lot in recent years. The food industry, in fact, develops ceaselessly formulas to increase the organoleptic attractiveness of foods and their compulsive consumption. These are known as “hyper palatable foods”. They are supposed to be one of the reasons of wide spreading food-addiction, not to mention the pervasive obesity epidemic.

The paper focuses on the topic of controversial “food taxes” (taxes on foods with contents of fat, sugar, salt above certain thresholds), recently applied in several countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Mexico), in order to cope with alarming phenomena of obesity, overweight and compulsive consumption of junk food. The reasoning on the basis of a food-tax is essentially simple: an extra tax on certain “target” foods induces an increase in their price, and a lowering of consumption; while the proceeds of the tax should be spent on other side interventions (i.e. awareness for a proper diet) aimed at improving the eating habits of the citizens, or to reduce other types of taxes in order to create incentives to consumption considered virtuous. But in reality, things are much more complex than that!

The issues - ethical, legal and technical - related to the implementation of a food-tax are numerous and thorny, not to mention the fact that the effectiveness of such a policy is still far to be proved. The paper, through a comprehensive analysis of data and literature available, faces up the sociocultural and economic aspects of food-taxes and proposes a few possible corrections.

Biography

Umberto Pagano, PhD in Sociology is an adjunct professor of “Sociology of culture” at University “Magna Graecia” of Catanzaro. His main research interest is in the field of public health policies, with specific regard to related social and cultural factors. Since 2001 he has published 5 books and a lot of papers in reputed journals. He is a member of the Italian Academic Group of Sociologists of Health and Medicine.

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