



Collective Farmers' Marketing Initiatives in Europe: Diversity, Contextuality and Dynamics

MARKUS SCHERMER, HENK RENTING AND HENK OOSTINDIE

[Paper first received, 1 December 2010; in final form, 13 December 2010]

Abstract. Collective action by farmers has played an important role in the history of European agriculture. During the twentieth century, the foundation of agricultural marketing co-operatives contributed in many countries to better market access, increased farm incomes and rural employment. However, European agriculture is facing a range of new challenges nowadays. Farmers have increasingly lost control over supply chains, due to globalization processes and the growing power of retailers, and they are also confronted with a general decline and reorientation of policy support. At the same time, there is a need to respond to changing demands for food safety, quality and an attractive countryside. Against this background, a range of new types of collective farmers' marketing initiatives is emerging across Europe by which farmers in coalition with other categories of societal actors aim to find answers for the challenges they are currently facing. Based on the outcomes of the European COFAMI research project, this article explores the diversity of strategies that characterize these newly emerging collective marketing strategies and the different types of social network relations that they are generating. Also, it outlines some main methodological principles for studying the dynamics and operation of new collective marketing initiatives.

Introduction

Collective action by farmers has played an important role in the history of European agriculture and rural development. During the first half of the twentieth century the joint action of farmers in many European countries gave rise to the foundation of agricultural marketing co-operatives, resulting in improved market access, a better negotiation position towards downstream market parties, and thereby indirectly in

Markus Schermer is Associate Professor of Agricultural and Rural Sociology at the Department of Sociology, University of Innsbruck, Austria; e-mail: <markus.schermer@uibk.ac.at>. He works on rural changes, alternative food systems and changes in cultural landscapes, focusing on developments in mountainous areas. Henk Renting is Associated Researcher at the Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University, Netherlands, and Visiting Professor at the Postgraduate Programme on Rural Development of the University of Córdoba, Spain; e-mail: <rentingh@gmail.com>. He has been involved in several EU projects, and was co-ordinator of the COFAMI project on collective farmers' marketing strategies. Henk Oostindie is Senior Researcher at the Rural Sociology Group of Wageningen University, Netherlands. He has ample international research experience and was involved in several EU research projects in the field of rural development, multifunctional agriculture and sustainable food supply chains.

increased farm incomes and rural employment opportunities. More recently, farmers' collectives have made an important contribution to the development and dissemination of sustainable production methods, for example through study groups in organic and integrated agriculture.

However, wider market, political and societal contexts have changed considerably and European agriculture is now facing a range of new challenges. Increasingly, farmers have lost control over supply chains, due to globalization processes and the growing power of retailers, resulting in downward pressures on product prices and the conditioning of access to mainstream markets by farmers' capacity to meet quality requirements. At the same time, farmers are confronted with important changes in agricultural and rural policy frameworks of the European Union (EU), implying a general decline in price and income support and a stronger orientation to broader rural development measures. More generally, there is a need for agriculture to respond to changing consumer and societal demands for food safety, quality and an attractive countryside. Again, collective action may potentially play a central role in finding appropriate answers for these new challenges.

This Special Issue focuses on new forms of collective action of farmers in the marketing of food products, services and public goods that are emerging throughout Europe in response to the outlined changes in market, policy and wider societal contexts. The articles herein result largely from the European research project 'Encouraging Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives' (COFAMI),¹ complemented with contributions from a working group on the same topic at the XXth Congress of the European Society for Rural Sociology (ESRS) in Wageningen, Netherlands, in August 2007. The COFAMI project looked into experiences and policies related to collective farmers' marketing initiatives in 10 countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Latvia and Switzerland) with the aim of obtaining an overview of the development and dynamics of such initiatives across Europe. Also, 18 in-depth case-studies of collective farmers' marketing initiatives (COFAMIs) were carried out to provide insights into their methods of operation and the factors that enable and limit their emergence, impact and further development.

The results of the COFAMI project draw a rich picture of the diversity and dynamics of new collective farmers' marketing initiatives throughout Europe. This diversity is reflected by the collection of articles selected for this Special Issue, which covers both different strategies of collective action in marketing as well as very different contextual settings in which initiatives emerge. The articles have a strong empirical basis, partly focusing on a particular case example of collective marketing initiatives and analysing the specificity of this experience from a specific theoretical perspective. Other articles apply a cross-country perspective and draw general conclusions from the comparative analysis of COFAMI experiences in different contextual settings across Europe. In line with this, the following sections of this introductory article give an overview of the overall insights gained from the COFAMI project, both the conceptual understanding of the emerging diversity of collective farmers' marketing strategies and the main methodological principles for the study of these.

Diversity of Quality Dimensions and Social Network Relations

The outcomes of the COFAMI research indicate that across Europe new forms of dynamism in collective action of farmers can be observed in an attempt to strengthen

the position of farmers, to increase rural incomes and employment, and to develop collectively viable adjustment strategies towards the future. While there are important differences between countries and between the specific strategies applied, these newly emerging collective marketing initiatives have in common that their approaches go beyond the classic mechanisms of co-operation characterizing traditional agricultural marketing co-operatives. The success of classic marketing co-operatives was largely based on a strategy of building countervailing power by pooling volume and joint investments in processing and marketing, thereby strengthening the negotiation position of producers vis-à-vis downstream supply-chain actors, generating cost advantages due to economies of scale, and exercising collectively more influence on price levels and conditions of exchange (Dijk, 1997).

However, the growing scale of operation of food supply chains and the concentration of processing and retail industries within globalizing food regimes (Friedland, 2004; McMichael, 2005) has undermined increasingly the strength of this classic co-operative model. To some extent, one might say, the continuous drive towards scale enlargement in which many classic marketing co-operatives find themselves caught has neutralized much of the initial strengths and co-operative principles (ownership, democratic control by farmer members). For farmers it has become more difficult to understand the processes taking place and the management decisions taken. As a result, member farmers have less influence, identify less clearly with 'their' co-operative organization, and are gradually relegated to the position of suppliers of raw materials. From the perspective of the co-operative management, the treadmill to invest continually in new technologies and quality control is often strongly felt. Thus, many traditional marketing co-operatives are struggling with the challenge to reconcile member involvement with effective marketing strategies in a highly dynamic market and policy environment (Knickel et al., 2008).

This does not mean that classic co-operatives have completely lost their importance within European agri-food markets. In fact, traditional agricultural marketing co-operatives continue to play a role as key players on food markets throughout Europe, and classic co-operative mechanisms of pooling volume and joint investments are still applied even by many newly emerging COFAMIs, though often in combination with other strategic orientations. However, classic forms of co-operative marketing have lost much of their innovative capacity, and an inventory made for the COFAMI project for 10 study countries across Europe makes clear that much of the dynamism in collective marketing initiatives corresponds to new co-operative strategies. On the basis of the COFAMI research, the following typology of empirical expressions of new collective marketing initiatives could be developed: 1. initiatives focusing on high quality food products; 2. initiatives focusing on regional food products; 3. initiatives aiming at direct producer-consumer relations; 4. initiatives developing markets for non-food products, services and public goods; and 5. initiatives establishing a regional brand (for more details, see Knickel et al., 2008; Renting, 2008).

These new forms of dynamism in collective farmers' marketing go clearly beyond traditional co-operative mechanisms of building countervailing power among farmers vis-à-vis downstream supply-chain actors. Rather, the new initiatives attempt to counteract the loss of producers' control over food supply chains by creating alliances and co-operation with other categories of societal and market actors. Also in other respects, new collective marketing initiatives can be understood as active re-

sponses to changes in market, policy and wider societal contexts. Especially relevant in this respect are:

- the increased importance of markets for distinctive food qualities arising from changing perceptions and consumer concerns over food;
- the emergence of new markets for non-food products as well as for services and public goods provided by agriculture (e.g. tourism, landscape, biodiversity, energy production) coupled with a growing recognition of the multifunctional nature of agricultural activity (Van Huylenbroeck and Durand, 2003; Renting et al., 2008, 2009);
- the growing differentiation of rural areas and evolving relations between the city and the countryside (Kováč and Kristóf, 2009; Morgan, 2009);
- changes in national and European rural policy frameworks with an increased importance of multi-sectoral, territorial governance approaches.

The exact ways in which farmers' collectives respond to these contextual changes are differentiated to a considerable degree. Consequently, the new collective marketing initiatives apply a diversity of strategies – sometimes in combination – that are crucial to take into account in order to understand their functioning and (potential) impacts.

The *notion of quality* is of paramount importance in the different strategic orientations. In many respects, quality has become a key aspect of contemporary agri-food systems (Murdoch et al., 2000; Harvey et al., 2004). On the one hand, food quality has become an important instrument for producers and providers to differentiate their products from others offered on the market and to demand higher prices or access to specific market segments on the basis of distinctive quality attributes. On the other hand, food quality has become an important domain of power struggles between different actors involved in food supply chains, with key questions being who is in control of defining what are considered distinctive food qualities and who has the power to appropriate the added value generated by accentuating these.

Many of the newly emerging COFAMIs can be understood as collective attempts by farmers to regain control over the definition, marketing and valorization of the distinctive quality of their products and, by doing so, to retain value added at member farms and within rural areas and to improve access to specific markets. However, the exact mechanisms applied for realizing this general aim are highly differentiated between various categories of collective marketing initiatives (see typology above). Initiatives focusing on high quality food products using distinct production methods (e.g. organic or animal-friendly production systems) build their strategy of quality differentiation on adhering to generic production codes, often controlled and guaranteed by an external control agency and/or backed up by state legislation. In contrast, in the case of initiatives focusing on regional food products, quality specification is effectuated by strengthening the link of the food product with the territory, emphasizing its place-based nature and embeddedness, for example by valorizing traditions of typical local products and gastronomy or by referring to specific nature and landscape values associated with regional production systems (Roest and Menghi, 2000; Barham, 2003). Often, locally specific ecological resources (e.g. soil types, specific animal breeds, or local crop varieties), producers' knowledge and experience to valorize these (e.g. artisanal methods, traditions) and distinctiveness in taste and authenticity are emphasized to further differentiate the product. Again another strategy of quality differentiation is followed by initiatives aiming at direct

producer–consumer relations, in which the distinctive quality of food products is based mainly on direct, face-to-face exchanges between producers and consumers, the trust and authenticity developed by these, and the fairness of prices paid to producers (Renting et al., 2003; Holloway et al., 2007).

The central and strategic role of quality dimensions in new collective marketing initiatives in this Special Issue is further elaborated in the article by Noe and Alrøe. They analyse the construction of quality in different types of collective marketing initiatives, and above all how quality is mediated along the food chain. Using nine cases from the COFAMI project a typology of dimensions of quality is developed. The authors look into the processes by which different quality dimensions are mediated between producers and consumers. Their final conclusion places special emphasis on the importance of creating coherence between different categories of actors along the food chain, irrespective of the specific strategic orientation of the initiative.

Another key aspect differentiating various strategies of new collective farmers' marketing initiatives concerns the *nature of social network relations* required for their emergence and successful development. As indicated previously, newly emerging collective marketing initiatives have in common that they all build and capitalize on new social networks of farmers that go beyond the agricultural sector. By doing so, they create alliances and coalitions with other categories of societal and market actors that help to regain part of producers' control over food supply chains. Again, the exact ways in which new networks and alliances are constructed beyond the agricultural sector is highly differentiated between various collective marketing strategies.

A comparative analysis of case-studies for the COFAMI project indicates that within the variety of newly emerging collective marketing initiatives three main orientations for the construction of relevant social and market network relations can be distinguished, depending on the collective strategies applied by the initiative. A strategic orientation on quality differentiation through chain networks is mainly adopted by initiatives focusing on high quality food products, which generally have a strong market orientation and depend on alliances with other supply-chain actors to valorize the distinctive quality of their products. A second category of initiatives also aims at quality differentiation, but through networks with social and market actors within the territory and by building trust-based relations within dedicated markets. This strategic orientation on quality differentiation through territorial networks and dedicated markets is, on the one hand, applied by initiatives focusing on regional food products, which often implies the building of alliances with small-scale processors, retailers and government agencies within the territory.

Initiatives aimed at direct producer–consumer relations are to be considered part of this second strategic orientation. A key element for their emergence and successful development is the establishment of new, dedicated and trust-based network relations between producers and consumers, often with a basis at the territorial and/or community level. The example of constructing direct producer–consumer relations in this Special Issue is further elaborated by Brunori et al., who describe the experience of Solidarity-based Purchase Groups (GAS) in Tuscany, Italy. Perhaps in a strict sense GAS are not COFAMIs, since they are mainly consumer-driven food networks; however, as Brunori et al. indicate, the creation and alignment of network relations between consumers and producers have played a key role in the emergence and development of the initiative in this case too. They demonstrate that the innovative nature of the initiative lies especially in the joint development by consumers and

producers of shared cognitive frameworks, codes and practices and the progressive adjustment by farmers of their farm structures and production methods to these.

The contribution by Vittersø and Jervell also highlights the importance of building new network relations to open up opportunities for collective farmers' marketing initiatives, by analysing the interrelations between recreational consumption, rural tourism and direct marketing of farmers in Norway. The article shows how tourism and recreational consumption are used actively by farm businesses as a means of creating 'alternative food spaces' in a country that is characterized generally by a highly centralized food distribution system. Collective farmers' action plays a role both in organizing the supply of rural tourism activities and the co-ordination of direct selling at farmers' markets through the organizations HANEN and Bondnens Marked. The article concludes that direct markets have developed into an interesting option for consumers, both as a leisure experience but increasingly also as part of ordinary food consumption.

This links into a third and last category of collective marketing initiatives with an orientation on network relations that are instrumental to the development of markets for new rural services and (public) goods. As the Norwegian example demonstrates, the development of markets for new goods and services provided by agriculture often presupposes the establishment of network relations with categories of actors outside the food-related supply chains in which farmers are accustomed to operate. This is the case for markets for new services such as farm-based tourism or care activities, but even more for the valorization of public goods provided by agriculture (landscape, biodiversity, water management, etc.) for which 'markets' are often incompletely articulated and largely depend on the successful enrolment of (semi-)public institutions in networks.

The Interplay between Contextual Factors and Capital Assets

The collection of articles presented in this Special Issue reflects the *diversity* of collective marketing approaches and strategies across Europe. This diversity is not only of analytical interest but has implications for aspects such as the potential impacts of COFAMIs on farm incomes, wider rural development and sustainable food production, on what are relevant categories of actors to be mobilized and enrolled for the success of each of the strategies, and on which possible support strategies may be put in place to enhance their performance and dissemination. Hence, it is important to obtain a better understanding of the operation of collective marketing initiatives and their constraining and enabling factors.

Apart from the diversity of strategies they represent, *dynamics and contextuality* are important methodological principles for a better understanding of the development of collective marketing initiatives. The results of the COFAMI project show that the emergence and development of marketing initiatives can often be understood only as active responses of farmers' collectives to changing contextual settings; they also show that the opportunities and bottlenecks embodied in each specific context to a considerable extent influence the specific development trajectories of particular collective marketing initiatives. The importance of contextuality for the development of COFAMIs in this Special Issue is most clearly demonstrated by the article by Tisenkopfs et al., who analyse the specific expression and challenges of collective marketing initiatives in the context of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries with their specific history of collectivism during the socialist period. On the basis of

four case-studies in Latvia, Czech Republic and Hungary they indicate that newly emerging collective marketing initiatives in CEE countries share a common challenge to overcome the legacy of imposed co-operation during communism, which has had a long-standing effect on farmers' attitudes and their ability to co-operate. The authors conclude that, in order to overcome the path dependency resulting from this particular historical context, more emphasis needs to be put on innovative mechanisms to rebuild trustful links and increased stocks of social capital.

However, the emergence and development of COFAMIs certainly does not only depend on the (lack of) opportunities embodied in particular contextual settings. This is illustrated by the article by Megyesi et al., who compare two case-studies of COFAMIs set in two very different environmental and historical contexts in Hungary and Austria. The article also highlights the role of social capital in collective marketing initiatives, but from a quite different analytical perspective. While the article by Tisenkopfs et al. uses a macro-perspective to analyse how social capital mechanisms can assist in enabling a transition towards post-socialist environments, the contribution by Megyesi et al. aims to grasp the internal dynamics of COFAMI development and the role that social capital mechanisms play in these. The authors analyse the role of different forms of (bonding, bridging and linking) social capital in the development of each initiative and conclude that an unbalanced composition of types of social capital may hamper the development of collective action and undermine the capacity of the COFAMI to valorize the opportunities offered by its specific contextual environment.

The perspectives of both articles on the development of collective marketing initiatives are therefore complementary and suggest that the dynamics of COFAMIs are to be understood as the outcome of the interplay between contextual factors and the internal development of the collective initiative. In line with this, Figure 1 visualizes schematically the main elements of a conceptual model to analyse the emergence and dynamics of collective farmers' marketing initiatives.

The conceptual model shows how, at a particular time and place, different contextual factors and given capital assets are the starting point for the emergence and dynamics of collective action (left-side of the figure). Contextual factors may concern market conditions, policy frameworks and institutional structures, but also social and cultural trends, and may be limiting or enabling for the development of the collective marketing initiative depending on the specific contextual setting. Capital assets, on the one hand, consist of naturally given (climate, soil, etc.) and historically co-produced assets (landscape, culture, heritage, etc.), but also cover existing social networks, knowledge, or material resources contributed by members. In correspondence with the various capital assets a COFAMI can draw upon, it can choose and design a specific strategy for collective action to valorize opportunities or overcome constraints resulting from its particular contextual setting.

In addition to contextual factors and capital assets as a starting point for COFAMI development, the conceptual model addresses the internal dynamics of collective action (right side of Figure 1), in order to understand by which mechanisms resource assets are mobilized, combined and recombined in order to build, reproduce and expand the capacity for collective agency of the initiative over time. The specific goal and strategy of the COFAMI need to be operationalized in an effective internal organizational structure, and other actors in relevant social networks need to be mobilized in order to build capacities within the initiative. The collective agency resulting from these capacities and networks in the next step translates into (social, market,

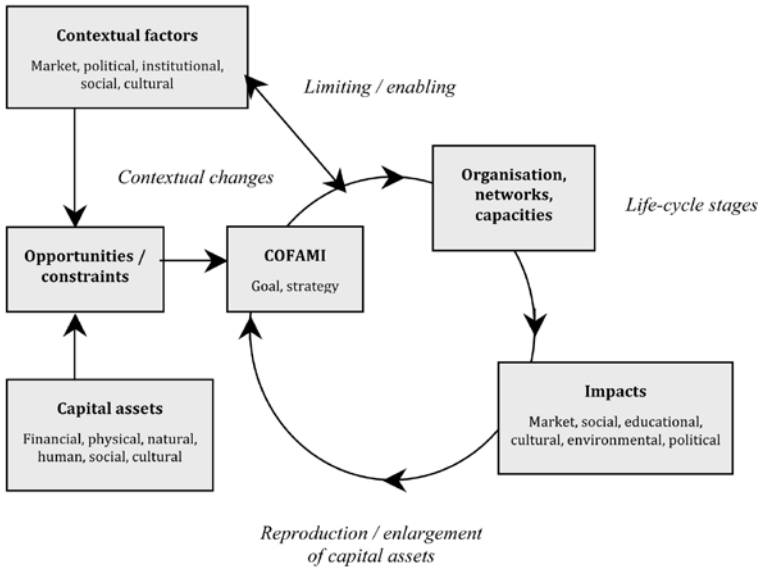


Figure 1. COFAMI dynamics as the outcome of the interplay between contextual factors and capital assets.

educational, etc.) impacts that, in turn, may result in changes in contextual factors and improvements of the capital assets that the initiative can draw upon – thereby opening new opportunities and challenges for a next ‘cycle’ in the development of the COFAMI. Following this analytical framework, the development of COFAMIs may be understood as a dynamic process over time in which different resources, conditions and networks of relevant actors required for the functioning of an initiative are combined and in interaction determine the performance and impacts of a particular COFAMI strategy.

The articles in this Special Issue provide a variety of examples and insights to illustrate the complex interactions between contextual factors and capital assets within the dynamics of collective marketing initiatives. Several case examples of initiatives are cited that highlight the role of contextual factors and social changes in triggering, enabling or hindering the emergence of COFAMIs and conditioning the choice of particular strategies of collective action. Vittersø and Jervell indicate that in the context of Norway changing policies towards local food and innovation support programmes in agriculture have resulted in a positive environment for the emergence of farmers’ markets. Megyesi et al. mention the example of small-scale dairies in Austria that were forced to reconsider their marketing strategies in view of their country’s accession to the European Union. Not only political and institutional developments, but also wider societal and cultural changes have effects on the emergence and dynamics of new collective marketing initiatives. Tisenkopfs et al. in this respect refer to the development of environmentalism as part of a civil society movement, which facilitated the founding of the region branding initiative Tradice Bílých Karpat (TBK) in the Czech Republic, while Brunori et al. point at the importance of growing consumer concern and opposition to mainstream agri-food systems as a driving force for the emergence of Solidarity Purchasing Groups in Tuscany.

Unlike the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods approach (Chambers and Conway, 1992), which conceptualizes the development of livelihood strategies in response to a vulnerability context, the COFAMI research revealed that in the case of collective marketing initiatives there are no universally enabling or hindering contextual factors. Similar contextual factors can operate as limiting or enabling factors, and whether they are perceived as opportunity or impediment always depends on the capacities and available resources of collective initiatives to respond to them. Megyesi et al. indicate along this line that the change of marketing system provoked by Austria's EU accession caused the collapse of many small-scale dairies. However, it also enabled a number of others, such as the Walserstolz case presented in this Special Issue, to design a successful niche product and to forge new network alliances along the supply chain and within the territory.

While contextual factors are the setting in which the economic activity of COFAMIs operates, capital assets represent the means by which the collective initiative responds to the challenges and opportunities arising from these. Most commonly, five different forms of capital are distinguished, namely financial, natural, physical (or built), human and social capital (e.g. Goodwin, 2003). Additionally, Svendsen and Soerensen (2007) distinguish between tangible and intangible forms of capital. Physical, financial and natural capitals are classified as 'tangible', because they can be measured and are objectified. Human capital is considered 'less tangible' since it is incorporated in human beings and thus not objectified, although it can be measured by education levels. Finally, social capital and related forms of organizational and cultural capitals are classified as 'intangible' as they are difficult to measure and are mediated by the agency of human actors. Contrary to common assumption, the analysed COFAMI cases underpin the importance of intangible forms of capital, and especially the crucial role of social capital, over tangible forms (see the articles by Tisenkopfs et al. and, especially, Megyesi et al.). Still, so far the main national and European support measures for collective marketing provide almost exclusively financial capital and physical infrastructure and, more generally, in economic projects the focus is put on financial, physical and human capital resources.

The importance of intangible capitals for sustaining competitive advantage is also underlined by economic approaches to business management following the concept of a resource-based view (Barney, 1991). The intangible character of capital assets makes it easier to prevent imitation or substitution. By basing their strategy on these capitals, firms can develop capabilities (a bundle of assets needed to perform a business process) and competencies (internal capacities to achieve competitive advantage) that allow them to stay ahead of and differentiate themselves from other firms. Another relevant insight from the empirical studies of collective marketing initiatives is that capital assets cannot be viewed in isolation. They act upon each other and a coherent strategy of collective action may result into a 'spiralling up' of different forms of capitals (Emery and Flora, 2006). Along similar lines, Megyesi et al. show for the Hungarian Arany Sárfehér case that social capital can mobilize human capital and may trigger indirectly the support by financial capital.

This leads to the observation that, in the course of their life cycle, COFAMIs gradually transform capital assets into capacities. They build organizations and networks that allow them to professionalize and institutionalize individual forms of capital and, by doing so, make them permanently available for use by the collective. Social capital, which is crucial to the building of internal cohesion within the organization and for establishing relevant wider social networks, obviously requires collective

action and may be strongly improved by actions of the initiative. Human capital is less strictly dependent on collective action, but COFAMIs have a high potential to improve this capital asset, e.g. by mobilizing member's leadership qualities or by facilitating collective learning processes. Political capital provides the link to institutions and for mobilizing or influencing policy frameworks. In the initial stages, it is often provided by key figures of the collective initiative but needs formalization to be permanently available for the entire initiative. Failure to do so may lead to crucial weaknesses in the COFAMI's organization in the long run, as suggested in, for example, the Austrian Walserstolz case described by Megyesi et al.

Thus, the configuration of contextual factors and capital assets is no longer the same at the end of a full development cycle as it was initially, resulting in the need and opportunity for the COFAMI to readjust its strategy. On the one hand, collective initiatives may succeed in expanding their capital asset base over time, but, on the other, external factors may change autonomously beyond the influence of the COFAMI. An example of gradual changes in the balance between context and capital assets over time is provided by Tisenkopfs et al., who describe how cultural barriers to collective action have been gradually overcome due to the socialist legacy in CEE countries. During the last decade, farmers have begun to reconnect to the history of pre-collectivization and to integrate lessons from COFAMI experiences in other parts of Europe, resulting in a more positive attitude towards new forms of collective action. Successful COFAMIs have the potential to positively influence and reinforce this development and thereby, at least to some extent, develop a transformative power to shape their own environment.

More generally, newly emerging collective farmers' marketing initiatives comply to a high degree with the goals and objectives set by society for future agricultural and rural development policies. The recent Communication by the European Commission on the future orientation of the EU Common Agricultural Policy after 2013 calls for measures to improve the bargaining power of farmers vis-à-vis other supply-chain actors and to enhance its value share in the food chain in order to guarantee sustainable and viable food production (European Commission, 2010). In this respect, the practices of COFAMIs as described in this Special Issue on a regional scale are often perceived as flagships and hold important lessons for the design of future European and national support measures.

Note

1. The COFAMI research project (SSPE-CT-2005-006541) was funded by the European Commission under the 6th Research Framework Programme and was effectuated from 2005 to 2008.

References

- BARHAM, E. (2003) Translating terroir: the global challenge of French AOC labeling, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(1), pp. 127–138.
- BARNEY, J.B. (1991) Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage, *Journal of Management*, 17(1), pp. 99–120.
- CHAMBERS, R. and CONWAY, G. (1992) *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century*. IDS Discussion Paper No. 296. Brighton: IDS.
- DIJK, G. VAN (1997), Implementing the sixth reason for co-operation, in: J. NILSSON and G. VAN DIJK (eds) *Strategies and Structures in the Agro-Food Industries*, Assen: Van Gorcum, pp. 94–110.
- EMERY, M. and FLORA, C. (2006) Spiraling-up: mapping community transformation with community capitals framework, *Community Development*, 37(1), pp. 19–35.

- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2010) *The CAP towards 2020: Meeting the Food, Natural Resources and Territorial Challenges of the Future*, COM(2010) 672 final. Brussels: European Commission. Published online <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/communication/com2010-672_en.pdf>, accessed 31 November 2010.
- FRIEDLAND, W.H. (2004) Agrifood globalization and commodity systems, *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 12(1), pp. 17–28.
- GOODWIN, M. (2003) *Five Kinds of Capital: Useful Concepts for Sustainable Development*, Global Development and Environment Institute Working Paper No. 03-07. Medford, MA: Tufts University. Published online <http://ase.tufts.edu/gdae/publications/working_papers/03-07sustainabledevelopment.PDF>, accessed 31 November 2010.
- HARVEY, M, McMEEKIN, A. and WARDE, A. (2004) *Qualities of Food*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- HOLLOWAY, L., KNEAFSEY, M., VENN, L., COX, R., DOWLER, E. and TUOMAINEN, H. (2007) Possible food economies: a methodological framework for exploring food production-consumption relationships, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 47(1), pp. 1–19.
- KNICKEL, K., ZERGER, C., JAHN, G. and RENTING, H. (2008) Limiting and enabling factors in farmers' collective marketing initiatives: results of a comparative analysis of the situation and trends in ten European countries, *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, 3 (2/3), pp. 247–269.
- KOVÁČH, I. and KRISTÓF, L. (2009) The role of intermediate actors in transmitting rural goods and services in rural areas under urban pressure, *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 11(1), pp. 45–60.
- McMICHAEL, P. (2005) Global development and the corporate food regime, in: F.H. BUTTEL and P. McMICHAEL (eds) *New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development*, Research in Rural Sociology and Development 11, Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, pp. 265–299.
- MORGAN, K. (2009) Feeding the city: the challenge of urban food planning, *International Planning Studies*, 14(4), pp. 341–348.
- MURDOCH, J., MARSDEN, T. and BANKS, J. (2000) Quality, nature and embeddedness: some theoretical considerations in the context of the food sector, *Economic Geography*, 76(2), pp. 107–125.
- RENTING, H. (2008) Collective approach to farmers marketing, *eStrategies*, May, pp. 102–104.
- RENTING, H., MARSDEN, T. and BANKS, J. (2003) Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development, *Environment and Planning A*, 35, pp. 393–411.
- RENTING, H., OOSTINDIE, H., LAURENT, C., BRUNORI, G., BARJOLLE, D., JERVELL, A., GRANBERG, L. and HEINONEN, M. (2008) Multifunctionality of agricultural activities, changing rural identities and new territorial linkages, *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology*, 7(4/5), pp. 361–385.
- RENTING, H., ROSSING, W.A.H., GROOT, J.C.J., PLOEG, J.D. VAN DER, LAURENT, C., PERRAUD, D., STOBBELAAR, D.J. and ITTERSUM, M.K. VAN (2009) Exploring multifunctional agriculture: a review of conceptual approaches and prospects for an integrative transitional framework, *Journal of Environmental Management*, 90(S2), pp. S112–S123.
- ROEST, K. DE and MENGHI, A. (2000) Reconsidering 'traditional' food: the case of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(4), pp. 439–451.
- SVENSDEN, G. and SOERENSEN, J. (2007) There's more to the picture than meets the eye: measuring tangible and intangible capital in two marginal communities in rural Denmark, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23(4), pp. 453–471.
- VAN HUYLENBROECK, G. and DURAND, G. (2003) *Multifunctional Agriculture: A New Paradigm for European Agriculture and Rural Development*. Aldershot: Ashgate.



Quality, Coherence and Co-operation: A Framework for Studying the Mediation of Qualities in Food Networks and Collective Marketing Strategies

EGON NOE AND HUGO F. ALRØE

[Paper first received, 1 February 2010; in final form, 13 December 2010]

Abstract. The aim of this article is to present an analytical framework to examine how qualities are mediated between producers and consumers, and how this is linked to the way the food chain is constructed, who is involved, and the way the market is developed. The framework is a reorientation to see food networks as consisting of triadic value relations that transform and mediate qualities through the chain, using an analytical typology of quality dimensions. From this perspective, a meta-analysis of case reports from collective farmers' marketing initiatives in Europe has been performed. The cases differ greatly in the number of quality dimensions involved, and they represent very different strategies to mediate the qualities from field to table. We find that the performance of the marketing strategy is related to coherence in terms of whether the individual value relations are able to carry the involved quality dimensions throughout the whole network. In conclusion, this framework is a promising tool to radicalize our understanding of how qualities are mediated through food networks.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing focus on high value food products that incorporate additional, non-standard qualities, such as organic food, as a way forward for European agriculture. By way of incorporating special cultural, aesthetic and ethical qualities in high value products, farmers and the food industry may break out of the increasing competition and narrowing profits on the global bulk markets (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006). This development has the potential to combine the goals of business opportunities, rural development and sustainable agriculture, as indicated by the growth of organic agriculture and terroir marketing, which are key examples of such a development. It is not clear what the conditions and prospects

Egon Noe is Associate Professor in Rural Sociology at the Department of Agroecology and Environment, Aarhus University, Denmark; e-mail: <egon.noe@agrsci.dk>. His current research interests are in decision-making, forms of co-operation, quality of food and rural development and he has published in the areas of rural sociology, multifunctional agriculture and cross-disciplinary research. Hugo F. Alrøe is Associate Professor in Philosophy of Science and Ethics at the Department of Agroecology and Environment, Aarhus University, Denmark. His current research interests are in the structure of scientific perspectives and the ethics of systems and he has published in the areas of philosophy of science and cross-disciplinary research, organic and sustainable agriculture, and agricultural and environmental ethics.

are for new segments of the food sector to enter successfully this alternative development path, but it is obvious that it requires forms of co-operation and collective action far beyond what is needed to compete in a bulk market (Noe, 2006).

Farmers' collective marketing can thus be an important element in combining sustainable agriculture and rural development goals in a European context through high value products. First, because co-operation could secure a bigger share of the value added in the food chains to farmers, and thereby benefit the farmers and indirectly rural areas. Second, because co-operation could support a marketing strategy where farmers are not only competing on price and quantity, but where other quality aspects of farming, such as environmental concerns, landscape and animal welfare, are evaluated via the marketing chain.

Discussions in a Danish stakeholder forum on collective farmers' marketing strategies within the COFAMI project,¹ showed a shared understanding of the importance of quality as something that has to be carried throughout the whole food chain, from production at the farm, through transformations in the network to final consumption – the understanding that quality is not only linked to the product, but also to the relation between the involved actors. An experienced director of a company that imports cheese specialities, used the metaphor 'to carry the "smile" all the way through to the consumer' as a way of explaining the importance of the fact that many qualities are dependent on the acknowledgement and skills of the people involved in mediating the qualities through the food chain. Another output of the stakeholder forum was that different forms of qualities put different demands on the food network in terms of handling and mediating. The big challenge of these collective marketing strategies is therefore not only to ensure the production of high quality food items, but also to ensure that these qualities are mediated and supported throughout the network to the consumers.

Within rural sociology there is an emerging tradition for looking at food chains as actor networks (see e.g. Lockie and Kitto, 2000; Marsden, 2000; Goodman, 2001; Murdoch and Miele, 2004; Holloway et al., 2007) and a 'turn' to quality associated with the proliferation of alternative agro-food networks (Goodman, 2003). Still, we miss analytical tools to examine the question of how quality is mediated. The question of how to carry quality through food chains touches a deep, difficult and substantial question for sustainable food production. The ambition of this article is to present and apply a relational perspective on the mediation of quality in food networks.

There are a number of studies of quality in agri-food networks based on convention theory (e.g. Renard, 2003; Ponte and Gibbon, 2005). Convention theory focuses on the role played by macro-level normative systems in shaping interactions between individuals by way of establishing legitimacy and justification (e.g. Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Denis et al., 2007). This is quite compatible with our approach, but these studies tend to focus on the overall co-ordination among actors and treat qualities as objects of collective understanding and negotiation, whereas we treat qualities as aspects of the empirical relation between actor and object. Mansfield (2003), who argues that quality is something that exists in interactions and relations among elements in the commodity chain, is an example of a study that comes close to our relational perspective on qualities in food networks, a perspective that is connected to a broader relational view of values (Alrøe and Kristensen, 2003, p. 76f).

The 'economy of qualities' is an elaborated relational approach to the concept of quality, which describes the dynamic economy of the product where quality is obtained through processes of qualification, through which qualities are attributed,

stabilized, objectified and arranged (Callon et al., 2002). Goods are (temporarily) stabilized products, and qualities allow goods to be differentiated from one another. The good, as a configuration likely to vary in a continuous process of qualification-requalification, is thus an economic variable in line with price, and the qualification of goods is at the heart of economic competition.

We share the emphasis on quality as an empirical reality found in the economy of qualities, but our focus here is on the mediation of qualities that are rooted in primary production, and not on the open and unbounded qualification processes that Callon et al. discuss. Where they come closest to discussing mediation, Callon et al. say that there is a host of different actors that share a product and pass it on to the next in line, and who can propose and prepare qualifications, including consumers (see also Stræte, 2008), and they emphasize that the co-ordination between these actors is difficult. It requires, as they say, 'an apparatus of distributed cognition in which information and references are spread out between many elements'. Along the same line, Brunori (2007) states that the success of local food networks depends on the capacity of the strategy to 'align' actors along shared axes of meaning as the condition to co-ordinate their action, noting that: 'The process of qualification brings a gradual "objectification" of a set of quality characteristics, obtained by consolidating actor-networks around agreed meanings that relate to the product'.

The economy of qualities is not at all incompatible with our approach here, but it is not directly applicable either, due to an important difference in focus. Some qualities can only be created in the primary production, and not through qualification processes in other parts of the food chain, and these qualities are key elements in collective farmers marketing strategies. In this article, we focus on how these 'primary' qualities can be mediated through the food chain, and not on the more general and less bounded qualification processes in food networks.

Because our focus is on qualities created in the primary production, in particular localized settings – qualities that will elude us if we treat them like material features or characteristics of the product, or if we treat them like meanings that are ascribed to the product without any material basis – we pursue a more fundamental and radical relational conception of quality. In this article, we will unfold such a relational conception of quality to examine how qualities are mediated in food networks.

The fundamentally relational understanding of quality that we advocate in this article is closely related to Robert M. Pirsig's notion of Quality. In Pirsig's (1991, 1999) understanding, quality is a relational entity that is prior to the objects involved in the relation. This understanding contains a radicality that we find can contribute to sharpening the analysis and understanding of mediation of qualities in food networks. Based on Pirsig's ideas, we have developed an analytical framework for examination and exploration of the correspondence between quality, marketing strategy and coherence in food networks.

The proposition of this article is that a deeper understanding of how the values and qualities of food products are mediated in different food chains, and what this means for the producer-consumer relationships, can, on the one hand, help to understand the different development pathways of collective farmers marketing initiatives in various parts of Europe and, on the other hand, help the involved actors in developing and improving primary production based networks of high-value food – as two sides of the same coin.

The two mutually supporting aims of this article are therefore: 1. to present an analytical framework to examine how qualities are mediated between producers

and consumers, how this is linked to the way the food chain is constructed, who is involved, and the way the market is developed; and on this basis, 2. to contribute to a deeper understanding of what makes collective farmers marketing strategies successful.

Method and Approach

This article builds on a combination of theoretical and empirical analyses. In the following, we first give an introduction to Robert M. Pirsig's notion of qualities as primary to objects and not as features of objects, and develop this into an operational analytical framework. The analytical framework is based on the idea that the mediation of qualities can be represented by way of triadic value relations, using the comprehensive theory of semiotics from Charles S. Peirce (1931–1958).

The analytical framework is used to perform a meta-analysis of nine selected case-studies of collective farmers marketing initiatives across Europe from the COFAMI project, which represent a variety of product assortments and marketing strategies. The COFAMI project studied the potential role of collective farmers marketing initiatives in finding adequate responses to changing market and policy conditions, aiming to identify the social, economic, cultural and political factors that limit or enable the development of such initiatives. As a core research activity, the project carried out 18 in-depth case-studies in 10 countries, covering the strategies, relevant networks, sustainability impacts and support strategies of different types of collective farmers marketing initiatives. The case-studies provide detailed insights into the influence of different factors that limit and enable the development, performance and continuity of collective farmers marketing strategies, and they also assess the performance of the initiatives in terms of social, economic and environmental impacts. Another important part of the project was to organize national stakeholder forums, where key stakeholders from various parts of the food chains have been involved in discussing the implementation and findings of the project.

To further operationalize the analytical framework for use in the meta-analysis, a typology of quality dimensions is developed to give a simplified description and categorization of the variety of qualities that are mediated in such alternative food networks. In the final part of the article, the analytical framework and the typology of quality dimensions are used to examine the mediation of qualities in the selected COFAMI case-studies, how this is linked to the way the food chain is constructed, who is involved, and to the way the market is developed, and what the level of coherence is between the type and number of quality dimensions that are mediated, and the marketing strategy.

Theoretical Basis and Analytical Framework

'Quality is not just the result of a collision between subject and object. The very existence of subject and object themselves is deduced from the Quality event. The Quality event is the cause of the subjects and objects, which are then mistakenly presumed to be the cause of the Quality!' (Pirsig, 1999, p. 91).

Our analytical framework is based on Pirsig's notion of Quality as the primary empirical reality of the world (Pirsig, 1991, p. 76). This basic assumption will be developed upon below. The theoretical and methodological framework for analysing the mediation of qualities in food networks that is developed in this article shall be seen as an element in a larger theoretical framework for analysing farming and food systems with semiotics as the main corner stone (Noe and Alrøe, 2006; Alrøe and Noe, 2008; Noe et al., 2008).

The strength of the Pirsigian notion of qualities as the primary reality of the world is that it breaks radically with our habits of thinking of qualities as properties of objects and forces us to see qualities as relational, and thereby forces us to take a completely different empirical position. Pirsig's point is that he wants to break fundamentally with the scientific tradition of describing the world objectively as a number of objects and seeing the relation between subject and object as secondary. Instead, he claims that there are no objects or subjects before value relations – substance is a stable pattern of values (Pirsig, 1999). Therefore, a value can be defined as the unity of subject and object. This means that materiality is an unconditional part of a value relation.

One of the major challenges of making such a radical break is that our notions and languages are embedded in the object-oriented understanding of the world, which makes it very difficult to communicate a relational view. The easiest way may be to use an empirical example to unfold Pirsig's assumption. Take a chair, for instance. A chair as an 'object with qualities' is linked to the evaluators of the object – the observers – and their value relations with the chair (Alrøe in Glover, 2003, p. 50).

1. The chair can be the observer's favourite chair to sit in and read the newspaper. In this case, the quality of the chair is linked to the value of comfort of the chair in relation to the habitus of the person, how she or he feels when sitting in it, etc.
2. The chair–observer relation can be based on sentimental value. Maybe the chair used to belong to the person's mother, and it sparks memories about the good and easy moments of childhood. The quality of the chair is then linked to the affective relation in the shared history of the person and the chair.
3. The chair–observer relation could also be linked to an antique evaluation, which means that the chair has got a generalized value to many observers, due to other value relations of the chair. For instance, the designer of the chair may be famous, or this particular chair formerly belonged to a famous person, or it is a very rare type of chair, and this would give the observer or the owner of the chair a special value relation to it.

In all three examples, the value relation and the quality of the object cannot be separated from each other. In the chair–person relation both the chair and the person are part of the relation. The value relation constitutes both the 'value for the person' and the 'quality of the chair'. The three examples reflect three different qualities that can be independent of each other, or can be at stake in the same relation. It may also impose some conflicts in the relation. If the chair holds a high antique value, the person may avoid using it for relaxing.

To operationalize Pirsig's ideas in this article, we utilize Charles S. Peirce's semiotics as a tool to represent value relations, where a 'sign' (or representamen) is something that stands for something (its object) to somebody (the interpretant) in some respect (Peirce, 1931–1958 [1897], CP 2.228). This triadic structure of the sign is akin to a triadic conception of a value relation, where the value stands for a qual-

ity to some 'valuer' or observer. For the further operationalization of this analytical framework, we therefore refer to value as the unity of the relation between observer and object (or, more generally, the unity of any relation between objects) and to quality as the analytically basic, one-dimensional 'object' of a value relation.

A quality is always monadic, in a Peircean sense, it is a (real) potential that may be actualized in dyadic value relations (Alrøe in Glover, 2003, p. 308f). Hence the concept of quality is often used as a means to speak about value relations in an 'objectified' way, a 'high-quality product', for instance. But Pirsig reminds us that quality is also a way of referring to the reality of quality as a dynamic potential (in a Peircean sense, the dynamical object), though quality is only ever actualized in relational form, as value. The quality behind an empirical value relation is sometimes ascribed to the object, e.g. 'she has a quality camera', and sometimes to the observer (or subject, in Pirsig's terms), 'she is a quality photographer', and we may underpin empirically such claims through comparative studies. But in reality, actual values are always relational and qualities are always potential (Figure 1).

Finally, operationalizing the framework into a tool for analysing food networks, the producer-consumer relation is viewed as a triadic value relation including the food items. These three elements – producer, consumer and food item – form a unity connected by the qualities actualized in this relation (Figure 2). It is a unitary relation because, first of all, it is obvious that it is not possible to speak about a consumer if there is no producer and no food item, and vice versa. Second, all three elements depend on each other to constitute the quality dimensions that connect them. As an

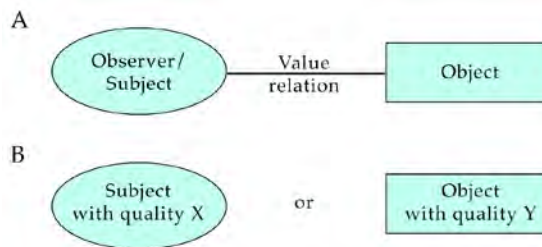


Figure 1. A value relation between an observer/a subject and an object (A) tends to be seen, and spoken of, as either an object or a subject with a certain quality (B), although qualities are only ever actualised in relational form, as value relations.

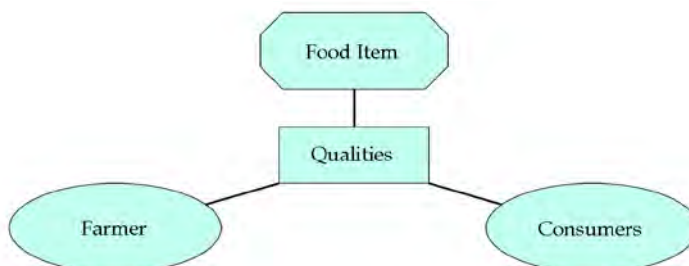


Figure 2. The producer-consumer-food item relation is the simplest unitary triadic value relation of the food chain. It is constituted by the qualities that are actualised in the value relation.

example, a food item is only organic when it is recognized by both the producer and the consumers. The producer could live up to the organic standards but that would not make the product organic if it is not recognized by consumers as such, or if consumers have other expectations to what organic qualities are, e.g. if they expect the food item to be tastier.

However, the situation where qualities are mediated in a direct relationship between producer and consumer, in terms of direct marketing, is the exception. The development has generally gone in the direction of differentiation, including more and more links of triadic value relations in between field and table and branching into complex food networks. We therefore need to generalize the analytical concept in Figure 2 to encompass an arbitrary relation in the food chain, in which what is explained above is applicable to every link in the chain or network.

Furthermore, a food chain not only consists of relations between market actors (companies, industries, farmers, etc.), but also of the internal relations within the actors. We can use a dairy to illustrate this. On the one side of this link we have the farmer–raw milk–dairy relations; on the other side we have the dairy–dairy products–retailer relations. Physically, there is a material flow through the chain, but the value relation may change considerably. The internal relations can be seen as the actors' strategies to mediate between the two sides of the chain relation. Again, processing is a transformation that is also a triadic value relation involving different quality dimensions. And it becomes an object of observation how the involved quality dimensions change between these links, and to compare what this means to the construction of the food network.

There is a surplus of potential qualities in each link, based on the involved actor–food value relations, but only a limited number of qualities can be actualized in a food network link. In food networks in general, there is an ongoing struggle between the different actors in the chain to obtain power over the quality definition of the food items by breaking or reducing the mediation of qualities downwards in the chain, e.g. in the battle between food company brands and the private labels of retail supermarket chains.

Figure 3 illustrates both the chain nature of triadic value relations in a food chain and the two kinds of ongoing triadic processes producing and reproducing the food chain and mediating the qualities related to food items through the food chain. Note that food networks in general are not simple chains but contain branches, which, for the sake of simplicity, are not shown in Figure 3. A last methodological point is that



Figure 3. The food network as a chain of triadic relations. A food chain network not only consists of value relations between actors but also of internal value relations of the actors, transforming and mediating between the two sides of the chain.

the food chain does not start with the producer selling and ends with the consumer buying the food; it starts in the field and ends in the stomach. And, ideally, everything in between these two positions should be included in the analysis.

For the analysis of qualities of food in food network, this framework means, first, that we see quality as the 'object' of a triadic value relation and that a number of qualities can be involved in such a relation. This means that qualities cannot be understood and analysed independently of the triadic relations of the food network, however long or short the chain is. Second, the mediation of qualities is not pure construction and storytelling, because it cannot be analysed independently of the materiality and reality of the food item.

These ideas apply also to the ordinary scientific approaches to food quality in the form of empirical studies of freshness, nutritional value, substances, etc. The point is that these studies establish their own triadic value relations between the materiality of a food item and the observational tools and conceptions of qualities employed in the particular scientific perspective. This framework is thus not eliding the 'material function' of food, but treating this function as one among many other value relations to food and thus enabling a cross-cutting analysis of a variety of types of food quality.

Based on this framework, a mediation (or non-mediation) of qualities through the food network can (and shall) be observed and analysed with regard to the triadic value relations throughout the network from soil to table. From a farmer's point of view, this means that the quality produced in the soil–food–farmer triadic relation can only be carried to the triadic relation of consumer–food–dinner, if the triadic relations between field and table can mediate, take care of and reproduce these qualities throughout the network.

A Typology of Quality Dimensions in Food Networks

In the following sections we will use the presented analytical framework to perform a meta-analysis of the mediation of qualities in selected collective farmers marketing initiatives. To simplify this meta-analysis, we first develop a nomenclature of different quality dimensions involved in food networks. A typology is always a way to manage complexity from a certain perspective, and such a typology needs to be developed and improved empirically. The following typology of food quality dimensions is meant as a first attempt to do so.

There are some correspondences between our typology and the general typology of competing cognitive and evaluative rationalities ('worlds of justification' or 'orders of worth') developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (e.g. Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Thévenot, 2002), which can be seen as constitutive conventions serving as macro-level forms of co-ordination between actors. For instance their 'industrial order of worth' corresponds to what we call 'qualities of safety'. But our typology also transgresses their original six orders (in line with their own suggestion of an emerging 'green' order), and our typology of quality dimensions is more specific and specifically oriented towards food networks. In this way, the typology developed in this article is somewhat similar to Brunori's (2007) typology of meaning in the operation of food systems, which includes five categories: functional, ecological, aesthetic, ethical and political meaning.

On this basis, and based on the Danish stakeholder forum and material from the other partner countries in the COFAMI project, we have developed the following

typology of quality dimensions to help categorize the qualities mediated between the actors of food networks, as a basis for our meta-analysis of COFAMI cases.

1. Qualities of safety. The main issue of the industrialization and globalization food regime. In the Danish context, it has more or less overruled all other quality aspects completely, especially due to the Danish interest in sensitive export markets.
2. Qualities of health. The dominating discourse of food quality, mediated by the table of contents, and mediated by the whole industry of functional food. However, there is also a whole range of alternative quality of health movements at stake.
3. Ethical qualities about fair trade, environment, animal welfare, etc., mediated by labels, certification, rules and control. Organic farming is mainly embedded in this quality dimension.
4. Aesthetical qualities linked to the consumption of the food, like taste, flavour, look, rituals. These qualities are based on differentiation and not standardization, and are mediated by e.g. brand and culture.
5. Qualities of rootedness. Reconnection to soil and nature, that the food is produced somewhere by someone, cultural and artisanal.

Meta-analysis of COFAMI Cases from a ‘Triadic Mediation of Quality’ Approach

In the next two sections, we will use the presented analytical framework to perform a meta-analysis of the coherence between the different quality dimensions involved in the marketing of the products and the market networks of collective farmers marketing initiatives. This meta-analysis is based on nine selected case-studies carried out for the COFAMI project, which show different specific interesting aspects and elements of mediation of quality (Assouline, 2007; Kalnina et al., 2007; Noe, 2007; Oostindie et al., 2007; Roest et al., 2007; Sanders and Moschitz, 2007; Schermer and Rieder, 2007). Table 1 contains the first step in the meta-analysis. For every case, it shows the type of products marketed, the type of marketing network, the quality dimensions mediated through the triadic relations of the food network, the degree of differentiation of qualities in the triadic relation of primary production at the farm level, the ownership of the ‘quality label’, and to which degree the ownership is vertically distributed in the network.

The selected COFAMIs represent a variety of different products, ranging from initiatives marketing specific products such as cheese or meat to initiatives with a larger assortment of e.g. organic fruit and vegetables. Furthermore, there is an initiative that seeks to market a whole range of products from a certain area. At the same time, the cases represent very different kinds of market networks, from direct marketing through more targeted and dedicated networks to heterogeneous market networks that often also include mainstream market actors. Hence, the cases represent a large diversity, both in kinds of products and types of marketing strategies, but all have in common that they apply a co-operative strategy to market food qualities that go beyond mainstream bulk production. Moreover, as we can see in Table 1, none of the cases in their marketing strategy strive to differentiate with respect to the food safety quality dimension.

Table 1 makes clear that there is no simple mechanistic relationship between the degree of quality differentiation at the farm level, who the ‘owners’ of the quality la-

Table 1. Marketing strategy and quality dimensions of case-studies of collective farmers marketing initiatives.

COFAMI	Marketing network ^a	Quality dimensions carried by the network	Degree of quality differentiation at farm level	'Owner' of quality label	Vertical mobilisation of market actors in value relations
<i>AMAP (France)</i> Array of local products	Direct	Health Ethical Aesthetical	High	Consumers	Strong
<i>Biologisch Goed Van Eigen Erf (Netherlands)</i> Organic fruit and vegetables	Direct	Health Ethical Aesthetical Rootedness	High	Farmers and co-operative	Strong
<i>Bio-direct (Switzerland)</i> Array of organic products	Direct	Health Ethical Aesthetical	High	Bio direct	Strong
<i>Thise (Denmark)</i> Organic dairy products	Targeted	Ethical Aesthetical	High	Thise co-operative	Strong
<i>Fejø Fruit (Denmark)</i> Apples	Targeted	Health Aesthetical Rootedness	Low	Co-operative Retailer	Medium-low
<i>Preiļi farmers' co-operatives (Latvia)</i> Organic fruit and vegetables	Targeted	Health Ethical Aesthetical	Medium	Farmers co-operatives	Medium-weak
<i>AOC Beaufort (France)</i> Cheese	Heterogeneous	Aesthetical Rootedness	High	Owned by the origin	Strong
<i>Walserstolz (France)</i> Cheese	Heterogeneous	Ethical Aesthetical Rootedness	High/ Medium	Cellar-wholesaler	Medium
<i>Asprocarne Piemonte (Italy)</i> Beef	Heterogeneous	Ethical Rootedness	Low	Region (ASPRO-CARNE)	Weak

bel are, and which quality dimensions are at stake in the marketing networks. In the following section, we will further deepen the analysis of how the triadic mediation of quality is managed coherently within the different COFAMI strategies, in order to explore the general preconditions of successful mediation of quality from field to table.

Quality, Coherence, Strategy and Distribution of Ownership

The COFAMI cases globally represent three different marketing strategies to obtain coherence between the quality dimensions involved and the organization of the marketing network. The first strategy is to keep a very close value relation with the consumers. The second strategy is to strive for a distributed ownership of the quality dimensions throughout the network, in order to mobilize all the triadic value relations in taking care of and supporting the involved quality dimensions. The third strategy is to create a product brand that is strong enough to mobilize a whole range of other actors in different market outlets around these multidimensional value relations and mediate them to the consumers.

Close Relations between Producers and Consumers

Three of the initiatives with a strong coherent marketing strategy are characterized by a close relation between producers and consumers by means of different forms of direct marketing.

The closest relation we find in the French consumer-driven AMAP case (As-souline, 2007), where groups of consumers have entered into strong buyer co-operation to support local small-scale producers and thereby created a purchasing activity that can involve many different quality dimensions and values. One can say that these AMAPs build on a co-operative buyer strategy to completely decouple the purchase from the industrialized market outlets and networks, as an opposition towards these. AMAP is driven by and very dependent on the consumers, but also farmer-driven initiatives based on direct marketing via box schemes and web portals are successful, and there seems to be a good coherence between strategy and the involved multidimensional value relations between producers and consumers.

The Swiss Bio-direct (Sanders and Moschitz, 2007) and the Dutch Biologisch Goed van Eigen Erf cases (Oostindie et al., 2007) are not regionally embedded initiatives. Biologisch Goed van Eigen Erf is an umbrella organization for a range of regional initiatives, providing a general label/brand allowing the individual producers to communicate and market their products not only locally. Bio-direct is founded by a smaller group of farmers together with two IT specialists to promote the marketing of organic products in Switzerland more generally. Besides the focus on direct communication, they also focus on high degrees of service, targeting busy families, for example through direct delivery to homes and by providing recipes. In both cases the direct relation between consumers and producers compensates the lack of a clear region brand and the web-based relation can contain many different quality dimensions. In both cases, there is a strong emphasis on mobilizing capacities for the professional development of an e-commerce platform.

The strong involvement of the farmers and their co-operation seem to be the main strengths of these initiatives, both in mobilizing farmers in the nursing of quality and for their abilities to enter into multidimensional value relations with consumers. Both cases face challenges to maintain the strategic consistency in the nearby future. The Dutch case is struggling with competing ideas about the further development of the initiative. Part of the members wants to turn the co-operative into a stronger policy organization, while another group wants to focus on commercialization via e-trade and shared branding. In the Swiss case, the strong sharing of the ideas and values of the founder is mentioned as one of the main elements of the strong and unequivocal brand of the initiative. The suggested involvement of more partners in the initiative will undoubtedly challenge this coherence.

Vertical Distribution of Ownership and Long-term Strategic Alliances

The Danish organic initiative Thise Dairy (Noe, 2007) is one of the examples of how it is possible to establish multidimensional value relations in mainstream market outlets. The strategy to obtain this has been the building of long-term strategic alliances with a relatively small range of actors in the dairy market. Especially, the long-term relation with the small supermarket chain Irma has been of great importance. Three factors have been crucial to the success, the first being a continued focus on the aesthetic processing qualities of the products and on new products. A second

key factor has been a continued attention on improving the value relations of the primary produce, by focusing not only on organic production methods, but also on health and animal welfare, the history and identity of the supplying farms, and differentiation between several kinds of milk (e.g. the fatter and more condensed milk from Jersey cows is used to make yoghurt). Third, the company has stayed with this strategy both in times of booms and regressions. This has only been possible due to the strong cohesion between the farmers and their strong support of the dairy factory. Generally speaking, this strategy has been held together by their ability to share ownership for the brand and quality with the other actors. For instance, the milk is sold under a mixed Irma/Thise logo in the Irma supermarkets, which means that all parties of the chain have had an interest in and benefit from supporting and protecting the value relations.

Contrary to this, we see the implications of the lack of distribution of ownership and thereby a lack of coherence in the Danish case Fejø Fruit (Noe, 2007). Here the farmers are hardly involved at all, despite the many dimensions of quality (including local embeddedness in terms of the links to the small island Fejø) involved in the marketing relations between the co-operative marketing company and the retailer as well as between the retailer and consumers. This can be explained by the way the initiative is organized, with the Fejø Fruit brand being owned partly by the co-operative marketing company 'Danish Pome Fruit' involving farmers from all over the country. The brand Fejø Fruit contributes to the branding of Danish fruit, but Danish Pome Fruit has no particular interest in supporting the pome growers from Fejø rather than the other members of the co-operative. On the other hand, the growers on Fejø have, so far, not co-operated well enough to take over the marketing of Fejø Fruit. This means that no share of the premium price of the brand is distributed to the pome growers, and there is no contribution to local development. It also means that there are no clear incitements to the farmers in contributing to develop new value relations. They are not remunerated for this, and therefore there is a lack of driving forces to further develop the quality dimensions in distinction to other fruit producers.

Another type of lack of coherence due to the failure of distribution of ownership is exemplified by the Latvian case of Preiļi (Kalnina et al., 2007). The primary objective of this initiative is a collective strategy to obtain a better negotiation position for marketing and distributing the farmers' organic products. Although there may be many benefits of this collective marketing initiative, the initiative is suffering from a lack of trust in collective marketing, which means that, despite of the collective efforts, all producers maintain the individual marketing of their produce. This lack of internal co-operation makes it very difficult to build long-term strategic alliances, and thereby value relations, with the other market agencies.

Strong Identity/Brand and Horizontal Distribution of Ownership

Where the previous strategy builds on distribution of ownership and strategic alliances as a means of obtaining coherence of multidimensional value relations, AOC Beaufort cheese (Assouline, 2007) is an example of a successfully and coherent multi-quality-dimensional marketing strategy involving a heterogeneity of market outlets. The core components of this strategy are a strong, organizational and legally protected territorial anchoring of the brand. This is linked to the rich artisanal and cultural tradition of producing cheese in the area and a strong local and social commitment

to protect and develop these traditions. Additionally, the producers of the area have a pragmatic but co-operative approach to marketing. This serves as a good fundament for a strong and distinctive brand, with an unequivocal connection to a specific area, which again supports a strong coupling to local rural tourism. Especially the linkages with rural tourism play an important role in producing and reproducing the multidimensional qualities in relations with the consumers. Even though only a small share of the cheese is sold directly to tourists, it supports a strong triadic value relation between both producer–cheese–consumer and consumer–cheese–territory. Combined, these elements create a brand that is strong enough to mobilize various food outlets to support and mediate the set of quality dimensions throughout the chain and, so to speak, to mobilize the other actors into these multidimensional value relations.

The Austrian case *Walserstolz* (Schermer and Rieder, 2007) is in many senses similar to the *Beaufort* case. *Walserstolz* is a regional traditional culinary cheese, but the ownership and horizontal organization of brand is problematic in relation to the coherence of the strategy. The label is owned by the private cheese firm *Hosp*, which is maturing and quality labelling the *Walserstolz* cheese for the dairies. *Hosp* has recently been bought by a Swiss firm and this external ownership of the brand is a source of internal conflicts. One of the participating dairies is marketing the same cheese under different labels in Germany and would like to use the label *Walserstolz*. However, this would conflict with the current organization of the supply chain. Compared to the *Beaufort* case, *Walserstolz* seems to lack a clear governance structure over the whole chain and a more direct ownership and involvement of the farmers in developing and promoting the brand.

Several initiatives strive to brand certain products of a region, through a branding of the region globally, like the Italian *Asprocarne* case that markets meat from Piemonte (Roest et al., 2007). However, this branding strategy seems difficult if the branding is not linked to the materiality of the products and thereby to the triadic value relation. In general, in such cases the co-operative organization is not able to introduce a quality differentiation in comparison with other areas and to obtain a premium price for these qualities, and many farmers continue their individual labelling and marketing strategies even though they are members of the association.

If the brand is not strong enough, a common trap of incoherence within the strategies of heterogeneous market networks is trying to establish different kinds of value relations with regard to the same produce and, for example, compete on one-dimensional price–volume–value relations in supermarkets while at the same time establishing multidimensional value relations in specialty shops. These attempts have a number of pitfalls. First, the lowest dimensional value relation in reality constitutes the quality of the products. Second, it is too costly to operate with different quality dimensions of the same product – either production costs are too high compared to the value added in the traditional market or marketing costs to obtain the multidimensional value relations are too high. Internal conflicts concerning the strategy and short-term opportunistic marketing possibilities are competing with long-term multi-quality-dimension branding necessary to obtain added value (Noe, 2007).

Discussion, Conclusions and Perspectives

Quality originates in the primary production at the farmers place in the triadic value relation soil–farmer–produce. The meta-analysis of the COFAMI cases shows that

a precondition for quality differentiation at the farm gate to be recognized by consumers, and thereby result in a demand and willingness to pay for these, is that the different qualities can be supported and mediated cohesively throughout the whole food chain – all the way to the triadic consumer–food–dinner relation.

The analysis of the cases reveals that there is not just one strategic model to organize a food network that is able to carry multidimensional qualities throughout the whole food chain. However, the results point out that coherence is an important condition from the perspective of added value at the farm gate. First, there must be cohesion between the quality dimensions at the farm gate and the way the network is organised, and quality differentiation must start at the farm gate. And second, all the triadic value relations of the network must be able and willing to support and carry these distinctive quality dimensions forward.

The meta-analysis of the selected COFAMI cases reflects three different general strategic approaches to obtain a coherent multidimensional quality-marketing network. The first is direct marketing. The second is distribution of ownership and strategic alliances throughout the network of triadic relations. And the third is to create a brand strong enough to mobilise a heterogeneous network around the multidimensional quality dimensions of the produce. Coherence is the keyword: success depends on whether there is cohesion between quality dimensions, marketing strategy and the triadic relations involved. Examples of initiatives where this is not the case are for example where there is internal disagreement among the involved farmers about quality dimensions and strategies, and where actors are tempted by short-term opportunistic market possibilities and do not build long-term strategic relations.

The meta-analysis of the COFAMI cases from the 'quality mediation approach' is in itself interesting and valuable, but in addition to the presented empirical findings this analytical framework is a promising tool to radicalize our understanding of how qualities are mediated through food networks. The triadic value relation perspective tends to be very fruitful and easy to apply. It contributes to the ability to handle many different quality aspects in the same analysis, and helps to reduce the level of abstraction of the analyses. Also, the analyses performed here appear to have a strong power to explain the degree of success of different cases and strategies.

The idea to develop this methodological framework emerged from our involvement in the COFAMI project. However, the original case-studies were not carried out on the basis of this approach and therefore its potential has not been fully explored yet. Based on this analytical framework, it will be possible to analyse deeper how qualities are mediated in food networks through closer studies of the specific value relations. In spite of this, the article demonstrates three strong points of the framework: 1. it allocates an ontological space in the analysis to quality as a basic empirical reality and thus allows for the connection of communicative and material analyses of quality; 2. it suggests a typology of food quality dimensions that simplifies the analysis; and 3. it provides a tool to combine quality dimensions with concrete food networks by way of triadic value relations. The framework offers a very tangible empirical approach to explore which dimensions of qualities are at stake in different producer–consumer networks by analysing the triadic value relations mediating qualities in these networks. From this perspective, quality is not a matter of pure communication or pure materiality, but a semiotic relationship that comprises all the techniques and instruments involved, from the field to the food that is consumed at the dinner table, in the restaurant or on the street.

This approach is not only valuable to analyse alternative marketing networks, it can also be used to explore the logic and struggles within mainstream marketing networks: how and where in the network is the quality dimension of the product defined, which measures and instruments are involved, what parameters of competition are chosen, etc. A concrete example could be the struggle between organic producers and private supermarket labels, and its implications for the successful mediation of different quality dimensions linked to organic products.

Note

1. The research for this article was realized as part of the project 'Encouraging Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives' (COFAMI) from 2005 to 2008 and funded by the European Commission under the 6th Research Framework Programme (SSPE-CT-2005-006541). The COFAMI project looked into experiences and policies related to collective farmers marketing initiatives in 10 countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Latvia and Switzerland) in order to obtain an overview of the development and dynamics of such initiatives across Europe.

References

- ALRØE, H.F. and KRISTENSEN, E.S. (2003) Toward a systemic ethic: in search of an ethical basis for sustainability and precaution, *Environmental Ethics*, 25(1), pp. 59–78.
- ALRØE, H.F. and NOE, E. (2008) What makes organic agriculture move – protest, meaning or market? A polyocular approach to the dynamics and governance of organic agriculture, *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology*, 7(1/2), pp. 5–22.
- ASSOULINE, G. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in France, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- BOLTANSKI, L. and THÉVENOT, L. (1999) The sociology of critical capacity, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2(3), pp. 359–377.
- BRUNORI, G. (2007) Local food and alternative food networks: a communication perspective, *Anthropology of Food*, S2, March 2007, published online <<http://aof.revues.org/document430.html>>, accessed 11 February 2009.
- CALLON, M., MÉADEL, C. and RABEHARISOA, V. (2002) The economy of qualities, *Economy and Society*, 31(2), pp. 194–217.
- DENIS, J.-L., LANGLEY, A. and ROULEAU, L. (2007) Strategizing in pluralistic contexts: rethinking theoretical frames, *Human Relations*, 60(1), pp. 179–215.
- GLOVER, D. (ed.) (2003) *Lila's Child: An Inquiry into Quality*. Fairfield, CA: 1st Books Library.
- GOODMAN, D. (2001) Ontology matters: the relational materiality of nature and agro-food studies, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 41(1), pp. 1–19.
- GOODMAN, D. (2003) The quality 'turn' and alternative food practises: reflections and agenda, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp. 1–7.
- HOLLOWAY, L., KNEAFSEY, M., VENN, L., COX, R., DOWLER, E. and TUOMAINEN, H. (2007) Possible food economies: a methodological framework for exploring food production-consumption relationships, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 47(1), pp. 1–19.
- KALNINA, A., ŠUMANE, S. and TISENKOPES, T. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Latvia, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- LOCKIE, S. and KITTO, S. (2000) Beyond the farm gate: production-consumption networks and agri-food research, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(1), pp. 3–19.
- MANSFIELD, B. (2003) Fish, factory trawlers and imitation crab: the nature of quality in the seafood industry, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp. 9–21.
- MARSDEN, T. (2000) Food matters and the matters of food, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(1), pp. 20–29.
- MURDOCH, J. and MIELE, M. (2004) Culinary networks and cultural connections: a conventions perspective, in: A. HUGES and S. REIMER (eds) *Geographies of Commodity Chains*, London: Routledge, pp. 102–119.
- NOE, E. (2006) The paradox of diffusion of organic farming: a case study in Denmark, in: G. HOLT and M. REED (eds) *Sociological Perspectives of Organic Agriculture: From Pioneer to Policy*, Wallingford: CABI, pp. 210–226.
- NOE, E. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Denmark, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.

- NOE, E. and ALRØE, H.F. (2006) Combining Luhmann and actor-network theory to see farm enterprises as self-organizing systems, *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*, 13(1), pp. 34–48.
- NOE, E., ALRØE, H.F. and LANGVAD, A.M.S. (2008) A polyocular framework for research on multifunctional farming and rural development, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 48(1), pp. 1–15.
- OOSTINDIE, H., RENTING, H. and MEULEN, H. VAN DER (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Netherlands, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- PEIRCE, C.S. (1931–1958) *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. 1–6, 1931–1935, Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (eds), vols. 7–8, 1958, Arthur W. Burks (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- PIRSIG, R.M. (1991) *Lila: An Inquiry into Morals*, New York: Bantam Books.
- PIRSIG, R.M. (1999) Subjects, objects, data and values, in: D. AERTS, J. BROEKAERT and E. MATHIJS (eds) *Einstein Meets Magritte – An Interdisciplinary Reflection: The White Book of ‘Einstein Meets Magritte’*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 79–98.
- PONTE, S. and GIBBON, P. (2005) Quality standards, conventions and the governance of global value chains, *Economy and Society*, 34(1), pp. 1–31.
- RENARD, M.-C. (2003) Fair trade: quality, market and conventions, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp. 87–96.
- ROEST, K. DE, MONTANARI, C. and CERRUTI, R. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Italy, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- SANDERS, J. and MOSCHITZ, H. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Switzerland, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- SCHERMER, M. and RIEDER, E. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Austria, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- SONNINO, R. and MARSDEN, T. (2006) Beyond the divide: rethinking relationships between alternative and conventional food networks in Europe, *Journal of Economic Geography*, 6, pp. 181–199.
- STRÆTE, E.P. (2008) Modes of qualities in development of specialty food, *British Food Journal*, 110(1), pp. 62–75.
- THÉVENOT, L. (2002) Conventions of co-ordination and the framing of uncertainty, in: E. FULLBROOK (ed.) *Intersubjectivity in Economics*, London: Routledge, pp. 181–197.



Co-producing Transition: Innovation Processes in Farms Adhering to Solidarity-based Purchase Groups (GAS) in Tuscany, Italy

GIANLUCA BRUNORI, ADANELLA ROSSI AND VANESSA MALANDRIN

[Paper first received, 1 February 2010; in final form, 13 December 2010]

Abstract. The growth of localized and sustainable food systems is widely recognized in many Western countries as a response to the increasingly evident crisis of conventional food systems. However, despite the growing consumer demand, the producer capacity to catch up with demand emerges as a critical point. The authors reckon that participation in alternative food chains not only needs a new market opened, but also appropriate farming styles. Adopting new farming styles requires radical changes to knowledge and skills, material assets, organizational patterns, communication practices, etc. To that end, the direct interaction with consumers as well as the co-operation and co-ordination with other farmers become crucial. On the basis of a deep analysis carried out through a case-study – the innovation cycles activated by farmers adhering to Solidarity-based Purchase Groups (GAS) in Tuscany, Italy – the article explores the complex processes linked to transition, and tries to contribute to a theory of alternative food networks by representing changes in the farm as an outcome of interaction within hybrid networks through the definition of new codes, cognitive frames, norms, rules and organizational patterns.

Introduction

The debate regarding alternative agri-food networks (AAFNs) over the last 15 years has created a virtuous circle in terms of theory, practice and policy in many countries.

Gianluca Brunori is Full Professor of Agricultural Economics and Agro-food Economics at Rural Economics Group, Department of Agronomy and Agro-ecosystem Management, University of Pisa, Italy; e-mail: <gbrunori@agr.unipi.it>. He has ample international research experience in the field of rural development and agro-food chains; he has been involved in several EU-projects, of which two as coordinator. Adanella Rossi is Researcher in Rural Economics and Agro-food Economics at at Rural Economics Group, Department of Agronomy and Agro-ecosystem Management, University of Pisa, Italy. She has ample international research experience in the field of rural development and agro-food chains; special interest in analysis of the issues related to the alternative strategies in the agro-food system. She has been involved in several EU projects. Vanessa Malandrini is Junior Researcher at at Rural Economics Group, Department of Agronomy and Agro-ecosystem Management, University of Pisa, Italy. She is involved in studies concerning new social dynamics in rural areas and new strategies in the agro-food chains.

Far from being purely academic, the debate has accompanied the evolution of grass-roots initiatives related to food, contributing to a redefinition of strategies, products and processes within the food industry and offering solutions to an increasingly evident crisis in conventional food systems. AAFNs' constitutive elements essentially include: a. a conception of food production and consumption as being simultaneously political, ecological and economic acts (Petrini, 2005); b. involvement of a plurality of actors and artefacts – belonging to different spheres of social and economic life – that come together to build new systems of meaning and new systems of food provision (Guthman, 2002; Roep and Wiskerke, 2005); c. new livelihood strategies for farmers (Renting et al., 2003; Goodman and Goodman, 2007) based on the search for autonomy from conventional chains; d. a search for new trust relationships with consumers (Goodman, 2003), in order to respond to the increase in food anxieties; e. performance measured not only in terms of purely commercial benchmarks, but by the capacity to modify existing consumption, production, technological norms and to establish a 'food democracy' (Hassanein, 2003; Jacobsen and Dulstrud, 2007).

The meeting of AAFNs literature and transition theories (Rip and Kemp, 1998; Smith, 2003, 2006; Geels, 2004; Moors et al., 2004; Wiskerke and Van der Ploeg, 2004; Seyfang, 2006) has opened a new research field by developing analytical tools to better study the contribution of AAFNs to broader social change, through the analysis of underlying processes. Transition theories suggest that: a. economic activity is embedded in relatively steady socio-technical systems, governed by coherent systems of rules and norms called 'regimes'; b. most innovations contribute to the stability of the dominant socio-technical systems as they are generated within these: innovation is therefore generally path-dependent; c. when internal or external variables threaten existing socio-technical systems, existing paths of innovation are not able to provide appropriate solutions, and the need arises for path-breaking innovation; d. new paths of innovation are more likely to emerge when 'niches' – that is, socio-technical systems that experience radically different cognitive frames, resource bases, relational patterns, etc. – have already been developed; e. when conditions of the external context (known as 'landscape') change, innovation paths initiated by niches contribute to change the dominant socio-technical system through integration or even replacement.

According to transition theory, niches create the necessary diversity in the system and provide possible solutions to crises in new political, economic, and environmental contexts. Strategic niche management (Schot and Geels, 2008) can be used as a powerful policy tool to strengthen social change 'from below', and to create a stronger capacity to adapt to change.

AAFNs fit in with the concept of the niches of transition theories. In fact, they are formed around the alternative techno-economic paradigms of food production, consumption and distribution. The size of AAFNs is small enough to guarantee them a protected space of action, but despite their modest impact in terms of quantities in the short term, they can have a tremendous impact on minds and hearts, as they suggest different ways of looking at things, different innovation pathways, and different rules and norms.

AAFNs represent a good case-study to respond to one of the most significant research questions raised by transition theories: to what extent, and in what conditions, can niches significantly impact on regime change? Regimes can in fact be strong enough to contrast emerging niches by raising political, regulatory and technical barriers to change. Moreover, often mere quantitative growth is not sufficient

to generate change, as scaling up may involve deviations from innovative trajectories and regime rules may end up being complied with (Brunori et al., 2008). The debate on 'conventionalization' has explored the problem with reference to organic farming, and has stimulated a fruitful reflection on the trade-offs between growth, integration with the existing food regimes, and consistency with its constitutive values (Guthman, 1998, 2004). However, it has only addressed superficially the strategies that could sustain successful transition pathways at the same time as growth. To go beyond the dilemma 'scaling up vs. keeping the original radicality', we think it is necessary to deeply examine the relationships between niches and regimes and their evolution.

AAFNs and Transition: A Theoretical Framework

As Sonnino and Marsden (2006) have highlighted, there is a continuous tension and dialectic between alternative and conventional networks. According to DuPuis and Gillon (2009, p. 45), 'notions of legitimacy, fairness and credibility are created and destroyed in the practices around the creation of alternative market fields'. These networks cannot be analysed in isolation, as each one can embody parts (symbols, artefacts, norms) of the others, so that innovations that were originally produced in niches can be embodied – through processes of translation *à la* Latour (1987) – into conventional networks that together strengthen the regime. It is not surprising, then, that the dialectic between 'conventional' and 'alternative' patterns may lead to convergences, which end up with a 'hollowing out' or absorption of niches into existing regimes. However, niches can also strengthen themselves by adopting (and adapting) technologies and enrolling actors of the dominant regime, thus detaching them from conventional networks and reattaching them into alternative ones (Callon et al., 2002).

The conventionalization and appropriation of alternative food chains (Goodman and Dupuis, 2002) may help the dominant regime to adapt to change, for example by turning consumer-citizens into new consumer segments and thus weakening the transformative role of consumer-citizens through re-fetishization. When regime attempts to adapt to change of the landscape are not successful, new niches may emerge with a renewed radicality. This is the case of post-organic movements (Moore, 2006; Goodman and Goodman, 2007), which include CSAs (Cone and Myhre, 2000), AMAPS (Lamine, 2005), and farmers' markets (Govindasamy et al., 2002; Kirwan, 2004). These movements build upon points of weakness of conventionalized AAFNs, drawing on a strong political commitment to articulate technical norms, commercial patterns and organizational rules in innovative ways. To maintain alternative innovative pathways, they start new innovation cycles drawing upon lessons learnt from previous experiences.

To properly address the dynamics of these innovation cycles we need to fill a gap in transition theories, wherein niches are treated like 'black boxes'. We need to open up these black boxes to see how and in what conditions the 'closure' of niches occurs. In our view, in fact, niches can be seen as actor-networks (Callon, 1999) whose co-ordination is guaranteed by well established and taken-for-granted routines. If we look at the processes before closure, a lot of failures are evident as well as negotiations, adjustments, trial and errors, aimed at giving stability and organization to new ideas, frames, inventions.

Though not considering them explicitly as preceding phases of niches, Van der Ploeg has described these processes as ‘novelties’, i.e. different ways of doing things (Van der Ploeg et al., 2004). In our view novelties are unstable actor-networks striving for stability through translation processes (Figure 1). The problems emerging from the context activate a process of search for solutions, the outcome of which may turn into a novelty. The more intense the network interaction in AAFNs is, the more farmers, consumers, and other actors align their cognitive frames, developing new production paradigms, technical norms, patterns of interaction and routines. In terms of transition theories, this means initiating new innovation pathways. Novelties, in fact, can be seen as the outcome of learning processes.

When novelties stabilize, through step-by-step improvements – that is, the relations between components act in a predictable way – they turn into niches.

The more farmers are connected to other actors, the more learning becomes ‘social learning’, improved ways of knowing or doing that are common goods within the network. From this point of departure we have set out a model for understanding innovation as a co-production between all the actors involved in an AAFN.

In this article, we focus on the innovation cycles activated by farmers adhering to ‘Solidarity-based Purchase Groups’ (from now on GAS,¹ from the Italian acronym), which are groups of consumers who purchase collectively through a direct relationship with producers, according to shared ethical principles (the ‘solidarity’ concept). In our view, GAS represent relational contexts wherein novelties are co-created by producers and consumers and develop into niches.

GAS are particular to the landscape of post-organic initiatives as they are initiated mostly by consumers and address specifically the need to develop alternative styles of consumption as an obligatory requirement of sustainability. In this, they build on the critiques made of the rent-seeking strategies of some AAFNs, the success of which has been linked to consumers belonging to higher social classes (Guthman, 2002), and on the awareness of the limits of the mainstream organization of organic food chains. On the basis of the principle that food quality is a right for everyone, but also that production is the weaker link in the chain, GAS represent patterns of consumer self-organization that, by creating partnerships with farmers, by-passing middlemen, employing volunteers, creating alternative logistics based on private/social tools and spaces, avoiding unnecessary operations and materials (such as classification, packaging and conservation), aim to create a win-win situation for farmers and consumers.

GAS operate as networks of individual consumers, who interact collectively with producers, selecting them on the basis of their adherence to sustainable consump-



Figure 1. The process of creation of novelties.

tion and production principles, and organize orders and distribution. Farmers are contacted directly by product co-ordinators who organize distribution depending on the type of product: box schemes for vegetables, fruit and bread, periodical orders for meat, cheese, wine and olive oil, pasta and cereals, and seasonal orders for other fruit.

The relational context is created through the communication established among actors, supported by e-mailing, direct interaction, organizational meetings, on-farm visits, participation in virtual and face-to-face forums, and organized events. Established communication patterns facilitate an exchange of information between actors, the definition of common rules, the building of common infrastructures, the organization of events, and communication to the outside world. Mailing lists also allow debate on several issues, spanning from sustainable consumption and production to broader political issues, thus contributing to strengthening the cohesion of the group. The movement also has higher levels of co-ordination (at regional and national levels), all of which are strongly based on communication via the Internet, together with periodical meetings.

Farm Transition Pathways and GAS

Becoming a GAS supplier is a complex process for a farmer. It is constructed through a profound reframing of the material and immaterial components of the farm's management, both inside the farm and in its relationships with the outside world.

Through participation in GAS, farmers are involved in translation processes (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) that help them to innovate through a pathway that entails banning chemicals, diversifying, dealing with multiple clients, responding to consumer needs and concerns, etc.. Innovation covers all aspects of farming, from internal organization (farm lay-out, farm infrastructures, human resources, crops and breeding), to logistics, administration, communication.

This process is not limited to the relation between farmers and consumer groups, but is also open to interaction with wider networks, of which producers and consumers are a part (such as farmers' markets or other forms of co-operation at local and extra-local levels), together with other actors (local administrations, NGOs, political groups) locally involved in building alternative food systems.

Within these networks new identities, new codes, rules and knowledge systems are created; as a result of translation processes legitimization is achieved; new initiatives are conceived and designed (and consequently new opportunities for farms are created). Different discourses around food in the territory and on the possible relations between countryside and town, between the multifunctionality of agriculture and the new needs of the local community start to develop.

Given that these transition pathways are undertaken in the network, through social learning, what are the implications for farms? For farmers, applying learned concepts and values to the farm implies a double adjustment, from the farm to the outside and from the outside to the internal organization. Thus, independent farming strategies undergo processes of alignment with the broader networks.

To explain farm adaptations, we need to look at models that explain farm development trajectories. Recently, Evans (2009) has renewed attention of scholars on the changes in family farming under the rapidly changing agrarian conditions. Reconnecting to the debate about farm household strategies of the late 1980s and 1990s, he underlines the validity of the concept and at the same time advocates the need to

open it up to cultural issues. With reference to New Zealand, Johnsen (2004) focuses on the interaction between agricultural change, farm structures and cultural norms.

Through a large research programme, Van der Ploeg et al. (2000) have developed a narrative to analyse the response of farmers to 'macro' changes in agriculture (and first of all to what they call the 'price-cost squeeze') – which in the language of transition theories we now could name 'landscape change' – by identifying three components of livelihood strategies: a. broadening, that is diversifying farm activities by intensifying relations with the rural territory; b. deepening, that is turning to high quality products getting up the food chain; c. re-grounding, that is reorganizing farm resources and reshaping the boundaries within the farm and outside. In this model, changes in structures, cognitive frames and cultural norms are strictly interrelated.

Wilson (2008) explains the dynamics of change of multifunctional farming in terms of a succession of 'nodal changes' (investments, radical learning, unforeseen events), each of which constrains (or enables) further evolution.

Under the influence of these approaches, we regard farm development as an independent trajectory that at a certain moment – in a changing landscape – encounters the trajectory of GAS. This encounter may initiate a detachment from a conventional network in order to join alternative networks. Joining GAS is a very important nodal change for farmers, as it generates clusters of new problems and the need for creative solutions: it is the beginning of a pathway of radical innovation. Further nodes, such as making investments for on-farm processing or for transporting the products, employing workers, activating an Internet forum, etc., create new clusters of opportunity and choice as well as trade-offs between decisions.

Thus, consumer needs and attitudes provide problems and opportunities for farmers, who search for solutions and select the most feasible ones. Along with the implementation of changes, they have to deal with constraints belonging to the farming realm or to the regime (e.g. hygienic or fiscal regulations, consumption norms, techno-scientific rules). Overcoming barriers requires not only individual solutions. Learning and adaptation both include collective action in other spheres (e.g. at the level of local administrations) in order to tackle the problems related to conflicts with existing regimes.

Case-study: GAS Farms in Tuscany

In this section, we analyse the micro-level transition related to GAS farms. By examining the various arrangements between producers and consumers, we focus on how an alternative approach to food provision impacts on the producers. On the basis of a thorough analysis carried out on many direct producer–consumer relationships within GAS,² we explored the radical changes being made to the cognitive, technical, organizational, and communication aspects of farming (including all the changes in material and immaterial assets). In our view, these are a result of the negotiation processes with consumer groups and, more in general, the interactions within hybrid networks to which both producers and consumers belong.

The Appendix summarizes the characteristics of the farmers interviewed. Most are small to medium size, family farms. One co-operative is also included. One of the most significant differences between them is related to the different types of farmers involved: we distinguish between 'neo-peasants' and 'local farmers', as they have quite different characteristics, attitude and behaviour.

'Neo-peasants' are quite an important group in Tuscany. They are the most important players in the 'rural renaissance' in this region, as they have been the pioneers of organic farming and of the multifunctional agricultural business model since the 1970s. The meeting of 'neo-peasants' and innovative entrepreneurship and institutions has generated what is now considered the 'Tuscan model of agriculture'. As most of these people settled in Tuscany in the 1970s, they are now in a higher age class; nevertheless, they are very experienced and still very innovative.

'Local farmers' are people with an agricultural family background, but who did not necessarily always choose agriculture as a profession (some retired early from other jobs or are part-time entrepreneurs). Their common feature is that they are native to the place where they operate, so they are strongly integrated with the local community.

Figure 2 illustrates the relational space in which the interaction between farmers and consumers can develop. Np1 is a 'neo-peasant', who has many contacts with individual consumers (c1, ..., cn) but is relatively disconnected from local farmers in the territory. This is not a rare situation, as in many places organic farmers who use direct selling are considered too innovative – or even seen as visionaries – by 'average' farmers. In these cases, farmers are more prone to link up to their peers (organic, innovative farmers) in other places, and to create 'virtual communities' with the support of mailing lists, blogs, Internet sites. Lf1, ..., lfn are 'local farmers', whose networks are more locally dense, but who do not have many direct relations with consumers. Detaching local farmers from intermediaries (int) and attaching them to GAS implies the possibility of reconnecting with a whole social network.

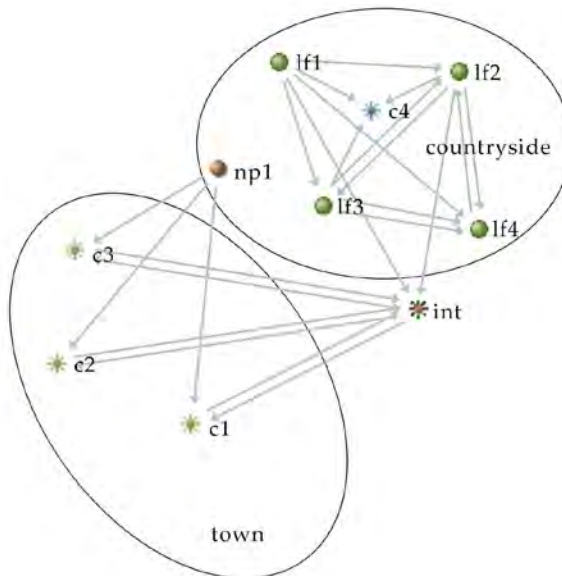


Figure 2. Relational spaces of neo-peasants and local farmers.

Business Model of GAS Farms

GAS farms follow business models that are very different from conventional ones. The differences between alternative and conventional models are summarized in Table 1.

In terms of conventional business models, farm size and technology are the most important competitive assets. In fact, they force farmers to obtain the highest productivity. In GAS farms, technology and size are not as important as reputation and trust. GAS farms are perceived as 'civic farms' (Lyson, 2004) and regarded as public examples of civic virtue by citizens and also administrations. Therefore reputation and trust-building is key. This is carried out through strong references to values, consistent behaviour, communication and networking. Reputation and trust give GAS farmers a better position on the market. In the best cases, trust replaces bargaining, makes certification for organic products unnecessary, and therefore reduces transaction costs. Farmers linked to GAS have a high rate of participation in publicly funded projects such as training, school visits, research and field trials from which they source additional income; moreover, their reputation facilitates access to public funds.

The survival strategy of GAS farms is centred on quality. Joining a GAS involves a process of qualification (Callon et al., 2002), which turns 'products' (quality concepts and rules of production) into 'goods' (through concrete production) and 'goods' (through consumption) into refined and improved 'products' (see also Brunori, 2007). The GAS network provides qualification with a fertile environment for development, as quality features are endlessly negotiated through the network. The GAS definition of quality goes well beyond conventional quality attributes. Seasonality and local provenance are key criteria, from which a lot of other product characteristics arise, such as freshness, variety, taste, and nutritional value. On the other hand, attributes as size and shape, colour, integrity, and homogeneity are not considered important.

GAS farms tend to internalize inputs (seeds, fertilizers, labour) as much as possible. This is a response to agro-ecological criteria, but at the same time helps to reduce financial costs and enhances the value of family labour. As far as seeds are concerned, internalization is also linked to the choice of producing local and traditional varieties, which are often not available on the market. Knowledge and skills are the fruit of direct experience and of interactions between farmers rather than those acquired externally (extension services, input providers). The abandonment of specialization has led to an increase in the need for new knowledge, which is usually satisfied through co-operation within farming networks.

Table 1. Comparison between conventional and GAS farms' business model.

	Conventional farms	GAS farms
Key assets	technology, size	notoriety, reputation and trust
Strategy focus	efficiency	quality
Input sourcing	mainly external	mainly internal
Knowledge, skills	mainly built through external inputs	mainly built through experience and interaction
Product mix	specialisation	diversification
Distribution	managed by intermediaries, concentrated	directly managed, diffused
Communication	none or very little	direct and indirect communication

In GAS farms, the product mix is largely diversified. There are many reasons for diversification, from distributing the risk among crops, to restoring fertility through crop rotations and functional biodiversity, to providing families with a wide range of products. As far as distribution is concerned, selling directly to consumers involves a strong investment of time and money in logistics. Box schemes, in fact, require the efficient management of orders, a complex process of co-ordination within a short time-frame (for the selection, weighing, organization of baskets and packaging) and a large number of points of delivery.

While conventional farmers need fewer communication skills – especially if the product is standardized, the price is already given and there is no contact with consumers – for GAS farms communication is a key function. This is because it is necessary to tune into consumer needs and to maintain and improve the farm's reputation and level of trust. Although most farmer communication is based on face-to-face interaction, there is increasing communication via the Internet. In addition to personal communication skills, networking skills are also important, as participation in networks leads to reputation building as well as opportunities for new projects. Personal communication and networking are very time-intensive activities, thus GAS farmers often complain about work overload or insufficient time to dedicate to farm operations.

Key Assets of GAS Farms

The business model of GAS farms requires a very different mix of assets from the conventional model. As previously mentioned, the survival strategies of GAS farms depend much more on immaterial assets such as reputation and trust rather than on material assets. In many cases in fact, GAS farmers have limited capital, and their capacity to survive is linked to their access to an endogenous resource base, knowledge and skills, which are produced and reproduced through the interaction within networks.

This does not mean that a better endowment of capital and technologies would not be useful. In any case, the business models of GAS farms require the availability of buildings, equipment, vehicles, and would benefit greatly from research into small dedicated technologies.

Apart from farm materials, we identified various critical resources for the survival and development of GAS farms: motivation, labour, and entrepreneurial skills.

Motivation

Farmers who join a GAS are motivated by a combination of 'push' motivations (political and ethical commitments, the search for farming styles that are consistent with their own values, unsatisfactory remuneration of prices from conventional channels, the search for better quality of life) and 'pull' motivations (opportunities emerging from contacts activated by GAS or initiatives started by other farmers). Of the 'push' motivations, personal values are very important, as they provide the energy to commit to alternative networks in difficult economic times and to balance the financial temptations offered by conventional business. The word 'solidarity' (the 'S' in GAS), after all, implies that there is a recognition by both consumers and producers that commercial relations are not between strangers or conflicting sides (Sage, 2003; Offer, 1997), but between members of the same community.

The importance of ethics in this type of business is more evident when there is a shared political, civic or religious commitment (such as members of food movements or radical farmers' organizations).

'Families in the Poggio di Camporbianco co-operative belong to a religious group. They live all together on the farm, sharing money and taking turns in all the activities (nobody specializes in just one sector). The co-operative, with its spiritual and ethical basis, adds a special value to work and ordinary life and regards the production of healthy food, with accessible prices for consumers, as a mission.'

Personal values create synergies with economic behaviour, especially when farmers experience unsatisfactory conditions in the current markets.

There is a large range of positions between the entrepreneurial focus on 'utility' and than on 'values'. In general, it can be said that farmers engaged in a relationship with GAS have a stronger focus on values. GAS, for them, is part of a 'praxis of survival which blends the survival strategies of the old peasantry with the skills and abilities of the educated urban elite' (Willis and Campbell, 2004, p. 317). Neo-peasants are proactive in looking for innovative and appropriate marketing solutions, based mainly on social relationships, and are aware of the importance of a management style that is coherent with values for economic performance. For local farmers, whose ideological commitment is lower, the awareness and endorsement of values evolves alongside the search for a better income.

Entrepreneurial Skills

Establishing steady relations with GAS involves above-average entrepreneurial skills. Whereas conventional farmers have to strive to comply with existing rules in the most efficient way possible, GAS farmers have to break the rules of the existing food regime and build new ones by trial and error. For this reason, first of all they need to be strongly motivated to overcome the adversities. Second, since they have to deal with different problems compared to those of conventional farms, they need to be creative to innovate. Third, the business model they develop is based on their capacity to establish external relations and to communicate effectively. At the same time, to be consistent with GAS values, their managerial style needs to be based on dialogue and support to workers.

Entrepreneurial skills are also very important for GAS farms, because of the complexity of their organization due to the range of external relations, their agro-ecological approach, their variety of products and customers, and therefore the number and variety of tasks to be carried out. To keep everything under control, both strong organizational and strategic planning skills are needed.

Labour

GAS farms are labour-intensive. In fact, not only does organic production require more labour per output unit, but also managing orders, keeping public relations, packaging, and delivering all require additional time. The ordinary labour force is expensive, and often farmers try to integrate it with other sources, such as neighbours, volunteers, and partnerships, etc. On GAS farms, labour, as on any peasant farm, is strongly related to entrepreneurship. Ideally, a worker in a GAS farm should have the motivation and skills that are in tune with the farm's mission, and should

be proactive in preventing, identifying and solving problems. This is not an easy task, especially when economic margins are limited.

When the scale of operations grows, the specialization of functions is unavoidable. This specialization frequently follows the lines of gender and age, with men working more on production and women on external relations, accounting, and packaging. When the division of tasks is not possible, mainly when the farms are too small, there may be symptoms of work overload and stress, as well as insufficient dedication to important farming aspects. For farmers well integrated in the local community, the exchange of labour among neighbours is an important labour source. However, ageing in rural areas makes this choice more difficult. Migrant workers are also available, as seasonal workers or (less often) permanent employees.

A particular source of labour for organic farmers is provided by the WWOOF Association (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), which links people who want to volunteer on organic farms or small holdings with people who are looking for volunteer help. In return for help, WWOOF hosts offer food, accommodation and opportunities to learn about organic life-styles. Another source, for which there is increasing focus among farmers, is workers with social or health problems for which the state subsidizes part of their salary. Diversified organic farms adapt very well to the therapeutic needs of these people, as they are characterized by a lot of simple operations that these people are able to carry out successfully (Di Iacovo, 2008). Becoming a 'social farm' also improves a farmer's reputation and helps them become aligned with GAS values.

GAS also provides opportunities to benefit from consumers' labour. There are several experiences in Tuscany where this opportunity has already been put into practice and in general a good number of GAS members are willing to be involved in farm activities. Co-operation between farmers and consumers helps during seasonal labour peaks (as, in Tuscany, for harvesting olives, tomatoes, and strawberries), but there are also regulatory restrictions that are not always easy to solve.

The complexity of farm organization fosters a division of labour, and the diversity of farm activities offers the opportunity to value skills and to respond to needs.

BioColombini farm is managed by Alessandro Colombini, a young farmer. His family has a long experience in the horticultural tradition of the area and has always been part of the local rural network. Some old farmers still work on the farm, because they like both the place and the work; moreover, they are a fundamental resource in terms of skills and knowledge. Also Alessandro's parents are quite old, but they still want to work on the farm: his father is still a valuable reference point for his experience. His mother is a real pillar in the organization of the new farm: she supervises the distribution of vegetables into bags. After participation in a horticultural therapy project, some young mentally disabled people have also been employed as workers.

With the fast growing business activated by adhesion to GAS, the labour force has become a limiting factor for the Nicobio farm. Stefano, who started on his own to grow vegetables with the help of his girlfriend who managed the administrative aspects, has been helped by young men sent by the employment office or by social co-operatives. Now he plans to turn the place into a 'social farm'.

Relational Assets of GAS Farms

Communication Structures and Practices

The success and the sustainability of GAS depend mainly on relational assets. The whole system rests on the special relationship that has been established between the two sides, through which a common base of values and principles as well as a better knowledge of the respective needs is developed. The development of adequate relational skills by farmers is thus fundamental. GAS contribute to develop these skills.

Farmers tend to intensify the dialogue with consumers as a natural outcome of integration into the GAS rationale. Apart from the delivery day of the boxes, most participate in periodic GAS meetings; many use personal web sites and mailing lists; others organize periodic visits to their farm. Patterns of communication vary a lot. In some cases, it is limited to the management of orders and often it is mediated by GAS co-ordinators. In other cases, communication is more intense, allowing the establishment of a direct dialogue between farmers and GAS members.

More and more communication concerns the technical features of production. Consumers, in fact, are often unaware about farming practices and their related problems (e.g. damage by bad weather conditions or from attack by diseases). 'When I was at the farmers' market, a consumer asked me why my green beans had such so high price. I explained to her how long the harvest process takes, and in the end the consumer was convinced' (Rosa, Lucca).

One farmer writes long letters to the GAS mailing list explaining the state of his crops, the problems he is facing (excess rain, pest attacks, particularly high or low temperatures). Another takes photos of the fields and plants to inform consumers on how near to harvest his products are. Others put recipes on the web, especially related to the use of non conventional vegetables that few consumers are aware of.

GAS consumers are eager to learn about food and the conditions of production. Farmers have perceived this need as an opportunity to create and strengthen trust relationships with them.

The Poggio di Camporbiano co-operative has chosen communication with consumers as a key to its livelihood. It places particular attention on informing consumers where the products come from and how they are produced, and encourages guided visits to the farm.

Alessandro Colombini never misses a meeting with consumers. He has also created a farm web site that is a perfect example of its philosophy. All the activities and the products of the farm are described and well documented with photo galleries; a space is dedicated to recipes and suggestions to cook some uncommon vegetables; there is a forum for discussions where consumers ask questions, make new proposals and sometimes complain. He also distributes leaflets and postcards during farmers' markets and other events. To follow all these communication aspects, Alessandro has hired an assistant.

Stefano from Nicobio, a local to the area and grandson of a well-known farmer, is well integrated into a dense social network. Friendships with local consumers have helped him a lot to build the local GAS. He has weekly occasions to meet consumers for the delivery of vegetable bags. He has also organized harvesting days for tomatoes as occasion to meet and have fun.

Consumer work is not only a help for farmers. For consumers, it helps them to be better informed about the nature of farming – its routines, difficulties and satisfactions – and hence to overcome any romantic image of farming.

Communication is not always easy. Sometimes, bad communication arises from the particular communication channel chosen. In this case, opening a direct communication channel (either by phone, mail or otherwise) with consumers would help to clarify and prevent problems.

According to Ida Roncareggi of the Contessa Beatrice farm, communication is less effective when groups talk with her through the GAS co-ordinator. She has observed that when a consumer of a group, not directly in contact with her, has something to complain about, he/she spreads this feeling through the whole group. For her, this is not wise, as it may be based on incorrectly reported facts, and a direct explanation could solve the problem easily.

In other cases, interests and visions may clash. GAS are made up of people who do in fact care about prices, and in some groups this may prevail over solidarity. Some farmers complain that consumers in some GAS are ignorant and aggressive. They believe that some consumers just want organic at a better price, while at the same time they want the same level of service as a supermarket. In many cases, this has led to a breakdown in contact. In more successful cases, mediation within the GAS helps to put communication back on the right track by appealing to GAS values.

Co-operation

Communication is closely linked to co-operation. Good communication influences co-operation as well as the other way round. In order to understand the nature of co-operation in GAS, we have to consider that the actors involved have both common and conflicting interests, thus co-operation and competition interact in an unstable equilibrium.

Competition and co-operation are presented in Figure 3). The outer circle represents the area of co-operation and the inner circle, the area of competition. Between buyers and sellers there is an inherent conflict of interests; however, the range and the potential of this conflict are limited by norms, rules, cognitive frames, infrastructures that consolidate a certain balance of power and allow only limited variations.

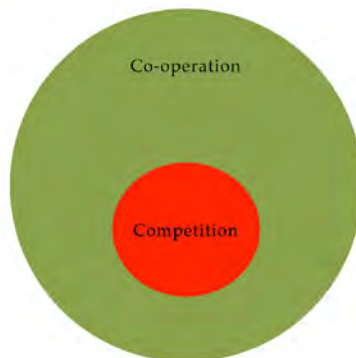


Figure 3. Co-operation and competition.

Ideally, within GAS, the space for bargaining is much reduced and constrained by a strong area of co-operation. The conflict between buyers and sellers is smoothed by common values and interests. However, the balance between co-operation and competition evolves continuously. When learning processes generate economies for example, farmers may improve their margins as prices tend to remain steady; the same may happen when GAS do not carefully monitor the quality of the supply, so that farmers are tempted to deliver lower value boxes for the same prices. In contrast, aggressive GAS price bargaining may worsen farmers' positions vis-à-vis consumers.

The same dynamics can be seen in terms of the co-operation/competition between producers. On the one hand, GAS farmers belong to the same 'community of values', which is supposed to be about facilitating co-operation. On the other hand, competition may appear when the size of the market is too narrow for the existing producers. In a recent paper, Chiffolleau argues that,

'alternative supply chains decrease or potentially decrease horizontal relations between producers by placing them in markets where the tie with the consumer is privileged almost exclusive, and where the producer's autonomy is promoted. This can not only result in a break with market intermediaries, but also with forms of co-operation between peers' (2009, p. 221).

Empirical evidence in our study confirms that co-operation among farmers is not easy to achieve.

In any case, GAS do contribute a lot to reducing competition and to increasing co-operation among farmers. Through long-term relationships they tend to create relatively protected markets for producers; they also promote synergies between them in the form of complementarity (integrating different products and services) or in terms of supplementarity (creating a critical mass for orders). Complementarity facilitates the diversification of production at a local level without forcing small farmers to manage dozens of crops in a limited space. Supplementarity helps farmers to deal with individual, temporary or structural, shortages or over-production. As all these arrangements are not rigid, different patterns of co-operation/competition may arise. In order to get the necessary balance, farmers need to agree on what basis to exchange their products: some barter (e.g. tomatoes for salad), others prefer to do a cash exchange.

In times of growing markets for GAS producers, often more experienced GAS farmers introduce other farmers into the GAS system and give them technical and organizational advice. The leadership they gain through this activity is remunerated by the improvement of their reputation and professional recognition, which in turn enlarges the size and density of their networks and, in the end, the sphere of their business.

Belonging to a network of networks, each farmer has easier access to a common pool of resources, such as knowledge, social capital in its different forms³ and agrobiodiversity. The more they use these resources in a reciprocal way, the more these resources improve and increase, whether they are seeds, information or contacts.

Rosario Floriddia is an organic cereal grower with considerable experience. Over the last few years, he has turned his passion and skills into reintroducing ancient wheat varieties. In doing so, he has set up collaborations with organic farming organizations and other NGOs involved in agrobiodiversity preservation. He has also started to directly process wheat in order to produce flour and bread. Within a few years, his farm has become

the centre of a network including other actors: farmers interested in changing their wheat cultivation (and thus need for seeds and knowledge), bakers who need flour to produce bread without using industrial techniques, GAS and individual families who directly purchase his bread, and technicians involved in training activities.

A further source of richness of local networks comes from the different kinds of relationships that develop among farmers. As Chiffolleau (2009) also highlights, farmers can interact on different levels – though a professional relationship, friendship, shared political engagement, each of which have different effects on shaping the relations with GAS.

Co-production of Innovation

To build a business model applicable to GAS principles, farmers have to follow complex transition pathways. Each step of this transition is a ‘closure’ of the actor-networks to which they have contributed to initiate (novelties) into sufficiently steady socio-technical systems (niches). When closure is complete, relations between actors and things follow agreed rules that turn into collective knowledge and attitudes, and new cycles of innovation can start. The process is not at all linear, as many internal and external factors may cause a rupture of already reached equilibriums and the need to restart from scratch. In this section we examine innovation in relation to the above framework. We highlight how the relational context provided by GAS can foster processes of learning and co-producing innovation. We outline five problematic fields.

Coherence between Values and Practices

GAS generally select their producers on the basis of the characteristics of the farmers: preferably they are small, organic, open to dialogue, trustworthy, with interesting personal stories. These characteristics are often perceived as being more important than efficiency or price, since GAS are aware that alternative farming cannot achieve the same levels of commercial performance as conventional farms (see Table 2).

Many neo-peasants belong to this type, as they have developed these characteristics since the very beginning of their activities. In some cases, given their experience and communication skills, they guide consumers in terms of identifying values. Most of the others, and mainly local farmers, have a much lower degree of awareness of these values, or at least they are not able to communicate them in a coherent way. However, through dialogue within the GAS environment they develop a process of individual and collective reflection. By doing this, they find that personal values and family stories can be used in order to define a distinctive identity. The main obstacle to this identity redefinition may be related to conflicting norms derived from the market discourse (maximization of profits, price as a result of impersonal demand/supply forces, competition as a quasi-natural law).

Tuscan neo-peasants have developed the capacity to pursue strategies of excellence, supplying high quality products with high prices to wealthy consumers and especially to tourists. What GAS demand, instead, is ‘ordinary’ food, to be consumed daily by average (or low) income consumers. This market is increasingly attractive to farmers who are financially and ethically unsatisfied with their link to conven-

Table 2. Innovation cycles: coherence between values and practices.

Consumers' input	Producers' problem	Opportunities	Producers' solutions	Problems generated	Individual solution	Collective solution	Regime barriers	Feedback
selection of farmers on ethical criteria	aligning consumer criteria	potential for non conventional farmers	re-definition of identity; image building	mobilising values, personal and family background	self reflection	collective reflection	competitive markets	improved image strengthens farmer reputation
demand for sustainable food	undertaking a sustainable pathway	opportunity for diversification of market outlets	conversion to organic farming	deskilling and reskilling	trial and errors	learning processes	inadequacy of knowledge systems	consumers get awareness of constraints

Table 3. Innovation cycles: box schemes

Consumers' input	Producers' problem	Opportunities	Producers' solutions	Problems generated	Individual solution	Collective solution	Regime barriers	Feedback
fresh, local and seasonal vegetables from farmers	to provide a complete set of products	reducing risk related to prices and crop failures	diversification of production	complexity of farm operations	improving management processes	planning together with consumers	fiscal and labour regulation	changing consumer styles of shopping
demand of a complete basket of seasonal products	diversification	create customers' loyalty	turn to old and possibly varieties	need to find seeds; need to develop appropriate knowledge and skills	buy seeds on the market; on farm seed reproduction; trial and errors	seed exchange and improvement	seed national regulation; inadequacy of knowledge systems	awareness of diversity

Table 4. Innovation cycles: tackling supply-demand gaps

Consumers' input	Producers' problem	Opportunities	Producers' solutions	Problems generated	Individual solution	Collective solution	Regime barriers	Feedback
instability and seasonal fluctuation of demand	seasonal over-production or under production	valorisation by processing surplus produce	improving and extending time span of planning	strengthening consumers' involvement	selecting customers	pre-payments	consumer incomes	involving consumers in higher level of support to farmers

tional commercial channels. GAS have been the stimulus for conventional farmers to consider organic farming.

Deri farm was a conventional chicken farm. Its owner was interested in changing his commercial channel, so he looked for a contact with local GAS, but since their criteria is primarily organic, this was not feasible in the short term. In any case, he established a relationship with some GAS and together they developed a plan to gradually convert the farm. As a first step of a complete reorganization, he has turned his system of production into a more extensive one and GMO feed has been replaced by GMO-free feed. Moreover, a local chicken breed has replaced the old one. At the moment, the Deri farm is the main GAS supplier for eggs in the area.

Conversion processes have already been studied extensively (Padel, 2001), and the problems faced by GAS farmers are not different from problems faced by other organic farmers, such as the need for de-skilling (to abandon old techniques) and re-skilling (to adopt new technical principles). However, there is a difference with the GAS environment. As trust is the basic element of GAS relationships, GAS do not need official certification, and this helps farmers to undergo conversion in a flexible (and cheaper) way. Moreover, GAS agreements are tolerant about delivery times and quantities, and respond positively to requests of support in the case of crop failures. In addition, as already stated, GAS provide access to diffused knowledge in the network and facilitate distributed learning.

Tackling Supply: Collective Box Schemes

Box schemes are one of the most characteristic activities of GAS. Symbolically they represent the consumers' willingness to adopt alternative patterns of consumption. They are also the activities that best contribute to develop the GAS network and its learning processes. Unlike box schemes provided individually,⁴ within GAS the rules and routines regulating orders, prices, qualities, deliveries, penalties in case of default, etc. are unstable, and are defined and consolidated through continuous interaction in the network (see Table 3).

Box schemes represent a pathway node (Wilson, 2008) both for consumers and producers. As far as consumers are concerned, box schemes contribute to a radical restructuring of food consumption patterns not only at an individual level, but also for families. In fact, box schemes lead to the reorganization of purchasing habits, of family diets, of the conservation and preparation of food. For farmers, the new innovation cycle activated by box schemes is based on diversification. In vegetable box schemes, boxes contain no less than six to seven types of products. To be able to provide six to seven products across the seasons, each farmer needs to be able to cultivate more than 20 crops in a year.

When Colombini used to sell his produce to a big retailer he cultivated only three or four different types of vegetables on large extensions, at first using the conventional farming methods and later with organic standards. Now he cultivates 30 different crops, and when also taking into account the varieties the number rises to 50.

With GAS box schemes, farmers have the freedom to choose the composition of the box. This leaves farmers a lot of room for testing new crop combinations and new

varieties. Consumers participate in this research by expressing their comments and evaluations on the new products. Farmers thus learn about diversification and consumers learn how to make new species and varieties part of their diets. Diversification is a way of compensating for the constraints that seasonality and dependence upon weather conditions impose: consumers gradually become accustomed to appraising the variety of fruits and vegetables that are available in each season.

The variety and presence of local and old varieties keep consumers loyal, rewarding them for the efforts paid in the change by offering them real product difference and adding value to the product.

Agro-biodiversity gives farmers a competitive advantage over conventional channels: supermarkets severely restrict the range of varieties and breeds that consumers choose, either because alternative varieties and breeds are available only in small quantities or because they do not comply with commercial standards (size, colour, integrity of the product, etc.) or with ordinary consumer taste. As GAS generally consist of consumers who are open to innovation, farmers are encouraged to turn diversification into differentiation, by introducing neglected species and local breeds and varieties. In this way, the GAS supply cannot be compared with supermarkets in terms of conventional criteria, and price comparison among channels becomes harder.

Farming diversification can also be carried out through on-farm processing (in the case of wheat, for example, hulling and/or producing flour, flakes, pasta). Apart from being a good way to increase added value for the farm, processing on the farm helps to minimize over-production in critical moments of the year (such as during summer holidays) and to manage periods of production shortages.

For farmers, box schemes also involve several post-harvest operations, such as washing and cleaning, weighing, box compositions, and labelling. Besides production and post-production activities, box schemes require a sophisticated management of orders. First, this involves planning harvesting carefully. The crops must be harvested shortly before delivery, otherwise products lose their freshness. Some farms use fridge-cells to stock some products and to plan orders better.

Order management strategies depend on different combinations of criteria and tools: from standardization of baskets to customization, from computer-assisted ordering to paper and the farmer's memory.

In the beginning, Colombini did not have a clear scheme in mind to organize the logistical aspects. Each group of consumers decided for itself, according to its necessities and preferences for the management of orders (who collects the orders and how they are transmitted to the producer, the frequency), payments (how – cash or bank account – and the frequency), deliveries (who does the delivery and where). Now that Bio Colombini supplies about 1,000 families, this kind of approach is no longer sustainable; Alessandro now believes that a new approach is urgently required, especially to avoid new groups making the same errors as the past.

To forget a box of vegetables or to make a mistake in its composition can become a problem as it generates dissatisfaction and complaints; with so many boxes to prepare every week, such mistakes are not uncommon.

The delivery of prepared bags and boxes to the delivery points is another important phase, and solutions to the emerging problems call for co-operation, both among farmers and between farmers and GAS.

The Poggio di Camporbiano farm has a dedicated van, and members of the co-operative organize delivery turns. The Contessa Beatrice farm cooperates with the Cortevilla farm for the deliveries. Colombini also delivers the bags for another producer. Josef Tscholl, an apple producer, also distributes oranges for a producer from Sicily, delivering them to a delivery point common to several GAS.

The organization of deliveries also involves efforts to optimize the trips. This is another aspect that stimulates co-operation: often farmers become communication channels between GAS, for example to coordinate the delivery times when several GAS have delivery days in common.

Tackling Supply – Demand Gaps

One of the biggest problems for the viability of the box schemes is the demand/supply gap throughout the year: in winter only a few crops can be cultivated, and the risk of crop failures due to weather adversities is high. On the other hand, when production peaks, demand is much lower because many families are on holiday (see Table 4).

Exceptional weather conditions or pest attacks can delay the harvest or cause product loss; on the demand side, there can be a large discontinuity in orders. To respond to a shortage of supply, farmers can try – when possible – to diversify further, thus they have a greater flexibility. The degree of tolerance that GAS allow farmers in the box composition enables them to make use of ‘emergency products’ (e.g. processed products or more durable products – e.g. onions, potatoes, carrots). Although this solution does not fully satisfy the needs of families (they are sometimes forced to integrate with purchases from other channels), there is a considerable degree of acceptance as a form of solidarity.

At the same time, some problems can arise. During the winter of 2008–2009 a lot of people complained about a reduction in quality or variety in the products (including many ‘emergency products’). Some suspended orders (opportunistically waiting for better days), and others asked for a reduction in price. In some cases, the complaints go beyond contingency: as there is a continuous growth in demand for box schemes, there is a suspicion that a too large number of customers will undermine the quality of supply.

The discussions on the forum of the Bio Colombini web site, from December 2008 to February 2009 completely focused on these aspects. In some cases complaints about the farmer emerged: was his business getting too big and thus lowering his concern for his customers? Somebody claimed that the farmer did not programme the sowing well enough for the winter and that he should be better organized for next year. The farmer replied that the season had been very difficult, with continuous rain and temperatures frequently below zero, and that in spring and in summer they will receive more products than agreed.

Moreover, not all consumers are committed enough to the GAS mission to order boxes every month. When there are cases of dissatisfaction, or simply when the burden of adapting to the new system is felt to be too heavy, some families stop ordering. This instability generates financial troubles for farmers. Some farmers have

therefore started to ask for longer orders and pre-financing (e.g. two or three months instead of one), so that they can plan their activity better. Others are thinking of imposing some limitations on the free entry and exit of consumers: seen as an effort to create a basis of loyal and reliable customers. A more advanced solution, being tested in some GAS, is a 'pact' that commits consumers to buying bags for a whole year, with prepayment every three months. These risk-sharing schemes work well when there is a large degree of trust within the network. The supply/demand gap may undermine this trust.

To our knowledge, not many solutions have emerged to resolve the shortage of demand during the summer season. As mentioned previously, some farmers adapt to this situation by processing unsold produce, to be sold separately or inserted into boxes during the winter season. This may provide an important extra income for farmers; at the same time, however, it involves a lot of extra work and investment.

Pricing: Between Coherence and Convenience

Pricing is one of the most important challenges to conventional markets by GAS. In principle, GAS look for a 'fair price', which means that agricultural prices should take into account the full cost (including the environmental and social costs) of food and therefore its real value. As sellers are not strangers to buyers (as in ideal-typical markets of conventional economics), but rather are part of the same community, prices should reflect the willingness to take into account all the interests at stake, including the rights of farmers to a decent income. As we have seen, one of the motivations to become a GAS farm is also the farmers' aim to get a better return for their work. GAS provide farmers with a space to negotiate prices.

The GAS process of pricing is totally different from the conventional method. In the latter case, the price is set on the basis of 'market prices' registered on the national stock exchange, modulated in terms of rigid quality standards. In the case of GAS, and especially with box schemes, prices are part of a broader set of contractual norms that involve the stability of prices, and a high tolerance regarding the amount, variety and quality of the produce.

However, if setting a fair price involves taking into account both farmers' and consumers' rights, which set of elements should be taken into account? If we look at GAS forums, there is an endless discussion between those who compare GAS prices and prices in conventional channels and those who remark that solidarity means overcoming any such argument.

In any case, solidarity is not a solid criterion if it is not supported by information. Information regarding production costs would be a good starting point. However, very few farmers keep accounts and are capable of identifying their costs.

The Poggio di Camporbiano farm is a co-operative and so their accounts must be transparent for all associates. The prices of the products are accurately based on the costs of production, and their policy is also made transparent to consumers.

Until now Alessandro Colombini has applied the old farmers' approach to financial aspects, which he learned from his father: it is all based on empirical observations, from day to day. As the complexity in the farm's activities has increased, Alessandro has recognized the urgency of setting up an information-based farm strategy.

At the Nicobio farm a financial evaluation of the farm activity has just started, thanks to Elena's skills and propensity for this kind of analysis. They choose to keep selling the boxes of vegetables at an average price of €2 per kilo, believing that organic products should be affordable for everybody, but without knowing if they are covering all their costs.

Francesco of the Contessa Beatrice farm used to work in industry before becoming a neo-rural. He was used to keeping account of working times. Now he and his wife take note of the time spent on operations on a calendar in the small farm office. They have also joined a programme to implement an accounting system on the farm.

More accurate awareness of costs may enable farmers to define the relation between prices and income and this, through communication, may help both farmers and consumers to agree on a fair price. Even where there is co-operation between the two sides the difficulties to overcome are considerable, because of the need to take into account several aspects, such as the specificities of different production systems, or a certain level of inefficiency due to the small scale, or the lower productivity of special varieties. Although there is no guarantee of results, exploring production costs represents a good opportunity to highlight the 'hidden costs' of production, thus contributing to learning processes.

Scaling Up

The growth of GAS is creating pressure on producers. Farmers tend to tackle this unforeseen growth of demand as best as they can, but it is becoming increasingly clear that this situation challenges the whole GAS system. On the one hand, the risk of opportunistic behaviour increases (when farmers are not able to fulfil demand they may be tempted to integrate the supply with purchased commodities: this is not illegal, but goes against the GAS philosophy) and trust in the system may be eroded. On the other hand, the scarcity of supply may force GAS to relax standards by accepting conventional producers or enlarge the sourcing area.

To deal with the increased pressure of demand, GAS are actively looking to recruit new farms. This, as we mentioned previously, involves the detachment of these farmers from old networks and their reattachment to new ones. The challenge is not easy, but some already existing experiences indicate the way forward: giving conventional farmers an economic motivation to convert to organic farming; mobilizing GAS farms to support technical transitions through knowledge sharing; mobilizing consumers in trust building; looking for local administration support to finance training, farm investments, communication initiatives; activating links with farmers' unions to involve them directly in the process.

Concluding Remarks

GAS are a peculiar type of AAFN, aimed at fulfilling the demand for fresh, local, sustainable and nutritious food for middle to low income consumers. Rather than looking at typical, locality, and excellent quality food, GAS focus on daily food, which may have a far more radical impact on the structures of daily life.

GAS challenge the dominant food regime by creating a public space where food is thought of, known about, produced and consumed according to alternative norms and rules. Within GAS, the actors involved redefine their identity and modify their socio-technical environment. Commitment, connectivity, diversity, solidarity, and embeddedness replace or integrate specialization, competition and bargaining. To adapt production, distribution and consumption technologies to GAS principles, the actors involved question their daily routines and experiment with new ones. By interacting with each other, farmers and consumers work to overcome material and cognitive barriers to change. Along with this process, they submit 'principles' to a 'real life' test: they align their practices with principles and at the same time work out principles to ground them better into practice. By choosing to set voluntary constraints on their patterns of consumption they explore the possibilities of new consumption and production styles based on different hierarchies of value.

GAS highlight the collective dimension of innovation. Not only do they help to appreciate the importance of social ties for innovative action; they also show the common cognitive frames, rules, norms, and material infrastructures created as an external effect of individual interactions. Innovation is co-produced by all actors in the network, and the outcomes of this process become public goods to which they then have access.

New business models and styles of consumption co-evolve and build a protected environment that helps them resist hostile cultural, technological and regulatory environments. GAS are in fact a. communication infrastructures facilitating the creation of alternative cognitive frames through learning processes; b. deliberative spaces where new concepts of systems of food provision are legitimized; c. regulatory environments providing the necessary flexibility to experiment with new patterns of economic behaviour. GAS define the rules and at the same time provide the necessary flexibility to adapt to them. They replace formal controls and sanctions with trust and moral sanctions. They interpret consumers' and producers' duties and rights in the light of solidarity, and therefore redistribute risks and rewards.

This article has focused mainly on the effects of farmers' involvement in GAS. Initially, GAS provide an alternative market by giving farmers many advantages, related to immediate (or even advanced) payment, stability of prices, and higher added value. When the relationship with GAS becomes firmly established, farmers make physical investments, adapt the organization and lay-out of farms, acquire new skills, reformulate economic calculations and farming strategies, and look for new input providers.

The analysis of GAS in Tuscany shows that they have a high potential for growth. In fact, they interpret the social concern for the crisis of the food regime, made evident by its inability to give solutions to global issues such as resource scarcity, food-borne diseases, pollution, and unfairness. A growing number of consumers are willing to change their routines and to contribute with voluntary work in order to get access to 'good' food at a fair price. The growth in GAS operations puts further pressure on the network, demanding greater efficiency and coherence between parts of the system, and at the same time creates tensions on its boundaries, as it intensifies competition with conventional business and makes regulatory conflicts with the regime more evident.

From the conventionalization literature we know that the reaction of conventional business to food movements can be two-sided: on the one hand, it tries to undermine the legitimacy of GAS (related to quality control, food safety, and fiscal issues)

and, on the other hand, it incorporates innovative parts of the new system into its traditional system. However, as Smith (2006) suggests, incorporation can be also considered an innovation, albeit 'incremental'. Following the same argument, 'conventionalization' may also fall into the same category: it helps the regime to adapt without challenging it radically.

The problem is to keep the dialectic alive between 'incremental' and 'radical' innovation. Innovative ideas and organizational principles are introduced as novelties – radical breakouts from existing rules and norms – and gradually consolidated into routines, institutions and infrastructures. The key, in our view, is in the distinction between novelties and niches. The article has argued that niches are not well understood if there is no analysis of the processes occurring prior to their 'closure'. Most GAS, in this view, are in the novelty phase, with very radical visions and goals, and struggle to face a multiplicity of problems emerging from the radicality of the innovation they pursue. When novelties consolidate into niches, they sacrifice part of their radicality to gain efficiency. But if the conditions that created the novelty are still there, new novelties will emerge.

Notes

1. GAS is the acronym of Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Solidarity-based Purchase Groups). In the text the word is used both for the singular and for the plural form.
2. This analysis draws on the findings of research that was conducted within a regional project active since 2006. We collected information through direct interviews with Tuscan farmers involved with GAS (see Appendix 1) and with GAS co-ordinators, and through an analysis of e-mail communication between many GAS in the region and their providers.
3. Three types of connections have been identified in social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking (Woolcock, 1999). Bonding social capital refers to the links between people with similar attitudes and objectives and characterizes many groups; bridging social capital refers to the capacity of groups to make links with others that may have different views; linking social capital refers to the ability of groups to engage vertically with external agencies, in order to influence their policies or to draw on useful resources.
4. This type of box scheme is the most common in North Europe; it is based on an individual relationship between farms or intermediaries and consumers.

References

- BRUNORI, G. (2007) Local food and alternative food networks: a communication perspective, *Anthropology of Food*, 2, pp. 1–20.
- BRUNORI, G., CERRUTI, R., MEDEOT, S. and ROSSI, A. (2008) Looking for alternatives: the construction of the organic beef chain in Mugello, Tuscany, *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology*, 7(1), pp. 126–143.
- CALLON, M. (1986) Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Brieuc bay, in: J. LAW (ed.) *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?*, London: Routledge, pp. 196–233.
- CALLON, M. (1999) Actor network theory: the market test, in: J. LAW and J. HASSARD (eds) *Actor Network Theory and After*, Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 181–195.
- CALLON, M., MEADEL, C. and RABEHARISOA, V. (2002) The economy of qualities, *Economy and Society*, 31(2), pp. 194–217.
- CHIFFOLEAU, Y. (2009) From politics to co-operation: the dynamics of embeddedness in alternative food supply chains, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 49(3), pp. 218–235.
- CONE, C.A. and MYHRE, A. (2000) Community-supported agriculture: a sustainable alternative to industrial agriculture?, *Human Organization*, 59, pp. 187–197.
- DI IACOVO, F. (ed.) (2008) *Agricoltura Sociale: Quando Le Campagne Coltivano Valori*, Milano: Franco Angeli.
- DUPUIS, E.M. and GILLON, S. (2009) Alternative modes of governance: organic as civic engagement, *Agriculture and Human Values*, 26(1–2), pp. 43–56.

- EVANS, N. (2009) Adjustment strategies revisited: agricultural change in the Welsh Marches, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 25, pp.217–230.
- GEELS, F.W. (2004) From sectoral systems of innovation to socio-technical systems: Insights about dynamics and change from sociology and institutional theory, *Research Policy*, 33, pp. 897–920.
- GOODMAN, D. (2003) The quality turn and alternative food practices: reflections and agenda, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(1), pp.1–7.
- GOODMAN, D. and GOODMAN, M. (2007) Localism, livelihoods, and the ‘post-organic’: changing perspectives on alternative food networks in the United States, in: D. MAYE, L. HOLLOWAY and M. KNEAFSEY (eds) *Alternative Food Geographies*, Emerald Group Publishing.
- GOODMAN, D. and DUPUIS, E.M. (2002) Knowing food and growing food: beyond the production-consumption debate in the sociology of agriculture, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42(1), pp. 6–23.
- GOVINDASAMY, R., ITALIA, J. and ADELAJA, A. (2002) Farmers’ markets: consumer trends, preferences, and characteristics, *Journal of Extension*, 40(1), pp. 1–7.
- GUTHMAN, J. (1998) Regulating meaning, appropriating nature: the codification of California organic agriculture, *Antipode*, 30(2), pp. 135–154.
- GUTHMAN, J. (2002) Commodified meanings, meaningful commodities: re-thinking production–consumption links through the organic system of provision, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42(4), pp. 295–311.
- GUTHMAN, J. (2004) The trouble with ‘organic lite’ in California: a rejoinder to the ‘conventionalisation’ debate, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(3), pp. 301–316.
- HASSANEIN, N. (2003) Practicing food democracy: a pragmatic politics of transformation, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp. 77–86.
- JACOBSEN, E. and DULSRUD, A. (2007) Will consumers save the world? The framing of political consumerism, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 20, pp. 469–482.
- JOHNSON, S. (2004) The redefinition of family farming: agricultural restructuring and farm adjustment in Waihemo, New Zealand, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 20, pp. 419–432.
- KIRWAN, J. (2004) Alternative strategies in the UK agro-food system: interrogating the alterity of farmers’ markets, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44, pp. 395–415.
- LAMINE, C. (2005) Settling shared uncertainties: local partnerships between producers and consumers, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 45(4), pp. 324–345.
- LATOUR, B. (1987) *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- LYSON, T.A. (2004) *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food and Community*. University Press of New England.
- MOORE, O. (2006) What farmers’ markets say about the post-organic movement in Ireland, in: M. REED (ed.) *Sociological Perspectives of Organic Agriculture: From Pioneer to Policy*, CABI, pp. 18–35.
- MOORS, E.H.M., RIP, A. and WISKERKE, J.S.C. (2004) The dynamics of innovation: a multilevel co-evolutionary perspective, in: J.S.C. WISKERKE and J.D. VAN DER PLOEG (eds) *Seeds of Transition: Essays on Novelty Production, Niches and Regimes in Agriculture*, Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, pp. 31–56.
- OFFER, A. (1997) Between the gift and the market: the economy of regard, *Economic History Review*, 50(3), pp. 450–476.
- PADEL, S. (2001) Conversion to organic farming: a typical example of the diffusion of an innovation?, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 41(1), pp. 40–61.
- PETRINI, C. (2005) *Buono, Pulito e Giusto*. Torino: Einaudi.
- PLOEG, J.D. VAN DER, RENTING, H., BRUNORI, G., KNICKEL, K., MANNION, J., MARSDEN, T., ROEST, K. DE, SEVILLAGUZMAN, E. and VENTURA, F. (2000) Rural development: from practices and policies towards theory. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(4), pp. 391–408.
- PLOEG, J.D. VAN DER, BOUMA, J., RIP, A., RIJKENBERG, F.H.J., VENTURA, F. and WISKERKE, J.S.C. (2004), On regimes, novelties and co-production, in: J.S.C. WISKERKE and J.D. VAN DER PLOEG (eds) *Seeds of Transition: Essays on Novelty Production, Niches and Regimes in Agriculture*, Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, pp. 1–27.
- RENTING, H., MARSDEN, T. and BANKS, J. (2003) Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development, *Environment and Planning A*, 35, pp. 393–411.
- RIP, A. and KEMP, R. (1998) Technological change, in: S. RAYNER and E. MALONE (eds) *Human Choice and Climate Change vol. 2*, Columbus, OH: Battelle.
- ROEP, D. and WISKERKE, J.S.C. (2005) *Nourishing Networks: Fourteen Lessons about Creating Sustainable Food Supply Chains*, Doetinchem: Reed Business Information.
- SAGE, C. (2003) Social embeddedness and relations of regard: alternative ‘good food’ networks in southwest Ireland, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp.47–60.
- SCHOT, J. and GEELS, F.W. (2008) Strategic niche management and sustainable innovation journeys: theory, findings, research agenda, and policy, *Technology, Analysis and Strategic Management*, 20, pp. 537–554.
- SEYFANG, G. (2006) Ecological citizenship and sustainable consumption: examining local organic food networks, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22, pp. 383–395.

- SMITH, A. (2003) Transforming technological regimes for sustainable development: a role for alternative technology niches?, *Science and Public Policy*, 30(2), pp. 127–135.
- SMITH, A. (2006) Green niches in sustainable development: the case of organic food in the United Kingdom, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 24(3), pp. 439–458.
- SONNINO, R. and MARSDEN, T. (2006) Beyond the divide: rethinking relationships between alternative and conventional food networks in Europe, *Journal of Economic Geography*, 6, pp. 181–199.
- WILLIS, S. and CAMPBELL, H. (2004) The chestnut economy: the praxis of neo-peasantry in rural France, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(3), pp. 317–331.
- WILSON, A.G. (2008) From ‘weak’ to ‘strong’ multifunctionality: conceptualising farm-level multifunctional transitional pathways, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24, pp. 367–383.
- WISKERKE, J.S.C. and PLOEG, J.D. VAN DER (2004) *Seeds of Transition: Essays on Novelty Production, Niches and Regimes in Agriculture*, Assen: Royal Van Gorcum.
- WOOLCOCK, M. (1999) *Social Capital: The State of the Notion*. Presented at a seminar on ‘Social Capital: Global and Local Perspectives’, Helsinki, 15 April.

Appendix: Sample

Farms	Province	Farmer type	Products	Farm size	Other on farm activities
Bio Colombini	Pisa	local farmer	vegetables, fruit	18 ha	processing of vegetables, direct selling, education
Nicobio	Lucca	local farmer	vegetables	8 ha	agro-tourism, direct selling
Poggio di Camporbiano	Siena	neo-peasant ‘commune’	milk, cheese, pasta and cereals, vegetables	200 ha	processing, direct selling
Contessa Beatrice	Livorno	neo-peasant	vegetables	7.5 ha	agro-tourism, direct selling
La Cortevilla	Livorno	neo-peasant	vegetables	3 ha	agro-tourism, direct selling
Radici	Arezzo	local farmer	vegetables, olive oil	5 arable crops, 35 wood	seed saving, processing of vegetables, direct selling
Bio Renai	Firenze	neo-peasant	vegetables, corn, fruit	4 ha	direct selling
Mansio Romana	Livorno	neo-peasant	vegetables	14 ha	agro-tourism, direct selling
Fattoria di Corazzano	Pisa	neo-peasant	vegetables	12 ha, 40 ha wood	direct selling
Il Cerreto	Pisa	neo-peasant	pasta and cereals, beans, honey, olive oil	150 arable crops, 80 wood	agro-tourism, direct selling
Lydia	Pisa	neo-peasant	cheese and meat	110 ha	on farm visits on payment
Le Corsine of Joseph Tscholl	Pisa	neo-peasant	fruit		processing of fruits (juice, liqueurs), direct selling
Kovatz	Pisa	neo-peasant	olive oil, honey	2 ha	
S. Cristoforo	Firenze	neo-peasant	pasta and cereals, processed vegetables	50 ha	processing of vegetables, direct selling
Il Palazzo	Firenze	local farmer	beef	370 ha (60 ha wood)	agro-tourism, direct selling
Giovanna Bacciotti	Firenze	local farmer	cheese	65 ha (8 ha wood) 400 sheep	direct selling
Luca Frediani	Firenze	neo-peasant	vegetables	3 ha	direct selling
Maurizio Gioli	Pisa	local farmer	bread, olive oil	2 ha (1 ha wood)	direct selling
Paolo Deri	Pisa	local farmer	eggs		direct selling
Gino Corvino	Pisa	neo-peasant	vegetables	3,5 ha	

Farms	Province	Farmer type	Products	Farm size	Other on-farm activities
Pedrazzi	Pisa	local farmers	sheep milk cheese	6 ha	direct selling
La Ficaia	Pisa	neo-peasant	vegetables	5 ha	agro-tourism
Di Grigoli	Pisa	local farmer	beef, eggs, chicken	80 ha, 45 cows	direct selling of beef
Leonardo Puccioni	Pisa	local farmer	cherries, summer fruit	4 ha	processing of fruits, direct selling
Alessandro Donati	Pisa	local farmer	cherries, summer fruit	5.5 ha	processing of fruits, direct selling
Rosario Floridia	Pisa	local farmer	wheat	120 ha	seed saving, processing of wheat (flour, bread),
Podere Zhaira	Lucca	neo-peasant	olive oil, vegetables and fruit	2 ha	processing of vegetables and fruit, direct selling
Ovidio Rossi	Lucca	local farmer	potatoes, cereals, chestnuts	5 ha	direct selling



Direct Markets as Multiple Consumption Spaces: The Case of Two Norwegian Collective Marketing Initiatives

GUNNAR VITTERSØ AND ANNE M. JERVELL

[Paper first received, 1 February 2010; in final form, 13 December 2010]

Abstract. Direct markets, such as farmers' markets and farm shops, have in the academic literature been discussed as alternative spaces of food to the conventional food system. Through theoretical perspectives on consumption and recreation, the article adopts a broad view on the development of these markets. It discusses how farmers both through collective organizations and as individual producers market their food products and rural services, and how these marketing initiatives are perceived and used by consumers. In recent years, farm-based businesses have identified tourism and recreational consumption as interesting for marketing of food products. Recreational consumption is one of the most rapidly growing consumption areas and both domestic and international tourism are part of this trend. Two Norwegian examples of farmers' collective marketing are presented in this article. The analysis and discussion is based on several sources: in-depth interviews, the organizations' self-presentations on the Internet and survey material. The article concludes that these direct markets represent an interesting option for consumers both as a leisure experience and as part of ordinary food consumption. An important future task is to better organize the collective marketing initiatives to meet the challenges that these different consumer demands represent in the food and leisure markets.

Introduction

Collective farmers marketing initiatives (COFAMIs) like HANEN (lit. 'The Rooster') and Bondens marked (BM) (lit. 'Farmers' Market') are in the Norwegian context new forms of organizing the distribution of food directly from the farmer to the consumer. These initiatives attract an increasing number of producers, as well as public attention and political support. There seems to be a growing demand for local products and rural experiences among consumers. The central issue of this article is to discuss the relative importance of recreation and food consumption motives for visiting di-

Gunnar Vittersø is a Research Fellow at the National Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO), P.O.Box 4682 Nydalen, N-0405 Oslo, Norway; e-mail: <gunnar.vitterso@sifo.no>. His research interests include sustainable consumption and rural development. He is presently working on his dissertation in human geography entitled 'Recreational Consumption As a Market for Farm-based Food and Tourism Businesses'. Anne Moxnes Jervell has a PhD in agricultural economics and is currently Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Her research interests include entrepreneurship in agriculture, farms as family businesses, collective marketing and change management.

rect food markets. Through theoretical perspectives on consumption and recreation, on the one hand, we will discuss how farmers through collective organizations and as individual producers market their food products and rural services and, on the other, how these marketing initiatives are perceived and used by consumers.

During the 1990s, the Norwegian government launched a new policy aimed at the development of niche products and speciality foods that opened up opportunities for small-scale producers to address new markets. Governmental schemes as for example the 'Innovation programme' (Verdiskapingsprogrammet), were designed in order to support small-scale producers. In recent years, these policies have been reinforced by establishing a political goal of 20% local or niche food products in the Norwegian market within the year 2020. Tourism has been a major tool in the development of local food products in Norway. Through innovation programmes and other support measures different marketing initiatives have been established. Tourist routes, similar to the wine and cheese routes in other parts of Europe, and food festivals are supported in order to attract tourists to local direct food markets. Also the establishment of HANEN and BM must be seen in this political context of developing tourism and income opportunities for farmers in rural areas. Norsk Bygdeturisme (lit. 'Norwegian Rural Tourism') founded in 1997, was first started as a bottom up initiative by farm and rural businesses offering accommodation to domestic and foreign tourists. The farm food organization, Norsk Gardsmat, was, on the contrary, initiated in 1998 as part of a governmental strategy for the promotion of Norwegian food. The organization worked to enhance sales among the members by initiating projects for increased co-operation on marketing of their products. These two organizations have later merged and today the organization is known by the name HANEN, and has more than 500 member businesses from all over Norway.

Bondens marked (BM) is a collective marketing initiative launched in August 2003. The concept is inspired by the US and British Farmers' Markets (Jervell and Borgen, 2004; Åsebø et al., 2007). Bondens marked was originally initiated by the Norwegian agricultural co-operatives and reflected an interest in facilitating new marketing channels for agricultural products for the members of the co-operatives. Since 2003, BM has expanded both in terms of the number of markets and the number of vendors (producers participating) at the markets, and today more than 20 markets are operating in various parts of the country.

By combining theory on consumption and recreation, we seek to add new perspectives to the understanding of visiting direct markets as food purchase and experience. Fine (2004) calls for more research on cultural and consumption issues within agri-food studies, and in similar ways Sonnino and Marsden (2006) call for a better understanding of alternative food networks. In the following sections, we address these calls by employing a broad perspective on the cultural and social meanings of food consumption, shopping and recreation. This theoretical overview is followed by a presentation of the research material. Then the results from studies of the two cases of direct markets are presented and discussed. The article concludes by addressing potentials and challenges for further development of direct markets as spaces of food and leisure consumption.

Alternative Food Spaces

Support measures for development of 'quality foods' and local production have been seen as a political strategy for sustainable rural development both in Norway

as well as the European Union (Morgan et al., 2006; Jervell and Vramo, 2007; Amilien et al., 2008). This quality turn (Murdoch and Miele, 1999) in production is paralleled by new trends in distribution towards more localized distribution, such as farmers markets, box schemes, CSAs etc. This again has been theorized as a re-connection between producers and consumers where local networks of producers and consumers create new, alternative spaces of food consumption (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000). However, as Sonnino and Marsden (2006, p. 187) point out, this process of re-localization of food is thus far by no means clearly understood analytically.

Alternative or local food systems are contested concepts (Tovey, 2009). These local alternatives have often been discussed in opposition to the conventional food system, where the pros of local food and short-distance food supply have been emphasized. It is stated that local food systems may contribute to sustainable development in rural areas both economically and environmentally. One positive effect of local food supply includes increased self-sufficiency of rural regions. It is argued that local foods are transported less than conventional food, which results in lower greenhouse gas emissions. Reconnection of consumers and producers is said to increase the transparency and trust in food production (Murdoch and Miele, 1999; Kirwan, 2006). This type of exchange is said to be beneficial in terms of respect, reputation and recognition on the producers' behalf, and in terms of sociability, attention, acknowledgement and friendship on the consumers' behalf (Sage, 2003; Kirwan, 2006).

These are just a few examples mentioned in the literature as advantages of alternative food systems. Local food system proponents have been criticized for having a 'blind spot' for more problematic issues of local food, and accused of promoting local as an end in itself without actually examining if and in what ways local food systems are more sustainable (Hinrichs, 2000; Born and Purcell, 2006). Organic agriculture has been seen, for instance, as an alternative production system and associated with small-scale farming and local distribution. While in fact, a large share of organic food is produced on a large scale and transported globally in order to reach the supermarkets in different parts of the world (Guthman, 2004, pp. 9–12). Local food or quality foods may maintain or even reinforce social inequalities in food consumption, because it is mostly the well-off segment of the middle classes that benefit from and engage in these new initiatives in the food market (Kneafsey et al., 2008; Tovey, 2009). Finally, local markets are not necessarily more transparent than conventional retailing, because asymmetric and non-reciprocal relations between seller and buyer may also occur at direct markets (Hinrichs, 2000). These are but a few examples to illustrate the complexity of the alternative food system issues. In agreement with Holloway et al. (2007), we will argue that these initiatives must be examined case by case, and that the motivations of the participants are better understood through a deeper analysis of the social framing of consumption.

The Social Framing of Food Consumption

Over the past 30 years, the Norwegian supermarket sector has more than doubled its market share, with the four big retail chains now accounting for about 98% of overall food sales (NILF, 2008). In this context, direct markets may have an important function in being an alternative to the dominant supermarket chains. However, we will not only view direct markets as 'alternative' in the sense discussed above, but aim at a more nuanced picture of the producers and consumers involved in these market initiatives. The conventional/alternative dichotomy 'is problematic when discuss-

ing what consumers actually do and think, (Eden et al., 2008, p. 1046), and often have too strong a focus on the agency and reflexivity of the individual (producer and consumer). Supporting local producers or buying environmentally sound products are of course important motivations for many consumers (Terragni et al., 2009), but these practices must not only be seen as reflexive or politically motivated. Rather, we want to underline that food consumption also consists of more habitual and social forms of consumer behaviour (Gronow and Warde, 2001, p. 219). Thus the producers and consumers involved in direct market initiatives carry out 'collective', social practices that may have different outcomes depending on the social contexts. The initiatives are not only agency driven, but framed by public policies, as well as the structures and power relations in the food market (Jacobsen and Dulsrud, 2007; Halkier, 2009). This social framing of food consumption has to be taken into consideration when analysing the development of COFAMIs and local food systems.

Thus, we want to analyse how the motives and actions of producers and consumers are affected by the social framing of the different marketing initiatives, and view these direct market spaces not only as alternative spaces as opposed to conventional food spaces, but also discuss these as extraordinary spaces in relation to the ordinary spaces of food in grocery stores and supermarkets.

Direct Markets as Ordinary and Extraordinary Food Spaces

Shopping at a farmers' market or in a farm food outlet is by its very nature different from the self-supporting way of shopping in modern supermarkets. Lehtonen and Mäenpää (1998) argue that in the modern department store there is no longer any interaction involved over the quality or prices of goods between seller and buyer. Present-day shopping may be seen as an activity of 'being with things that one wants to buy rather than shopping as interacting with other people' (Lehtonen and Mäenpää, 1998, p. 142). This element of interacting with other people is an important feature that distinguishes direct markets from the conventional way of distributing food. Consumption, and especially shopping, has been theorized as an individual and reflexive activity. For instance, the modern department stores or shopping malls have been studied as ideal places where a self-centred, hedonistic, but pleasurable and recreational shopping practice takes place (Hewer and Campbell, 1998; Miller et al., 1998). The shopper is seen in this perspective as an individual consumer who tries to find new ways of self-expression and individual identity formation through the shopping activity. While shopping often is considered a pleasurable, recreational activity, buying food is to a much greater extent associated with obligations and is often an activity that is carried out alone (Miller et al., 1998, p. 96). Food consumption, including the provision of food, has different social and cultural functions in everyday life. Food purchases may be considered as caring work where the main aim is to provide the family with good and nourishing food. However, it may also be an arena for social differentiation. Food may in different ways demonstrate belonging or distance to other social groups (Tovey, 2009; Bugge and Døving, 2000, pp. 68–70).

Miller (1998, 2001) argues that contrary to recreational shopping that aims at fulfilling individual wants and needs, family shopping is characterized by moral concerns connected to family obligations and socially constructed virtues, such as thrift and utility. In his fieldwork among working-class and middle-class families in London, Miller found that shopping had a profound social meaning in creating

and maintaining social relations – especially within the family. The relational content was not attached to the shopping activity per se, but to abstract social relations, such as kinship and friendship. Thus, shopping became primarily an act of love and devotion, in other words, a social activity with the ultimate aim of creating a happy family life. Following Miller, these family obligations have primacy before the more ethical and political motivations connected to food choices. From this perspective, it may for instance be morally wrong to buy expensive organic vegetables if it comes at the expense of other necessary purchases within the household (Miller, 2001, pp. 133–137).

While Miller focused on the ordinary consumption of everyday life and shopping routines in ordinary food stores, shopping as recreation may also be seen as a socially integrating activity where necessary purchases are combined with a pleasurable experience (Bjørkum, 1996). Visiting direct markets such as a farmers' market on a Saturday morning or to stop by a farm shop when on holiday may also be seen as recreational activities taking place in the leisure time. In his book *The Tourist Gaze*, Urry (2002) analyses tourism as a specific leisure practice that involves pleasurable experiences that are out of the ordinary compared to everyday life. A central part of these experiences is to gaze upon attractions whether these are monuments, buildings, landscapes or sceneries (Urry, 2002, p. 1). Urry states that the countryside, besides being a common 'stage' for the tourist gaze, is an important arena for other leisure activities, such as hiking, cycling and skiing. This observation fits the Norwegian leisure tradition with emphasis on outdoor recreation and vacations in cabins, caravans and similar 'second homes' in the countryside.

The family obligations that Miller focused on are most prominent in everyday life, while leisure time is usually considered as more free of moral obligations and social norms. To have a break from work, routines and rhythms of everyday life may be seen as an essential aspect of leisure and recreation. Although leisure time is considered as 'time out', it is by no means free in the sense that one may do as one likes regardless of traditions, social norms and expectations. Miller (1998, 2001) and Klepp (1993) have made similar observations of modern Western societies where the family and the wants and needs of the children have become increasingly important. Spending time together and doing activities that the children enjoy are idealized as the proper way of organizing 'family leisure' (Jensen, 1993, p. 113). To take an example from one of the most common Norwegian holiday activities: a successful vacation at the cabin usually includes that the family share common outdoor experiences such as skiing, boating or hiking in the woods (Vittersø, 2007). Rural tourism and farm experiences, but also visits to farmers' markets in an urban context, may be activities that resonate with this present leisure mentality focusing on family leisure and spending time together.

Considering these different social meanings of shopping and leisure, we will view the development of direct food markets both from the perspective of food provisioning and as a recreational experience. When analysing the two different collective marketing initiatives, we look for how these different aspects are emphasized by the farmers (organizations) and consumers. Is it the symbolic values of the products and experiences, the reflexive, alternative consumer, or values of family obligations that are emphasized in the different contexts? Our aim is to understand how these different aspects of food and leisure consumption are framed and experienced within the different direct marketing initiatives.

Data Material

The material used in the analysis and discussions is derived from several sources of qualitative data related to the two cases. First, we analyse the content of the BM and HANEN organizations' home pages on the Internet. These pages (<<http://www.hanen.no>> and <<http://www.bondensmarked.no>>) act both as direct links to the customers and as important communication channels for the members and producers. Here information about the marketing concept, marketing material, labelling and other relevant issues are posted. These pages include several documents dealing with the use of marketing logos and labels as well as handbooks and guides for the producers, vendors and market managers.

For the HANEN case, we also draw on material collected in 2007 and 2008 for a farm tourism project¹ in two different geographical areas. The data material consists of 18 in-depth interviews with customers recruited from different farm shops and interviews with 11 farmers offering products in farm food outlets in two different geographical areas. Customer informants (tourists on holiday, day-trip visitors or local customers) represented both blue- and white-collar workers, 25–70 years of age.

As the geographical and social patterns and structures of domestic tourism are quite different along the coast compared to the inland, the research took place in one coastal area in Vestfold county, south-west of the capital Oslo, and in one inland area in Buskerud county, west of Oslo. The farm shops we visited differed according to their products, services and marketing profile. In the coastal area they mainly offered potatoes, vegetables and berries while three farm shops in the inland area marketed different local foods such as: fresh eggs, herbs, smoked sausages, thin pastry, crisp bread, juices, jams, jellies, etc. Interviews with tourists and local inhabitants focused on the experience of buying local/localized products from these farm shops and the appropriation of these products on vacation and when back home.

From this farm tourism project, we will also refer to survey data concerning customers' visits to farm shops. These results are drawn from two different surveys including a customer survey in 10 different farm outlets, geographically spread throughout Norway (the HANEN survey), and a national statistically representative survey (the SIFO survey). The results referred to in the article are previously published in Terragni et al. (2009) and Vittersø and Schjøll (2010).

For the farmers' market case we primarily use results from two focus-group interviews with customers recruited at the Oslo BM in 2006. This includes 12 consumers recruited for two focus groups, one with younger participants (20–45) and another with older customers (40–65). The consumers were asked to discuss main differences between shopping at farmers' markets and in supermarkets and the importance of the information that one receive at the farmers' market.

We also draw on results from two major evaluation projects of the BM: first in 2003 and a follow-up study in 2006 (Svennerud and Jervell, 2004; Svennerud et al., 2004; Åsebø et al., 2007; Flaten et al., 2007; Jervel and Vramo, 2007). The evaluations included mail surveys of vendors, and observations and interviews with customers in markets.

HANEN

HANEN states in the 2006 Annual Report that the general interest in rural tourism and farm food is increasing (NBG, 2006). During the year 2007, about 7% of the

Norwegian population had visited a farm tourism enterprise, which was twice the number from 1991 (Blekesaune et al., 2010). Only 3% of all Norwegian farms have their own processing of food or sell products directly to the consumer (Forbord and Stræte, 2008), and farm sales are often combined with other tourism activities on the farm. In 2006, almost 60% of the members of HANEN offered accommodation, 40% had a farm shop/outlet and about a third of the members offered different kinds of activities/experiences (Fjellhammer, 2006; NBG, 2006).

In the 2006 Annual Report, it is underlined that what HANEN defines as 'rural tourism' is described in other contexts as 'green tourism', 'sustainable tourism', 'eco-tourism' and 'geo-tourism'. Likewise, what HANEN defines as 'farm food' is frequently recognised in other contexts as 'short-distance food', 'slow food', 'local food', 'small-scale food' and 'organic food' (NBG, 2006, p. 28). It seems that these concepts are interpreted as the same by HANEN without considering the contested and conflicting content of some of these concepts. In the Annual Report, it says that HANEN bases its work on three core values: culture, care and experiences. Important elements included in culture as a core value are local food, history, tradition, atmosphere and distinctiveness. The elements related to care are genuineness, quality, personality, care for the individual human being and responsibility for the natural environment. Elements connected to experiences are activities, contrasts, diversity and closeness to people, animals, farms and nature (NBG, 2006). The organization issues an annual catalogue, *Rural Tourism and Traditional Food*, which is distributed in 40 000 copies and written in the Norwegian, English and German languages and aimed at domestic as well as foreign travellers. All member businesses are listed in the catalogue with the name of the farm, postal address and telephone number. This information is supplemented with information in the form of pictograms that show the kinds of services the different farms offer. HANEN has developed an own logo, the rooster, which is presented as 'a sign of quality and excellence. Genuine food from the farm – when taste, experience and heritage are important!' (HANEN, 2009). This logo is to be found on labels on local food products and as signposts alongside country roads. One special task has been to support the farmers in the transition from producing standardized products for the food industry to the production of unique or singular products for a tourist and local market. This process of specialization may include developing new products, new recipes or special packaging, labels and logos on the products (Kaland, 2007; Lotti, 2010).

What is evident from the self-presentation of HANEN on the Internet is that the central organization directs its information and marketing to the travelling tourist who seeks out new experiences in rural areas of Norway. The Annual Report, for instance, emphasizes the visual attractions such as the beautiful nature and landscapes, but also common experiences as farm activities and contact with animals etc. This emphasis on tourism, experiences and accommodation is understandable considering that many of the member businesses offer accommodation as their main service.

Bondens marked (BM)

More than 20 local BM markets are operating in different parts of the country. The markets are only open part of the season and mostly less than once a week. This distinguishes the BM from earlier town markets that were open on a daily basis. The markets are mainly held on Saturdays (with some exceptions), which situates the

phenomenon in the consumers' leisure time and adds to the experience of visiting the market as something festive rather than an everyday activity.

The central organization has trademarked the BM label and developed a logo and a handbook as guidance for local managers and farmers (Jervell and Borgen, 2004). The BM manual emphasizes values such as quality, trustworthiness and that the products have a certain distinctive stamp. 'Fresh and tasteful – straight from the farm' is the vow that is given to the customers. In the manual, it is said that BM contributes to reducing food miles, which is to the benefit of the individual farmer as well as the local community. BM supports increased food diversity and 'not least saves the environment by reducing the need for transport' (Bondens marked, 2006). The vendors' guide is illustrated with pictures of how to place the products and with short texts that point out the importance of presenting the products in an appealing way, reminding the vendors of the aesthetical aspects as well as the importance of smell and taste in the promotion of food products, thus it must rather not be 'mucky carrots' or other products with soil at the market. Finally, the guide underlines that the BM first of all shall be a nice meeting place between the producer/vendor and the consumer, and that creating the right atmosphere is important in giving the customer a unique experience. The unique products are central in this – the vendor should know and be able to give the history of the product in the dialogue with the customer (Bondens marked, 2006). BM clearly distinguishes itself from ordinary food shopping. On the Internet home page, it is stated that "'Cheap food" will not be the main theme at the Farmers' Market, however, but rather quality and diversity' (Bondens marked, 2010).

BM seems, on the one hand, to cater for the ordinary family shopper looking for fresh, healthy produce at reasonable prices. On the other hand, BM seeks to present itself as an 'alternative' food space underlining the environmental benefits of less transportation and establishing separate organic food markets. We also notice how BM is staged in order to create and attract customers that seek extraordinary products and experiences.

Recreational Experiences at Farmers' Markets and Farm Shops

Both the farmers' markets and many of the farm shops have directed their opening hours to the weekends (Saturdays) and seasons (summer, December) when people enjoy their leisure time or holidays. Visiting a farm shop may be seen as part of family leisure where the social aspect of sharing nice experiences is important. More than 80% of the respondents in the HANEN survey stated that they visited the farm shop in company with others, and 54% totally agreed with the statement that an important part of visiting the farm was 'to do something nice in company with others'. More than 67% visited the place 'because it is a nice experience'. The survey also indicates that families with children to a greater extent than other families visited the farm in order to see animals and take part in activities at the farm, while customers of 60 years or older appreciate the surrounding landscape. Local and more regular customers to a lesser extent than tourists emphasise these experience values (Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010).

These findings point to the fact that a variety of offers and experiences may be important to attract visitors as part of family leisure. There are reasons to believe that the element of a unique experience is a greater motivation when visiting a farm outlet in the countryside than a market centrally in a town or city. The farmer can

utilize many different elements of the farm environment in the marketing in addition to the food products. This is evident in the interview with a female farmer in the inland area: 'On the farm, I have all the animals, always popular, and the old-style shop, and coffee to serve and food. I plan to offer pick-your-own corn-cobs and fishing. You can go for a pig safari or just sit here and enjoy yourself. At least I think people enjoy it'.

She had a lot of different food items of local origin in her shop, some of which were produced on the farm, but she wanted to promote more than just the food. The farmer told the customers many stories about the food products, the animals, the buildings, the landscape and the life at the farm. She was well aware of what kind of customers fitted to her concept: 'I put so much of myself into it, and many customers appreciate this. But sometimes, when I have visitors that I feel could just as well be sitting at home watching TV, I am provoked'.

This farmer initially got started with selling organic eggs directly to local customers, but in order to expand the business and get more customers, not least to attract tourists who passed by the farm, she started to focus on experiences and activities at the farm. This shift in focus increased the sales of farm products, probably because she managed to attract customers motivated both by the possibility to buy some food specialities and to have a nice (family) leisure experience at the same time. Customers in farm shops typically talk about how they got introduced to visiting and buying food at farms either as a child taken to the farm by their parents, or as grown-ups taking their own children to a nearby farm 'in order to see the animals'. The grown-ups get the opportunity to do some 'shopping' and the children get a nice farm experience and come in contact with animals. The trip made by car, bicycle or on foot may be both a social as well as a physical and recreational event in itself. Thus, it combines both the elements of the tourist gaze and the more exploring and playful activities (Urry, 2002, p. 89).

The farmers' most important motivation for participating at BM in the fourth season was the possibility of direct contact with consumers (Flaten and Svennerud, 2007), both the valuable feedback on products and the enjoyment of consumer evaluation of their products. Customers also appreciated this contact:

'I have a feeling that from their perspective – the vendors, that is – they are also very interested in asking you as a customer (Why do you come here? Or what is so special about these products?), that you easily start to chat with them. And they take the initiative. So it is not like a normal store where I just go there and it is me who wants something, and I shop, and then I leave. And the people in the retail store, they just hand out things. But I have a feeling that the vendors at the farmers' market really like it, and they are interested in the people they give their products to. There is much more of an exchange' (Woman, focus group 2).

From the consumer point of view, a large majority of visitors (80%) at the BM say that they would still visit the market if the same products could be bought in ordinary supermarkets or retail stores (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). Even customers who mostly buy ordinary fresh foods or who know that the special cheese also can be bought in a specialty shop, go to the market to enjoy the nice atmosphere. The market is considered a social event, where not only the vendors but also other customers contribute to the communication about food. One older woman in one of the focus

groups expressed it like this: 'It is a social meeting place. I don't think I have met people that I know of beforehand, but one always starts chatting with anyone there'.

The stories told by the producers at the market are also valued, and the sellers are often very interested in the customers, 'who we are, how we use the products, and what we think of them' (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). Farmers' market managers acknowledge the importance of creating an experience for visitors and attempt to add to the experience value of the markets by arranging food related activities like chef's demonstrations or thematic markets (such as all organic markets), or by adding food service and places for visitors to sit.

There is also a challenging side to promoting BM as a pleasurable experience. Some of the variety-seeking customers in the urban market are the same informants who commented that 'there are few new things at the market' and when you have visited it several times 'you see the same producers every time' (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). These customers emphasise the experience part and to find extraordinary products, products that are new and 'exotic' to them. Following the home page, these are among the customers that BM wants to attract to the markets.

Food Purchase at Farmers' Markets and Farm Shops

In a national survey conducted in autumn 2008, 26% of the respondents stated that they had visited an open air market in the last month, while only 11% had bought food from a farm outlet (Terragni et al., 2009). Surveys show that the typical customer at the farmers' markets and in farm shops are women in their fifties (Jervell and Vramo, 2007; Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010). We found a clear social differentiation in that the customers represented the most well-educated part of the population. The customers had a great interest in food and cooking, a preference for nutritious food, but also new and traditional food (Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010).

Food provisioning seems to be an important motivation for repeat customers at farmers' markets and in farm shops. A number of the BM informants go to the farmers' market for 'ordinary food'. They want more and a larger variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, potatoes, meat and dairy products; things they use every day: 'I buy a great deal of vegetables there, if it is available... but I wish there were more vegetables and I miss Norwegian fruit' (focus group participant). These customers also indicate that the market has taken a place in their shopping habits. They go regularly, every two weeks (when the market is open) and shop 'enough to last a while'. Farmers' markets have been compared with food purchase in the past before modern supermarkets became the dominant way of food provisioning, and customers at BM and in Norwegian farm shops describe it as an old fashioned way of shopping. In this way, direct markets may be viewed as a nostalgic or reactionary food space (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000). However, among our informants we found a recurrent contrasting of both the quality of foods and the shopping experience at direct markets with ordinary, conventional shopping in supermarkets, which we believe expresses more than just a feeling of nostalgia.

Several surveys indicate that the most important reasons for buying food in farm shops and other direct markets is to get fresh and healthy products. Taste and other intrinsic and visible qualities are often seen as important by these customers (Feagan et al., 2004; Jervell and Vramo, 2007; Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010). However, also when buying food in ordinary supermarkets, consumers in general value the same intrinsic qualities such as freshness, taste, appearance and healthiness as the most

important when purchasing food (Weatherell et al., 2003; Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010). Thus, it may seem that independent of where consumers make their food purchases, intrinsic qualities are more important than credence qualities such as local, organic or animal-friendly production. Food purchases in farm outlets are often contrasted with ordinary shopping, as by this customer in a farm shop in the coastal area: 'No, because here they have fresh, good vegetables, and I know what I get. Things like strawberries, for instance; if you buy them at the store, they're often watery and distasteful, but here you always get good things' (Woman, coastal area).

The woman in the farm shop expresses a concern for the fresh produce, which she finds ill treated in the ordinary food store, especially when contrasted to the products she procures in the farm shop ('here the products are always good'). This careful hunt for quality foods may be balanced against a moral obligation to be economical. For many customers, the price of the produce is a main issue, as for this woman in the coastal area: 'I don't even know if these are organic, but I suppose they probably are. I don't know. But I'm not that interested in whether it is organic or not... I go by price, really' (Woman, coastal area).

For these women who visited farm shops that mainly offered fresh produce, the relation between quality and price was important and subject to comparisons with the offer in ordinary food stores. Like in the farm shops, customers at BM also contrasted the quality of the products with those bought in ordinary food stores. The vegetables in the supermarkets are found to be not as fresh and not as local as those procured at BM (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). Caring for food, but also caring for the family, seems to be an important element underpinning the customers' search for quality foods at direct markets (Kneafsey et al., 2008, p. 26). Fresh and tasty products ensure that the household members enjoy their foods, and freshness is perceived as more healthy and to generate less waste because fresh vegetables do not perish that easily (Vittersø et al., 2005). Likewise Kneafsey et al. (2008, p. 163) found that provisioning and preparing of fresh vegetables 'straight from the soil' was undertaken in order to benefit those who were cared for, thus, this careful search for and preparing of quality foods may be interpreted as an act of love and care for the family (Miller, 1998, pp. 23–36).

From this perspective of family care, the direct contact with the vendor/producer becomes an important part of the valuation of food qualities and prices. The interactions with the personnel in ordinary retail stores are characterized as 'they just stand there', as opposed to the farmers' market where it is often the vendors 'who take the initiative', and in a farm shop you talk to the seller as opposed to an ordinary store where 'you walk about just picking things from the shelves'. Customers at the direct markets express that here one can get information on when and where the produce was harvested, and how and by whom the cured meat or strawberry jam was processed, while supermarkets provide information through impersonal and disembodied information such as food labels or food assurance schemes. But, following Eden et al. (2008), this type of knowledge provision is problematic. Consumers in many cases lack the ability to determine the truth of the information they are given (Miller, 2001, p. 135). To the customer the information received in a farm shop or at farmers' markets seems more transparent (Eden et al., 2008). This strong element of trust in direct markets that customers express is found in several studies (for example, see Sage, 2003; Kirwan, 2006; Moore, 2006). However, Hinrichs underlines that one has to examine critically the reciprocity of producers and consumers at direct

markets, thus, there will always be an element of both instrumentalism and asymmetry in the relation between producer and consumer (Hinrichs, 2000).

From the interviews with customers, we found differences in motivations for visiting direct markets between those who emphasized the search for qualities such as freshness and taste and those who particularly sought for credence qualities such as organic products. The customers in the focus groups discussed the importance of different quality aspects, and primary, intrinsic qualities such as freshness and taste were juxtaposed to credence qualities such as local and organic. Some stated explicitly that it did not matter whether the products were organic or not as long as the quality was good: 'As long as the quality is good I am willing to support farmers' markets, but I do not care much if it is locally produced or not' (Younger man, focus groups). 'I do not care if it is organic or bio-dynamic as long as it is good quality' (Woman, focus groups). However, other customers in the focus groups emphasized that BM provided both good quality and products with special credence qualities:

'I think it's really exciting, because many times that's the only way I can get both organic produce and particularly good raw materials... So I try to go there every time and stock up so that I have enough for the next two weeks, all that I need. I find it very useful... There are some stalls that I go to regularly' (Woman, focus group 2).

Some customers came to the market to get organic food, partly because organic vegetables on the BM market are very competitive compared to organic vegetables in other market outlets with regard to both price and quality. For these customers, the BM functions as an alternative food space where to express their ethical concerns and get hold of products, e.g. organic food, local or typical food, that are difficult to get elsewhere (Terragni et al., 2009). The difference between those who emphasize price and quality and those who focus on ethical shopping, demonstrates what Miller sees as a contradiction between 'care' and 'justice/'ethics'. If ethical shopping is found to be at the expense of family care it may 'be regarded as a form of extravagance that betrays the underlying morality of shopping' (Miller, 2001, p. 134). Miller argues that this contradiction could have been resolved if the responsibility for ethics were transferred from the individual to the political level, implying that there is a greater potential for 'ethical consumption' than what is currently realized.

However, when seeking food specialities in a tourist setting other aspects than quality, price and ethical concerns also become relevant. For instance, a male tourist in a farm shop in the inland area stated that he was looking for 'something that not everyone has got'. He clearly expressed the symbolic value of the local products and when having guests for dinner, for instance, these products were something he could 'brag about' and thus became a subject of conversation. However, there was a limit to how long these products could stay special, and he did not buy them at any cost: 'In the long run you must feel that this cheese is better than a similar cheese from Tine (the largest Norwegian conventional cheese manufacturer). I do not buy expensive products just because they are expensive' (Man, farm shop inland area).

These examples show that motivations and valuations of quality and prices of food vary with the type of products and the contexts in which they are sold. Farm tourism is an opportunity for tourists to have a 'backstage' view on food production. It is, however, not necessarily an authentic picture of the local agriculture that tourists get from these visits on farms or urban farmers' markets, and in many respects the local products are idealized by the tourists. Like farm tourism also BM focuses

on the experience value of farmers' markets and emphasizes quality and diversity rather than 'cheap food'. In this way, BM clearly distinguishes itself from ordinary food retailing, and caters for customers with a special interest in food. This preferably means the well educated middle-class consumer, and for some these products and markets have become a 'signifier of taste and social status' (Tovey, 2009, p. 26). Thus, marketing of local food in these extraordinary tourism food spaces seem to give the products a certain stamp as niche products, which are reserved for extraordinary occasions and not as ordinary food for everyday consumption (Vittersø and Amilien, 2011).

Direct Markets as Multiple Consumption Spaces

Our findings from studying the two Norwegian direct markets resonate with the conclusions of other researchers that point to the heterogeneity of alternative markets (Holloway et al, 2007; Tovey, 2009). The way these direct markets are framed, both as spaces of food purchase and of leisure experience, makes it pertinent to analyse them from the perspective of multiple consumption spaces (Figure 1).

Following Figure 1, direct markets may be seen as ethical or political spaces of food where consumers consciously seek these markets as an alternative to conventional markets. Farm shops and farmers markets may also, as Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) have pointed out, be seen as a nostalgic/ reactionary space appealing to and reminding of an old fashioned way of shopping. But as several authors have recognised, visiting these markets and searching for food specialities are increasingly seen as a signifier of social status and a modern urban lifestyle (Tovey, 2009). In this way, direct markets represent an extraordinary food space for the well-off urban consumer. Seen in a tourist context, local products are bought as part of an extraordinary tourist experience and taken home as souvenirs. In Norway, there is a strong link between the development of local food, direct markets and rural tourism, among others due to government involvement in and support for COFAMIs such as HANEN and BM. The focus of this policy involvement has to a large extent contributed to frame these direct markets within an extraordinary, tourism context (Vittersø and Amilien, 2011).

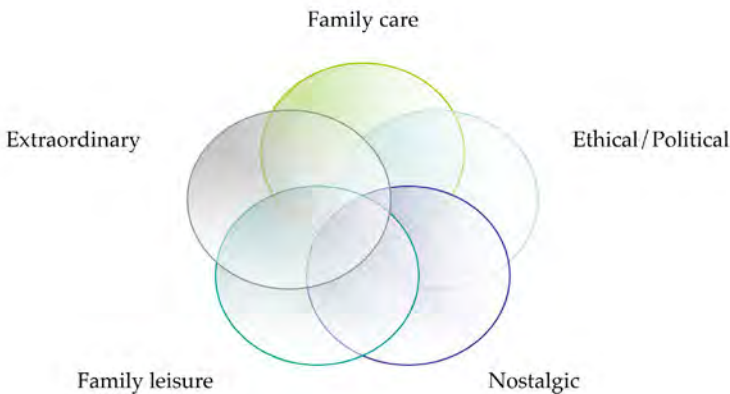


Figure 1. Direct markets as multiple consumption spaces.

The visit to the farm or the market may also be part of a broader social, family experience in which buying food is only a part of the total leisure experience. The latter exemplifies that the development of direct markets must be seen in the context of more general changes in consumption. Leisure and tourism are fast-growing consumption areas, and leisure gains an increasingly important position – both economically, socially and culturally in the present way of life of Norwegians. As seen from this study of farm shops and farmers' markets, food is increasingly linked with these new trends in leisure consumption.

In the HANEN and BM cases, we see a tension between developing these direct markets as exclusive niche markets aimed for the well-off customer and tourist, on the one hand, and the ordinary customer searching for less available, fresh and local products on the other. There is a limit to how much local customers and tourists are willing to pay for food products, and there might be a danger that the products are found too exclusive or too exotic in order for customers to buy and use these. There is a question if a too strong focus on local food as niche product may contribute to a greater social differentiation in the food market, and that these direct markets may primarily act as exclusive and extraordinary food spaces for a marginal, well-off customer base.

On the other hand, from the perspective of rural development and the individual producer, introducing local food in a tourism context may be especially important in rural districts distant from larger urban centres. In these areas, the local market is small, thus tourism may have an important function to develop viable markets of local food. Research is required in order to gain more knowledge about these different challenges for the development of local food and direct markets in rural and urban areas. The strength of the two concepts of direct markets studied seems to be that they appeal not only to consumers seeking alternatives to conventional food, but also to the ordinary family shopping for quality food products and to a socially motivated family leisure demand for pleasurable and novel experiences. The customer attitudes indicate a continued growth in consumer interest in direct contact with farms and farmers. The economic sustainability and the continued development of these direct food markets and farm tourism will, however, depend on how well initiatives like HANEN and BM are able to meet this demand, the competition from alternative leisure and food purchase alternatives, and on how they manage to adapt to increased demand and continuing changes in consumer behaviour, both in urban and rural settings.

Note

1. The project is titled 'Recreational Consumption as Market for Farm-based Food and Tourism Businesses' and is supported by the Norwegian Research Council.

References

- AMILIEN, V., SCHJØLL A. and VRAMO, L. (2008) *Forbrukernes Forståelse av Lokal Mat*, Scientific Report no. 1-2008. Oslo: National Institute for Consumer Research, SIFO.
- ÅSEBØ, K., JERVELL, A.M., LIEBLEIN, G., SVENNERUD, M. and FRANCIS, C.A. (2007) Farmer and consumer attitudes at farmers markets in Norway, *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, 30(4), pp. 67–93.
- BJØRKUM, E. (1996) *Shopping som Rekreasjon. En Studie av Handlevaner i Kjøpesenteret* (Shopping as Recreation – English Summary), Report no. 4-1996. Lysaker: National Institute for Consumer Research, SIFO.

- BLEKESAUNE, A., BRANDTH, B. and HAUGEN, M.S. (2010). Visitors to farm tourism enterprises in Norway, *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 10(1), pp. 54–73.
- BONDENS MARKED (2006) *Håndbok for Bondens Marked (BM)*. Published online <<http://bondensmarked.no/Default.asp?WCI=DisplayGroup&WCE=32&DGI=32>>, accessed on 20 January 2009.
- BONDENS MARKED (2010) *What is the Farmer's Market?*. Published online <<http://www.bondensmarked.no/Default.asp?WCI=DisplayGroup&WCE=220&DGI=220>>, accessed 30 June 2010.
- BORN, B. and PURCELL, M. (2006) Avoiding the local trap: scale and food systems in planning research, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 26, pp. 195–207.
- BUGGE, A. and DØVING, R. (2000) *Det Norske Måltidsmønsteret. Ideal og Praksis* (The Norwegian Meal Pattern – Ideals and Practices – English Summary), Report no. 2-2000. Lysaker: National Institute for Consumer Research, SIFO.
- EDEN, S., BEAR, C. and WALKER, G. (2008) Mucky carrots and other proxies: problematising the knowledge-fix for sustainable and ethical consumption, *Geoforum*, 39, pp. 1044–1057.
- FEAGAN, R., MORRIS, D. and KRUG, K. (2004) Niagara region farmers' markets: local food systems and sustainability considerations, *Local Environment*, 9, pp. 235–254.
- FINE, B. (2004) Debating production–consumption linkages in food studies, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(3), pp. 332–342.
- FJELLHAMMER, E. (2006) *Medlemsundersøkelse. Tabellrapport. Gjennomført for Norsk Bygdeturisme og Gardsmat*, November 2006. Oslo: Landbrukets Utredningskontor.
- FLATEN, O., VEIDAL, A. and SVENNERUD, M. (2007) *Bondens Marked – en Attraktiv Markedskanal for Nyskapende Nisjeprodusenter? Resultater fra en Spørreundersøkelse* (Farmers Market: a Favourable Marketing Channel for Innovative Niche Producers? Results from a Vendor Survey – English summary). NILF-report 2007-4, Oslo: NILF.
- FORBORD, M. and STRÆTE, E.P. (2008) *Hva Betyr Reiseliv, Kultur og Lokal Mat for Omsetning og Sysselsetting i Distriktene?*, Report 04/08. Trondheim: Norsk Senter for Bygdeforskning.
- GRONOW, J. and WARDE, A. (2001) Epilogue: conventional consumption, in: J. GRONOW and A. WARDE (eds) *Ordinary Consumption*, London: Routledge.
- GUTHMAN, J. (2004) *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- HALKIER, B. (2009) A practice theoretical perspective on everyday dealings with environmental challenges of food consumption, *Anthropology of Food*, S5, published online <<http://aof.revues.org/index6405.html>>.
- HANEN (2009) *Rural Tourism and Traditional Food in Norway*. Published online <http://www.hanen.no/index_en.html>, accessed 16 October 2009.
- HEWER, P. and CAMPBELL, C. (1998) Research on shopping: a brief history and selected literature, in: P. FALK and C. CAMPBELL (eds) *The Shopping Experience*, London: Sage Publications, pp. 186–191.
- HINRICHS, C.C. (2000) Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural markets, *Journal of Rural Sociology*, 16, pp. 296–303.
- HOLLOWAY, L. and KNEAFSEY, M. (2000) Reading the space of farmers' market: a preliminary investigation from the UK, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40, pp. 285–299.
- HOLLOWAY, L., KNEAFSEY, M., VENN, L., COX, R., DOWLER, E. and TUOMAINEN, H. (2007) Possible food economies: a methodological framework for exploring food production and consumption relationships, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 47(1), pp. 1–19.
- JACOBSEN, E. and DULSRUD, A. (2007) Will consumers save the world? The framing of political consumerism, *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics*, 20, pp. 469–482.
- JENSEN, I. (1993) *Friluftsliv: det å kose sæ litt*, in: A. KLEPP and L.E. THORSEN (eds) *Den Mangfoldige Fritiden*, Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, pp. 106–119.
- JERVELL, A.M. and BORGEN, S.O. (2004) New marketing channels for food quality products in Norway, *Food Economics*, 1(2), pp. 110–118.
- JERVELL, A.M. and VRAMO, L. (2007) *Farmers' Market after Four Years in Norway: Interviews with Customers, Organisers of the Market and Other Actors in the Food Market* (English summary), Report no. 10-2007. Oslo: National Institute for Consumer Research, SIFO.
- KALAND, V. (2007) 'Ekte vare?', in: G. RUSTEN, N.M. IVERSEN and L.E. HEM (eds) *Vårann med Nye Muligheter. Ressurs- og Opplevelsesbasert Verdiskaping på Vestlandsbygdene*, Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, pp. 171–202.
- KIRWAN, J. (2006) The interpersonal world of direct marketing: examining conventions of quality at UK farmers' markets, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22(3), pp. 301–312.
- KLEPP, A. (1993) *Den mangetydige fritiden*, in: A. KLEPP and L.E. THORSEN (eds) *Den mangfoldige fritiden*, Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, pp. 7–20.
- KNEAFSEY, M.R., COX, L., HOLLOWAY, E., DOWLER, L., VENN, L. and TUOMAINEN, H. (2008) *Reconnecting Consumers, Producers and Food. Exploring Alternatives*, Oxford: Berg.

- LEHTONEN, T.K. and MÄENPÄÄ, P. (1998) Shopping in the east centre mall, in: P. FALK and C. CAMPBELL (eds) *The Shopping Experience*, London: Sage Publications, pp. 136–165.
- LOTTI, A. (2010) The commoditization of products and taste: slow food and the conservation of agrobiodiversity, *Agriculture and Human Values*, 27, pp. 71–83.
- MILLER, D. (1998) *A Theory of Shopping*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- MILLER, D. (2001) *The Dialectics of Shopping*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- MILLER, D., JACKSON, P., THRIFT, N., HOLBROOK, B. and ROWLANDS, M. (1998) *Shopping, Place and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- MOORE, O. (2006) Understanding postorganic fresh fruit and vegetable consumers at participatory farmers' markets in Ireland: reflexivity, trust and social movements, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30(5), pp.416–426.
- MORGAN, K., MARSDEN, T. and MURDOCH, J. (2006) *Worlds of Food*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MURDOCH, J. and MIELE, M. (1999) Back to nature: changing worlds of production in the food sector, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 39(4), pp. 465–483.
- NBG (RURAL TOURISM AND TRADITIONAL FOOD IN NORWAY) (2006) *Årsmelding Norsk Bygdeturisme og Gardsmat (NBG) 2006*. Oslo: NBG.
- NILF (NORWEGIAN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS RESEARCH INSTITUTE) (2008) *Dagligvarehandel og mat 2008*, NILF-report 2008-1. Oslo: NILF.
- SAGE, C. (2003) Social embeddedness and relations of regard: alternative 'good food' networks in southwest Ireland, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(1), pp. 47–60.
- SONNINO, R. and MARSDEN, T. (2006) Beyond the divide: rethinking relationships between alternative and conventional food networks in Europe, *Journal of Planning Economic Geography*, 6, pp. 181–199.
- SVENNERUD, M., JERVELL, A.M. and ØYEN, B.V. (2004) *Kunder ved Bondens marked 2003*, NILF-Notat 2004-17. Oslo: NILF.
- SVENNERUD, M. and JERVELL, A.M. (2004) *Bondens marked som Salgskanal – Resultater fra en undersøkelse blant deltakere i 2003*, NILF-Notat 2004-18. Oslo: NILF.
- TERRAGNI, L., TORJUSEN, H. and VITERSØ, G. (2009) The dynamics of alternative food consumption: contexts, opportunities and transformations, *Anthropology of Food*, S5, published online <<http://aof.revues.org/index6400.html>>.
- TOVEY, H. (2009) 'Local food' as a contested concept: networks, knowledge and power in food-based strategies for rural development, *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 16(2), pp. 21–35.
- URRY, J. (2002) *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd edn. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- VITERSØ, G. (2007) Norwegian cabin life in transition, *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 7(3), pp. 266–280.
- VITERSØ, G. and AMILIEN, V. (2011) From tourism to local consumption? The role of local and localised food products in the dynamics of cultural identity, *Anthropology of Food*, 8, published online <<http://aof.revues.org/index660.html>>.
- VITERSØ, G. and SCHJØLL, A. (2010) *Gårdshandel som Innkjøpsaktivitet og Fritidsopplevelse* (Farm Shopping as Food Purchase and Recreational Experience - English Summary), Oppdragsrapport nr. 3-2010. Oslo: National institute for consumer research, SIFO.
- VITERSØ, G., RØDBOTTEN, M., VEFLÉN OLSEN, N. and DRAGLAND, S. (2005) *Gulrot og kålrot. Forbrukeres oppfatninger og bruk. Rapport fra fire fokusgrupper* (Carrots and Swedes – Consumers' Conceptions and Use – English Summary), Oppdragsrapport nr. 12-2005. Oslo: National institute for consumer research, SIFO.
- WEATHERELL, C., TREGAR, A. and ALLINSON, J. (2003) In search of the concerned consumer: UK public perception of food, farming and buying local, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp. 233–244.



Rebuilding and Failing Collectivity: Specific Challenges for Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives in Post-Socialist Countries

TALIS TISENKOPFS, IMRE KOVÁCH, MICHAL LOŠŤÁK AND SANDRA ŠŪMANE

[Paper first received, 1 February 2010; in final form, 13 December 2010]

Abstract. This article addresses the re-birth of co-operative and other mutual initiatives in Central and East Europe after the collapse of socialism and its centralized attempts to impose forms of co-operation on the countryside. The central theoretical question is: how is collectivity rebuilt and why does this process face great difficulties in post-communist conditions? The article refers to the social capital framework and explores specificities of rebuilding collective farmers marketing initiatives in post-socialist countries by applying five explanatory factors: the historical context of system transformation and path dependency of farmers' cooperation; the role of social capital and trust; political support frameworks; learning, knowledge processes and the role of advice (extension); and the impact of trade liberalization and globalization. Using case-studies from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Latvia, the article shows how different historical and cultural contexts have played a role in different trajectories of collective farmers marketing initiatives in these countries and how stocks of social capital have been used differently in building farmers initiatives according to specific contexts. The article demonstrates that the success or failure of initiatives is determined by the workings of social capital in interaction with other important dimensions – organizational structures, institutional arrangements, governance of markets, local culture and traditions, access to political power, and farmers' knowledge.

Talis Tisenkopfs is Professor of Sociology at the University of Latvia, Faculty of Social Sciences and Director of the Baltic Studies Centre, Lomonosova str. 1A, Riga LV 1019, Latvia; e-mail: <talisenkopfs@lu.lv>. He is an independent expert on agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS) at DG Research, author of scientific articles and literary sociological essays. His current interests include rural and regional development, agri-food chains, innovation, knowledge brokerage. Imre Kovách is Research Director at the Institute for Political Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Science. He has wide experience of cross-European research on rural sociology, and he is author of numerous publications. He was the president of European Society for Rural Sociology, 2003–2007. Michal Lošťák is Associated Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. He researches and writes on rural development (LEADER approach) and social context of organic farming and organic food. He is a teacher of rural development and economic sociology. Sandra Šūmane is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Latvia, and researcher at the Baltic Studies Centre. Her current research interests include rural innovation, sustainable food chains and organic agriculture.

Introduction: Social Capital Framework in the Analysis of Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives (COFAMIs)

The social capital framework (Granovetter, 1985; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1998) differentiates between two main forms of social capital: bonding social capital or reciprocity within a group (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001) and bridging social capital or solidarity in wider society (Evans, 1996). Some authors (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 2000; Lin, 2001) differentiate also between individual and collective social capital based on the main agency. Social capital contains of a great variety of elements: networks, actors, institutions, values, norms, practices of engagement, trust and others. In brief, it can be defined as the ability of actors to get things done collectively (Tisenkopfs et al., 2008). Social capital, particularly its bonding and bridging dimensions and its individual and collective manifestations, appears as central element of COFAMIs in Central and East Europe (CEE).¹

Social capital is at the base of co-operation. The norms constituting social capital are related to honesty, the keeping of commitments, reliable performance of duties, reciprocity, etc. Furthermore, social capital enhances trust between individuals, groups and institutions that, in turn, enables collective action and the achievement of common goals. Social capital is widely used as one of the basic explanatory factors for economic success. Fidrmuc and Gërxani (2005) summarize that a high stock of social capital increases individuals' ability and willingness to co-operate, improves enforcement of contracts, reduces information asymmetry, lowers transaction costs, fosters innovation and thus leads to better economic outcomes.

Various authors (Paldam and Svendsen, 2000; Fidrmuc and Gërxani, 2005; Murray, 2008) identify the specific context of post-socialist countries as requiring a more nuanced approach when applying the social capital approach and analysing social realities. This derives from the specific transformations and regime shifts that changed the social organization of these societies. The socialist period interrupted collective dynamics based on liberal values and mutuality and narrowed the public sphere for functioning of social capital. The norms constituting social capital, reciprocity, trust between individuals, groups and institutions were blocked through socialist centralization and state control. In socialist times, social capital existed but it existed in family circles, informal support networks (Alapuro and Lonkila, 2000), in blat networks for informal exchange of deficit goods (Ledeneva, 2009), in cultural associations and groups that were made largely as advocates of the official ideology or belonged to counter-culture (Risch, 2005). The socialist system devaluated social capital and created its adverse, corrupted forms. Institutional change during transition even further aggravated the stock of social capital and increased its negative aspects (in the form of underground activities, corruption or organized crime), (Fidrmuc and Gërxani, 2005). In the former communist world, Marxism–Leninism deliberately targeted and sought to undermine civil society and to atomize individuals; hence, it is not surprising that the vacuum of a collapsed state (i.e. the Soviet Union) has been filled with distrust and cynicism (Fukuyama, 2002). This legacy had a long-standing aftermath effect on farmers' current attitudes and their ability to co-operate.

Recent developments in co-operation in CEE countries have borne testimony to the restitution of 'positive social capital', as termed by Sotiropoulos (2005). The increasing accumulation of positive co-operation experience helps to break the path dependency of distrust. Social capital appears as the central element for COFAMIs as it serves also for the mobilization of other resources – economic, political and

knowledge – necessary for successful COFAMI performance. Due to the historical legacy, the level of social capital in CEE countries is quite low and collective farmers marketing initiatives are limited. On the other hand, the rebuilding of trustful links and increased stocks of social capital help to break the path dependency and generate collective economic action, as shown by the cases analysed in this article. Its main hypothesis is that in the CEE context social capital works as the central factor (initiator, driving force and cement) for mobilizing collective marketing, establishing the internal organization of COFAMIs and build external market, knowledge and political networks for successful operation of COFAMIs. As this social capital is originating in deeply embedded cultural traditions that can be shaped only with great difficulty (Fukuyama, 2002), the increase and rebuilding of co-operative behaviour in CEE countries is a long-term process that might both succeed and fail.

Historical Context and Path Dependency of Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives in CEE

The traditional forms of collective farmers marketing initiatives in countries addressed in this article were formed in about the second half of the nineteenth century. In Hungary, the first collective marketing initiatives were established in the 1850–1860s and in Czechia and Latvia in the 1870s. There were three theoretical and political perspectives influencing the origin of co-operation in CEE: economic liberalism, Christian conservatism, and the socialist movement. While the socialist movement considered COFAMIs as a means of transformation of individual farming into collective farming, economic liberalism considered COFAMIs as an element to help economically weak actors to exist as independent farmers. Finally, Christian conservatism understood COFAMIs in moral terms as a way to facilitate social conditions of rural life. Agricultural societies and organized groups of farms served as centres of early modernization and innovation in agriculture and operated as collective providers of supplies. The major forms of farmers' co-operation in this period were collective financial and collective marketing organizations.²

During the first half of the twentieth century, all analysed countries saw a proliferation of COFAMIs.³ In the meantime, an amalgamation and concentration of co-operatives started. In the 1930s, this process was stimulated by the state, which saw centralized co-operatives as institutions to promote national agriculture (especially in Latvia and Czechoslovakia) and to legitimize authoritarian regimes (the case of Latvia). Two of the most common types of farmers' marketing co-operatives were co-operatives of consumers and small farmers, and co-operatives created by socially and economically strong actors (large land owners and producers, traders), which were strongly supported by the state (Galla, 1937).

Together with the establishment of socialist regimes after World War II, the diversified structure of COFAMIs (e.g. marketing, processing, supplying and financing co-operatives) became significantly centralized (Meurs, 1999). The process escalated with collectivization of agriculture, which took different expressions in CEE countries (Swain, 1998). While Latvian collectivization had a strong Stalinist outlook (violence eliminating any initiative of farmers), Hungarian collectivization was a blend of state centralization and private local initiatives (Harcsa et al., 1998; Kovách, 1999). Czech collectivization according to Swain (1998) had a neo-Stalinist character; it was similar to the Latvian case, but with higher level of freedom for farmers under state control.

In Czech collectivization, which started in the late 1940s, the original co-operatives were either transformed into United Agricultural Co-operatives (UAC) or ceased their work. The farmers were forced to join either UACs (in the late 1980s these operated two thirds of land) or state farms (one third of land). The marketing co-operatives that overlapped several municipalities demised activities through nationalization (Helešic, 2002). Collectivization of agriculture in the 1950s resulted in the separate existence of farm production and agricultural marketing both under the supervision of the state. The farm co-operatives that existed at that time were fully engaged in agricultural production. Farmers' processing and marketing co-operatives were totally absent from the Czech scene after 1948 (Stryjan, 1993).

In Hungary, in the post-war land reform the land was confiscated but almost immediately two thirds was reallocated to individual peasants in 1945. The first period of collectivization began in the late 1940s with 20% of agricultural land incorporated in co-operatives. The poor performance and collapse of the majority of producer co-operatives led to a reconsideration of collectivization policy in the mid-1950s. The second wave of collectivization (1959–1963) resulted in the inclusion of 93% of peasants in the co-operatives (Harcza et al., 1998). In the 1960s and 1970s, agricultural co-operatives succeeded in integrating extended small-scale family farming and created commercial and industrial subsidiaries. Purchasing and consuming co-operatives became part of the new system. However, production remained the prevailing form, and diversification of activities of collective farms⁴ did not result in processing and marketing co-operatives.

In Latvia, the co-operative movement was interrupted by the enforcement of Soviet rule and violent collectivization at the end of the 1940s. Land-ownership rights were abolished and 200 000 individual farmers were forced to join kolkhozes (collective farms) and sovkhoses (state farms) where they became wage workers. In the meantime, rural households could retain small land plots for family needs.⁵ The Soviet-type of agricultural modernization in the 1970s led to the amalgamation of collective farms and their incorporation into so called agro-industrial complexes governed according to the rules of planned economy. Although marketing and processing were beyond the mainstream tasks of collective farms, some kolkhozes managed to diversify production, develop sideline branches, processing and sales.

Nowadays, 20 years after the collapse of socialist regimes, Central and Eastern Europe forms a specific social, economic and political environment shaped by a socialist heritage still imprinted in social and market structures and by the rapid changes related to the establishment of liberal market economy, democratization and the rebirth of civil society. During the socialist period, state managed collectivism had been the major organizational form of economic and social life in these countries, although it often found formal and centrally governed expressions only. After soviet collectivism collapsed, de-collectivization was followed by atomization and individualization. Collective action as the free choice of individuals is now being gradually rebuilt.

Forms and Diversities of COFAMIs in Post-socialist Countries

The current forms and diversities of COFAMIs in CEE countries are affected by the post-socialist transition in agriculture and rural areas, primarily the privatization of agriculture, market liberalization and accession to the European Union (EU) (Maurel, 1998; Halamska, 2008). In all three countries a dual structure of farming was

formed consisting of new family farms and former collective farms transformed into co-operatives or privatized large-scale farms (Hudečková and Lošťák, 1992; Kovách, 1994; Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics, 2005). The interface between private farming and the liberal market system determined the post-socialist segmentation of farm structures and led to the development of a minority of technologically up-to-date business farms and a majority of small-scale producers and often subsistence farms (Alanen, 1995; Deiviss et al., 1997; Kovách and Megyesi, 2006; Svatoš, 2008). In Latvia, political change after 1989 was marked by radical liberalism (Nissinen, 1999), which was somewhat different from that in the Czech Republic and Hungary where a mix of 'shock therapy' rhetoric was blended with gradual transformation policies prolonging state paternalism in the 1990s (Mlčoch, 1997). In all three countries farm modernization and the up-scaling of production was adopted as the main strategy for agricultural survival in increasingly competitive economic environments. A lot of private and public investment was channelled into the technological modernization of farms, improving production standards, and enforcing EU sanitary regulations.

A process of concentration has taken place in the whole agricultural production system. It became sectorally divided and vertically integrated into internationalised agri-food chains with limited possibilities for primary producers to generate value added and influence decision-making (Čechura and Šobrová, 2008). Even for countries that are not global agri-food players, such as Latvia, Czechia or Hungary, 'national' food-supply chains are being by-passed by the cross-border sourcing of retail chains and national farmers and food manufacturers can be completely marginalized (Kirwan et al., 2004). For small farmers it became increasingly difficult to retain autonomy and survive in an open market dominated by global food empires (Van der Ploeg, 2008). Even the equipped and professionalized farmers following the modernization path lost room for manoeuvre. In this context, COFAMIs started to develop as farmers' bottom-up initiatives and collective ways to generate resistance, avoid domination of big processors and retailers and to collectively produce viable economic strategies. Recently collective farmers' initiatives also have been stimulated by political support, growing consumers' concerns and the rebirth of food traditions and regional identities.

The research conducted in Latvia, Hungary, and Czechia⁶ for the COFAMI project identified both country-specific as well as common forms of collective farmers marketing initiatives: informal grass-roots co-operation at the local level; agricultural service co-operatives; share-holder companies, the 'residues' of previous collective farms; sectoral producers' associations; co-operatives involved in generic production; COFAMIs of smaller groups of farmers and non-farmers involved in specialized, non-generic production; 'broker' co-operatives for product marketing; big integrator organizations and the farms in their networks;⁷ newly established co-operatives encouraged and supported by the state and the EU;⁸ co-operatives specializing in quality products, rural services and public goods provide by agriculture, and others. This diversity of COFAMIs in CEE countries can be synthesized into three common types in terms of strategic orientation in relation to post-socialist conditions.

1. 'Traditional' COFAMIs oriented towards integrating into global, conventional agri-food chains, aimed at up-scaling of production in mainstream sectors, following the modernization trajectory in agriculture. These COFAMIs often rep-

resent the segment of big, entrepreneurial farms and are similar to traditional co-operatives in Western countries.

2. 'Multifunctional' COFAMIs oriented towards multifunctional agriculture (Van Huylenbroeck and Durand, 2003) and alternative food networks. These COFAMIs try to build new food chains and marketing channels in organic production, environment-friendly farming, and special quality / non-generic products. Usually such COFAMIs are characterized by their multi-actor composition, small scale, scoping of activities and pluriactive orientation (linking production and marketing with rural tourism, health farming, etc.).
3. 'Territorial' COFAMIs oriented towards a 're-localization' of food production (Morgan et al., 2006), trying to rebuild linkages between producers and consumers based on trust and local identity. This kind of COFAMI refers to territorial embeddedness (Hinrichs, 2000; Winter, 2003). In Hungary and Czechia, where geographical origin based food traditions are more recognized than in Latvia, small COFAMIs try to develop markets for local products with a distinctive origin, associated with values of locality and pre-industrial production practices (Fonte, 2008). The growing consumer demand for regional specialty products favours these COFAMIs (Kelemen and Megyesi, 2007). They might be associated with regional branding, community supported agriculture and other territorially grounded activities and are usually small-scale. On the other hand, the short-chain food market is still rather weak in the countries covered by this paper.

These types of COFAMI represent rather dynamic options and potential strategies for farmers' groups to locate themselves in complex agri-food systems.

The Main Types and Trajectories of COFAMIs in Central and Eastern Europe

In the following sections, we examine particular cases of COFAMIs from Czechia, Hungary and Latvia that correspond with the typology above. The chosen concrete cases are not pure ideal types but mixtures of these types. In each of the four cases, there are aspects of other ideal types too. Table 1 represents the main characteristics of each case and its theoretical implications. In the analysis of cases we apply five explanatory factors: the historical context and dynamics of COFAMIs; the role of social capital; economic and market conditions; the policy framework; and the role of learning.

Scaling-up in Conventional Chains: LATRAPs – a Traditional Agricultural Marketing Co-operative

The LATRAPs co-operative represents a COFAMI attempting to by-pass national processors and create direct links to export markets, as well as to diversify agricultural production into energy crops. LATRAPs was established in 2000 as a national farmers' co-operative marketing rapeseed and crops and is considered to be the first 'Western type' agricultural co-operative in Latvia. The co-operative was initiated by 12 big farmers (cultivating 300–800 ha) in the Zemgale region, which is the agriculturally most developed region in the country. Farmers considered co-operation as a solution to the constrained situation in national agricultural markets, which at that time experienced over-production of crops and prices dictated by the largest

Table 1. Typology and characteristics of COFAMI cases in Czechia, Hungary and Latvia.

Case	Main characteristics	Theoretical implications
LATRAPS – a traditional agricultural marketing co-operative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaling-up and vertical integration in global conventional chains • Professional management • Energy production as new function of agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance between bonding and bridging social capital • COFAMI connecting local and global capitals • Creation of new market with effective conversion of social and economic capital • Defining common rules, codes of practice, rights and responsibilities to govern heterogeneity in organisation
Arany Sárfehér Grape and Wine Producers' Co-operative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multifunctionality: economic, social, cultural and identity function • Economic and social cohesion • Networking capital, trust and economic success • Heritage and competitiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernity and traditionalism • Trust as social capital • Role of leading local persons • Pluriactivity and market orientation
Tradice Bílých Karpat – a territorial COFAMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network of farmers and non-farmers (environmentalists) • Supporting the region through co-operation of various actors • International recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesion and conflicts among various actors • Achieving the credibility and recognition of the initiative
Preilji: a failing COFAMI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a new organic regional food chain • Weakness of organization • Cease of operation • Single leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence of individualistic strategies over collective ones • Deficiency of social, economic and human capital hampers COFAMI • Trap of policy support

processing companies. The farmers' intention was to increase their market power by complementing their traditional cereal production with growing rapeseed and penetrating international markets.

Despite the fact that the initiative was considered to be audacious in professional and political milieus (the quality of Latvian grain was considered to be too low to be competitive on international markets), the co-operative turned out to be profitable in its first year of operation. Its success attracted other farmers, and during the next year the membership grew to 80. Since then, the co-operative has experienced continuous growth and up-scaling in many respects: the membership has increased; the farmers' economic situation has improved; the co-operative has developed an efficient collection system; investments have been made in equipping technologicaly up-to-date grain collection points, drying facilities and storing warehouses; new market channels have been created and the co-operative has completed preliminary works to open its own biofuel plant. In 2009, LATRAPS was the biggest agricultural co-operative in Latvia with around 500 members from all over the country and a turnover of 96.4 million Euros.

LATRAPS is quite a rare example of successful farmers' co-operatives in Latvia, demonstrating that farmers can achieve better prices, increase their income and improve their economic situation through the co-ordination of production and co-operation in marketing. It can be considered a great achievement in the Latvian context, where people retain prejudices against economic co-operation because of the negative experience of forced co-operation excluding individual initiative in previous times. The deployment of bonding social capital was a precondition of the initiative.

The co-operative was established by farmers in neighbourhoods who knew each other and there was mutual trust to engage in a common project, thereby overcoming the general mistrust in co-operatives. The common problem of farmers' weak position on national agricultural markets welded them together. The farmers had the shared goal of improving their market position and a vision of how to reach it, e.g. through collective market action in the international market. As the initiators were economically strong farmers, they possessed also the financial resources necessary to invest in the start-up of the co-operative.

The future manager of the co-operative (at that time, an employee of a multinational corporation manufacturing chemicals) was known in the agricultural community as a proponent of co-operation with ideas to produce rapeseed in Latvia and was invited to join the initiators' group. He took up the role of network expander, idea promoter and bridge-builder between the initial group and other social actors, including farmers, knowledge institutes and policy-makers (i.e. deployment of bridging social capital). In the beginning, a lot of effort was spent on establishing a well functioning organization. Both local and foreign expertise were taken into account to build the organizational structure and commercial strategy. In consultation with foreign co-operatives, and on the basis of detailed studies of experiences of existing marketing co-operatives, LATRAPs constructed its own commercial and organizational strategy. This reduced the possibility of internal conflicts and market failures.

During the following years, together with the expansion of the co-operative and loosening links between its members, the need for organizational consolidation came to the fore. The loyalty of new co-operative members was ensured by transparent governance and various benefits: collective organization of input supplies, organized marketing, reduction of transaction costs, higher prices for crops, guaranteed access to the market through the co-operative, time-saving for member farmers, etc. Altogether, LATRAPs provides its members with a quite secure and profitable market position. Besides economic benefits, the co-operative also secures access to information and knowledge. Loyalty towards the co-operative is manifested through the frequent reference by farmers to LATRAPs as 'our enterprise'. There are extremely few cases of free-riders and practically all produce is marketed through the co-operative.

The co-operative fits well into the current Latvian rural policy framework, which involves three main directions: the modernization of agricultural production and processing, diversification of the rural economy, and the development of new forms of social organization. This has been promoted also by the co-operative's active engagement in policy lobbying. Correspondence to policy goals has also ensured broader social legitimation and access to public funding.

A Multifunctional COFAMI: Arany Sárfehér Grape and Wine Producers' Co-operative

The case of the Arany Sárfehér Grape and Wine Producers' Co-operative (ASF), established in 2003 in the traditional viticultural region of Izsák in Hungary, presents the role of social capital in enabling economically and financially weak farmers to develop a fruitful strategy of co-operation (Csurgó et al., 2008). The multifunctionality in the case of ASF means that the COFAMI has not only economic, but also strong cultural, social and identity functions. The name Arany Sárfehér (literally meaning 'gold mud-white') originates from the grape variety that is produced solely in this

micro-region thanks to specific climatic conditions. The area of vineyards and small-scale vine production expanded after specialists vinified the Arany Sárfehér grape in the early twentieth century. In the socialist era, the coexistence of family farms with large-scale collective farms provided technological support and wholesale marketing ensured relative freedom for farmers in making decisions about production and marketing. A champagne factory processed the regional wine and produced 14–15 million bottles per year; it was privatized in the 1990s. In that new market situation, local managers, whose prestige originated from their co-operation with family farmers in the past, initiated the establishment of ASF. ASF is the main member of the local association that bought up the champagne factory from the multinational owner. Since its foundation in 2003, the membership of the co-operative has grown to 546 members. Together they produce 5,600 tons of grapes on 1,250 hectares, of which the co-operative processes 2,000 tons. The co-operative sells wine, champagne and soft drinks both on the national and international markets.

ASF, building on local traditions of viticulture, manages the collective marketing, supports farmers in purchasing input materials and provides professional consulting and administrative assistance. The farmers' economic strategies have been based on multi-sectoral pluriactivity, reflecting the absence of necessary alternative income sources which stimulated households to mainly cultivate small-scale, part-time plots. The co-operative aims to achieve higher prices and thereby reinforce the role of viticulture in maintaining local employment and household incomes. Farming in the Izsák region represents not the main, but an additional source of income for rural households, which derives from the dominance of small farms (on average around one hectare) and contributes to the high density of COFAMI membership. Co-operation is a necessity that mirrors the result of post-socialist land-use management and the need for a common supply of machinery and collective marketing. Their cultural and social heritage permits the wine growers to join the COFAMI as viticulture constitutes a local heritage and a part of their local identity. Grape and wine production gives prestige to COFAMI members and this evidently strengthens social cohesion. Activities of the COFAMI, such as the application for a protected designation of origin status of the Arany Sárfehér grape and wine-tasting and tourism, further contribute to the emergence of a local cultural economy.

Bonding social capital among wine-makers has historical roots; it is the basis of the mutual trust that helped to establish the collective organization, in which trust was also transferred between the members and the leaders of co-operative. The chairperson's individual bonding social capital was significant in the founding of the producers' group and the management of the co-operative's operation. Individual social capital originated from the chairman's personal capacities to take initiative and leadership, however, it converged with collective bonding and bridging social capital. The state and the bank required an increase in the number of co-operative members and co-operation with farmers' associations as preconditions for a loan and a guarantee. The chairman, managers and the mayor of the municipality had the capacity to use bridging social capital and build the necessary linkages that enabled the purchase of the local champagne factory from its foreign multinational owner in 2006. When the multinational company, controlling 90% of the Hungarian champagne market, wanted to withdraw from the market and abandon grape processing, the COFAMI leaders realized that the factory with its tools, machines and storing capacity might provide the basis to secure the livelihoods of local grape and wine producers in the long term and an opportunity for growth.

The ASF is well networked, at local as well as at regional and national levels. ASF managers established the collective enterprise with producers' groups from two neighbouring villages and, after a year of negotiations with the Ministry and the banks, obtained the factory. In fact, the COFAMI itself is a network organization related to many economic and policy institutions as well as individual and civic partners. The network-based COFAMI determines how farmers' collectivity is constructed, how power relations are managed and how relations with external partners are built. The leader of the co-operative and the mayor employed their personal political networks, which were used as linking social capital in the successful lobbying for a protected designation of origin status – granted in 2006. For example, the mayor personally convinced the minister of agriculture about the importance of protected origin certification at a dinner following a local conference. The co-operative's chairman is a leading member of various professional associations and interest groups and his bridging social capital links ASF to wider networks. Capacity building by means of collective action thereby had much more a social than an economical character. The multi-lateral access to various forms of social capital, as well as human capital (knowledge, skills) and cultural capital (traditions), allowed ASF to build a successful co-operative strategy on which financial capital and common profit are able to grow.

A Territorial COFAMI: Building Regionally Based Collective Marketing Initiatives of Farmers and Non-Farmers

Tradice Bílých Karpat (literally meaning 'Tradition of the White Carpathians', from now onwards TBK) is an example of a territorial COFAMI, trying to revive traditional products through the re-localization of production and the building of new trust-based relations between producers and consumers via the preservation of regional identity. TBK is an NGO operating in the Bílé Karpaty (White Carpathians) region of Czechia since the early 1990s when local environmental activists started to co-operate with local fruit growers. In the mid-1990s, some fruit growers converted their farms to organic production. The informal co-operation of environmentalists and organic farmers was formalized by the establishment of TBK in 1998. At that time, a financial grant was provided by a foundation from Luxembourg in order to reconstruct an old barn into an apple cider processing plant, and obtaining the grant required a formalised organizational status of the beneficiary.

The establishment of the processing facility was driven by the idea of producing local products under a local label in order to support the operation of small-scale fruit-tree growers, other farmers and local craftsmen. In 2003, TBK established and incorporated a business firm (TBK Ltd), which is fully owned by TBK. TBK Ltd markets regional food and non-food products and operates the facility producing (mostly) organic apple cider. The profit generated by the processing plant feeds back into TBK, and used to give out small grants to finance other projects in the locality in line with its goals. Through the collective marketing of regional organic apples (even from cross-border Slovakia), the farmers obtained the possibility to own an apple-cider processing plant and create a market for their local products.

TBK currently includes 10 members (three individual member farmers and seven collective members), operating in different domains such as organic farming, fruit farming, nature protection and environmental issues, information services and ex-

tension. These members are the bridges to other actors (e.g. other organic farmers, craftsmen) in the region.

Internal ties within TBK are based on informal relations and commonly shared views about nature. Many internal operations are non-formalized and arranged without written rules and contracts, since the organic farmers consider it (rewording Bourdieu) as 'habitus' – reflecting the social field in which they operate and which differentiates them from other actors. On the other hand, marketing (external ties) is carried out in a formalized way using the established business firm TBK Ltd. While marketing TBK products does not echo social capital, bridging social capital is important in other aspects related to the 'external world'. These include, for example, the social networks of an environmental NGO that is member of TBK, which played a key role in accessing grants for the apple processing plant that farmers otherwise would never have known about. The new and joint network of farmers and environmentalists was constructed to achieve common goals and to foster regional development.

Although TBK in many respects is successful, it also faces a kind of 'erosion' due to the heterogeneity of its actors. Farmers with a more materialist and practical approach, on the one hand, and environmentalists with an idealist vision of living in harmony with nature, on the other, may have different views on specific problems and possible solutions. Their cultural capital is evolving by differentiating the social fields in which they operate. Also farmers themselves at times disagree concerning the amount and type of agricultural products to be marketed, for example some farmers do not want to market the meat they produce jointly but do not mind marketing apples jointly. Potential disagreements among members are mitigated by trust developed through the experience of co-operation and the internal organization of TBK.

It was the establishment of the COFAMI that opened up for farmers the possibility to build an apple-cider processing plant, an option which for farmers individually would not have been possible due to its high costs. The experience of TBK as a bottom-up and grass-roots originated initiative underlines the important role that informal relations, NGOs and civic society in general can play in enabling collective marketing initiatives. This is even more the case, since formalized government structures at regional level do not provide sufficient support to such small-scale initiatives. Although there was a measure in Czech rural development policies to support collective marketing, this has been (as is the case for Latvia) more favourable to larger producers and traditional types of agricultural marketing co-operatives. Moreover, for this measure the collectively traded value had to exceed 3 million Czech Crowns (ca. 100,000 Euro) or the group had to include at least 5 members – conditions that were interpreted in such a way that not both were required at the same time. In 2007, there were therefore 183 'one-member' groups under this measure (out of 330 registered) and, after public criticism, the Ministry of Agriculture had to come up with a different legal interpretation. This experience underlines the need for more appropriate support to small-scale organic and quality food COFAMIs, especially if they are not like TBK backed up by civil society.

Preiļi: the Condensed Anatomy of a Failing COFAMI

Much can be learnt from failing experiences of COFAMIs about the malfunctioning of social capital in the CEE context. We take the Preiļi organic marketing co-opera-

tive from Latvia as an example. The Preiļi organic farmers' network was formed in the mid-1990s as a small-scale farmers' initiative to build a new, organic, regional food supply chain. The network functioned as the driver of organic production and disseminator of knowledge. More than 400 farmers joined the network; however, the establishment of a collective marketing organization was more difficult. In 2004, two organic co-operatives Produkts Veselībai and Latgales Ekoprodukts were created, with only 10 and 15 members. Despite certain economic gains (reduced transportation costs, improved logistics, broadened marketing channels, recognition of the distinctive quality of the organic products), it soon appeared that co-operative members preferred to sustain their individual marketing strategies, which they considered more reliable and easier to manage. The COFAMI was perceived only as a safety net to sell surplus, not as their main marketing strategy. Management problems added to the poor economic performance of the co-operatives and ultimately led to their actual suspension.

The story illuminates specific difficulties for COFAMI development in CEE, such as the lack of commitment to collective action, insufficient leadership and management skills, and the economic difficulties to establish new/alternative food chains. In the early years of Preiļi, the bonding social capital of the COFAMI was decisive for setting up farmers' informal networking and mutual learning. Bridging social capital helped to extend the network and access external knowledge sources and institutional partners (advisory services, other agricultural organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture). However, social capital functioned more saliently in its individual than collective manifestations and the co-operatives were never able to convert different potentialities included in social capital into an efficient marketing strategy and internal organization. Collective marketing requires professional management, contractual relationships, division of roles and responsibilities, and commitment to written and unwritten rules. In the Preiļi case no such common rules were adopted and farmers retreated to individual positions. This suggests that social capital skills (the ability to co-operate, negotiate, self-organize, manage conflicts, etc.) might be often lacking in post-socialist contexts.

The other specific issue for CEE countries is the underdevelopment of the organic food market, which put additional economic constraints on the COFAMIs (lacking processing facilities, low consumer demand, reluctance of retailers, etc.). The Preiļi case demonstrates also the ambivalence of political support for COFAMIs in the new EU member states. Grant schemes for co-operatives have been introduced, albeit aimed mainly at growth of production and targeted at mainstream conventional sectors. Public support has been often inappropriate for small COFAMIs operating in non-intensive sectors, organic production, and territorial and multifunctional initiatives. As the Preiļi co-operatives could not reach the minimum growth rate set in the regulations, they were excluded from receiving further subsidies. This suggests that public support for COFAMIs in the CEE context has to be balanced and oriented not only towards production, but also address marketing, managerial and organisational skills.

Discussion and Conclusion: Rebuilding Collective Marketing through the Integration of Capitals

The market, policy and social contextual factors for COFAMIs in CEE countries differ from those in 'old' EU member states, resulting in specific opportunities and barriers

for different types of (traditional, multifunctional, territorial) COFAMIs. For example, concentration on retail and export markets was less developed in CEE countries for some time, resulting in specific opportunities for certain types of traditional COFAMIs. LATRAPs is an example of this, by successfully articulating networks on export markets. On the other hand, poor sustainability concerns in the agricultural community and low food awareness among consumers have been a disadvantage for the development of 'alternative' COFAMIs, while the reinvention of food traditions and regional identities that persisted 'underground' in the socialist era could offer again specific opportunities for 'multifunctional' (ASF) and 'territorial' COFAMIs (TBK). However, the valorization of these opportunities requires skilful social organization and working of social capital on a territorial basis – the recreation of farmers' collectivities, improved skills of collaboration, partnership building with knowledge providers and market-chain partners, as well as new marketing skills.

The specific historical context and path dependency of CEE produces specific workings of social capital and challenges for learning, policy networks and support. There are different strategies for COFAMIs to respond to new market and social opportunities in CEE. The four cases documented here demonstrate different uses of social capital in combination with other capitals and resources to build farmers' collectivity and develop common marketing. LATRAPs seems to be a good example of a recreated traditional co-operative establishing itself on export markets. It demonstrates the creation of totally new market and knowledge networks with the efficient conversion of social (bonding and bridging) and economic capital. The ASF co-operative follows the line of multifunctional COFAMIs aiming at differentiated food quality, and seems to be successful by creating 'hybrid' networks between old political structures (networks based on personal relations) and new market contexts. The case illuminates the driving role of the chairperson's individual bonding and bridging social capital: his contacts with the mayor and the contacts of both with banks, as well as local and national state representatives. TBK is an example of territorial initiatives developing upon a network of heterogeneous actors and echoing civic society principles. Preiļi is a failing case due to the multiple deficiency of social, economic and human capital, illustrating specific bottlenecks faced by COFAMIs in the CEE context.

Bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001) in terms of networking, solidarity, and trust plays a crucial role at the start up of the initiatives. As COFAMIs grow, bridging or linking social capital (Evans, 1996; Woolcock, 2001) in terms of building links with external partners is brought to the forefront. For the durability of COFAMIs, it has been important also to strengthen their internal organization by defining common rules, codes of practice, rights and responsibilities, as is demonstrated by the ASF and LATRAPs initiatives. If this is done well, problems emerging from the heterogeneity of actors might also be solved, as the TBK case suggests.

Success and failure of collective farmers marketing is strongly related to the way in which stocks of social capital are enriched and put in interaction with other forms of capital – economic, human, cultural, symbolic, territorial (Marsden, 2009). In the CEE context, one of the major problems is the connection between individual and collective social capital based on the main agency. Weak COFAMIs (e.g. Preiļi) fail to integrate individual and collective networks, whereas successful initiatives manage to co-ordinate the diversity of actors: large-scale farmers, small producers, traders, advisors (in the case of LATRAPs case); or farmers, environmentalists, consultants (TBK). In the case of TBK, the social capital of heterogeneous actors was bound to-

gether with cultural capital (values of the locality, tradition). This helped to access economic capital (loans, investment) and consolidated production by means of symbolic capital (the TBK regional label and trademark). Without intangible (invisible) forms of capital, economic capital would not have achieved its most efficient use. In the LATRAPs case, the use of individual and organizational networks allowed the streaming of effective market, organizational and lobbying strategies. The co-operative made use of the situation on the agricultural market, where demand for energy crops had been increasing, as well as the availability of EU and national policy support. By contrast, in the Preiļi case the weak mobilization of social capital led to a gradual decline of collective marketing.

From Social Capital to Governance of Markets

As has been shown by the case-studies, as well as by other research (Kanemasu et al., 2008), social capital works both as the 'trigger' for and 'cement' of economic activity. It helps to create new market niches and supply chains by converting social networks into economic ties. The LATRAPs and ASF initiatives were successful in developing co-operation along the whole food supply chain – including suppliers, wholesalers, retailers, knowledge institutions, banks – as well as policy institutions and national and international partners. In the Preiļi case, where bonding and bridging social capital were not fully mobilized due to farmers' conflicting interests, economic constraints (small-scale farming), the absence of co-operation skills, and the rupture between individual and collective social capital resulted in co-operatives with poor economic performance. That, in turn, was reflected in the erosion of bonding social capital within the co-operatives (loosening of the organization, decrease in membership). On the other hand, some sort of individual social capital (in Bourdieu's understanding) is needed in marketing with the aim to reconvert 'wealth in contacts' into economic benefits for the farmers. The relation between collective and individual social capital is a sensitive issue in the daily operation of COFAMIs; it requires a careful balancing of individual and collective interests, the fulfilment of obligations and a professional management.

Overcoming Distrust and Path Dependency of Farmers' Disorganization

Kabele (2005) outlines the rebuilding of collectivity in countries with an interrupted tradition of co-operation. Also the COFAMI study shows that a socialist legacy of co-operation 'enacted' in a top-down manner still reproduces negative attitudes towards co-operation. As there is still knowledge about pre-collectivization, a historical context of this kind 'locks' farmers into two social constructions of collectivity that are narrated and explained differently: from neglecting and criticizing any form of COFAMI (radical liberal rhetoric) to hagiographic attitudes (extreme communist sentiments). A number of studies conducted in Eastern European countries (Chloupková and Bjørnskov, 2000; Galbreath and Rose, 2008) have dealt with the situation of social capital in post-socialism, drawing conclusions about low levels of trust and the prevalence of individualistic strategies and difficulties in establishing norms of co-operation at the micro level.

At the same time, there is a widespread system of mutual help and informal co-operation inherited from the times of deficit economy. The historical path depend-

ency of COFAMIs is influenced both by the socialist trauma of enforced collectivisation and the post-socialist trauma of privatization, which has been perceived by many farmers as the immoral appropriation of the means of production or 'honest robbery' (Nikula, 2000). After 1989, a manifestation of strong individualistic tendencies in political and economic discourse was obvious in all countries of the former Communist block and farmers were not interested in joining collective marketing. Especially private farmers (Hudečková and Lošťák, 1997) considered this kind of collective action as something opposing their individual freedom. From the new millennium onwards, farmers have begun to consider COFAMIs in more positive ways, referring to the history of pre-collectivization and contemporary Western experiences of COFAMIs. The dynamics of COFAMIs is influenced also by other civil society movements, such as environmental NGOs, as is demonstrated by TBK case.

The Role of Learning

In CEE countries there is possibly a stronger need than elsewhere to rebuild learning and policy networks, which have disappeared or are not suited for the development of new marketing approaches. For example, the lack of sufficiently strong local and regional government structures inhibits the development of territorial approaches and an over-estimation of the productivist role of agriculture inhibits the development of multifunctional COFAMIs. Social capital therefore serves also to mobilize the knowledge necessary for the operation of COFAMIs. This concerns both technical and 'soft' knowledge. Often co-operation implies new experiences for farmers and they have to acquire co-operation skills and principles.

As the cases show, social capital as trustful relations between farmers and other agents provide a good basis for this. Social capital facilitates also the accumulation and transfer of technical knowledge. In the ASF case, the inherited knowledge of grape cultivation and the work ethic transmitted over centuries were significant pre-conditions for its success. In a situation where there is insufficient internal knowledge, social capital as bridging bonds has provided access to external knowledge. LATRAPs and TBK have used the knowledge and experience of similar foreign initiatives. Access to external knowledge sources might be crucial as COFAMIs often operate in innovative fields and existing technical support can be inappropriate.

Advisory services often cannot provide adequate support for innovative, alternative initiatives. For example, in the LATRAPs case there was no remarkable support available from the advisory service. In order to fill the knowledge gap, the co-operative created its own knowledge network consisting of some local, but mainly foreign scientific institutions, which, according to the co-operative, could provide more up-to-date knowledge. Gradually the co-operative itself accumulated a considerable knowledge stock by carrying out field experiments and engaging competent experts. Dissemination of knowledge and popularizing rape production within the farming community is incorporated a part of the co-operative's up-scaling strategy. This shows the reciprocal effect of knowledge processes on social capital building.

Building Policy Networks

The role of bridging and linking social capital has been visible as means of developing the policy networks of COFAMIs – those 'bridges' to institutional and policy

partners that are necessary to mobilize support. The studied successful COFAMIs (ASF and LATRAPs) are rich in such networks. The members and leaders have used both their personal and the co-operatives' organizational contacts to promote the interests of the COFAMI in policy institutions, to gain access to state subsidies, obtain guarantees for bank loans, lobbying decisions regarding distribution of subsidies, etc. Small COFAMIs such as Preilji and TBK have been weaker in transforming their social networks into policy networks – probably with the exception of local level – yet were able to attract scarce financing for developing facilities for collective marketing.

EU and national policies give incentives and support to farmers' collective actions, but it is mainly large-scale farms that are able to establish successful initiatives in order to compete with multinational enterprises. The national policy and legal framework of CEE countries before EU entry was only formally supportive for COFAMIs, and financial support for producers' co-operatives was only introduced after EU accession. On the other hand, the establishment of food hygiene standards and other regulations (by the EU, the national state or by retailers) pose greater difficulties for smaller initiatives to fulfil their requirements.

In order to influence unfavourable policy frameworks, COFAMI's representatives are actively involved in policy and professional networks to lobby for their interests. Correspondence to policy objectives has permitted some COFAMIs to attract certain financial support from national and EU funds, as well as to gain broader social legitimization. COFAMIs in CEE countries have prepared several policy proposals and collaborated with professional organizations to strengthen their negotiating position with policy-makers. Social capital in terms of getting successful political actions and lobbying done needs continuous attention and care from co-operative members in order to consolidate collective economic activity and social cohesion.

The main lesson that can be learnt from COFAMIs in the specific context of CEE countries concerns the relevance of social capital. Bonding and bridging, as well as individual and collective, social capital play a key role in rebuilding farmers' collectivity and in combination with other forms of (economic, human, cultural) capital help farmers to convert social organization into common economic activity. By building new collective organizations farmers can develop new supply chains and marketing channels, adjust to economic difficulties (market squeeze), and overcome the cultural constraints (distrust in co-operation) characteristic of post-socialist countries. The synergy between social capital and collective marketing in successful COFAMIs – such as ASF, LATRAPs and TBK – depends on the continuous self-organization and management of co-operatives regardless of their (traditional, multifunctional or territorial) type. To use the potential of COFAMIs for sustainable agriculture and rural development favourable policies at the EU and national levels are needed. There is a need for institutional willingness to create 'protected spaces' for small, innovative COFAMIs that enter unconventional segments of the agri-food economy, like organic production, agri-tourism, quality products, and locality-based services.

Notes

1. The research for this article was realised as part of the project 'Encouraging Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives' (COFAMI) from 2005 to 2008 and funded by the European Commission under the 6th Research Framework Programme (SSPE-CT-2005-006541). The COFAMI project looked into experi-

- ences and policies related to collective farmers marketing initiatives in 10 countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Latvia and Switzerland) in order to obtain an overview of the development and dynamics of such initiatives across Europe.
2. In Hungary, these were the Credit Union and Consuming and Marketing Co-operative, both working till 1945 under the aegis of the landed aristocracy-led movement, the Hungarian Farmers' Association. In Latvia, the first prototypes of co-operatives were set up by the German nobility (the biggest land owners) and the Latvian farmers in the form of agricultural societies and savings-and-loan societies.
 3. For instance, in 1929 there were 10512 farmers' co-operatives in Czechoslovakia (Boučková, 2001). In Latvia by this year, 592 credit unions and 455 dairy co-operatives were established (Kučinskis 2004). In Hungary by the year 1940, there were 2,000 credit unions with more than 300000 members; 700000 farmers were united in the 'Ant' Consuming and Marketing Co-operative, which operated 30 canneries, 20 industrial factories and 400 shops all over the country (Gunst, 1998).
 4. By the early 1980s, half of Hungarian agricultural co-operatives' income originated from non-agricultural activities (Harcza et al., 1998).
 5. Agricultural production was double-sided with an important segment of individual production on household plots. For instance, household production in the dairy sector in Latvia reached 25%, 15% in the meat sector, and up to 40% of total production in vegetables.
 6. For part of the Czech research, the grant 'Resource Economics of Czech Agriculture and their Efficient Use in the Frame of Multifunctional Agri-food Systems' (No. 6046070906) was received from the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.
 7. In 2002, 35% of total Hungarian food and vegetable production was taking place in such integrated co-operatives (Tátrai, 2003).
 8. There were 93 producer marketing organisations and 252 producer groups in Hungary in 2005 and 662 supplying and marketing co-operatives in 2006 (Dorgai et al., 2006).

References

- ALANEN, I. (1995) The family farm ideology, the Baltic countries, and theories of development, *East European Countryside*, 1, pp. 5–21.
- ALAPURO, R. and LONKILA, M. (2000) Networks, identity, and (in)action, *European Societies*, 2(1), pp. 65–90.
- BOUČKOVÁ, B. (2001) Quo vadis, zemědělská družstva? Perspektivy konkurenceschopnosti, in: *Agrární Sektor Před Vstupem do EU. Sborník Příspěvků z Vědeckého Semináře a Poznatků Ekonomické Sekce AP IX*, Praha: Katedra zemědělské ekonomiky, Provozně ekonomická fakulta, Česká zemědělská univerzita v Praze, pp. 48–52.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1986) The forms of capital, in: J.G. RICHARDSON (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241–258.
- BURT, R. (2000) *Questioning Geopolitics: Political Projects in a Changing World-System*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- CHLOUPKOVÁ, J. and BJØRNSKOV, C. (2000) Could social capital help Czech agriculture?, *Agricultural Economics (Zemědělská ekonomika)*, 48(6), pp. 245–249.
- COLEMAN, J. (1998) Social capital in the creation of human capital, *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, pp. 95–120.
- CSURGÓ, B., KELEMEN, E., KOVÁCH, I. and MEGYESI, B. (2008) *Encouraging Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives (COFAMI)*. Budapest: Institute of Political Sciences, published online <<http://www.mtapti.hu/pdf/mtcofami08.pdf>>, accessed on 13 February 2009.
- ČECHURA, L. and ŠOBROVÁ, L. (2008) Price transmission in pork meat agri-food chain, *Agricultural Economics (Zemědělská ekonomika)*, 54(2), pp. 77–84.
- DEVISS, S., SLI, B. and TISENKOPFS, T. (1997) *Sociālie un Ekonomiskie Apstākļi Latvijas Laukos*. Rīga: Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts.
- DORGAI, L., HAMZA, E., MISTÓ, K., SZÉKELY, E. and TÓTH, E. (2006) *Producer Organisations, Producer Groups in the Agriculture*. Published online <http://www.akii.hu/kiadvany/intezeti_kiadvanyok/magyar/AKII_TANULMANYOSSZEFoglalok/2005-4.htm>, accessed on 13 February 2009.
- EVANS, P. (1996) Government action, social capital and development: reviewing the evidence on synergy, *World Development*, 24(6), pp. 1119–1132.
- FIDRMUC, J. and GERXANI, K. (2005) *Formation of Social Capital in Central and Eastern Europe: Understanding the Gap vis-à-vis Developed Countries*, William Davidson Institute Working Paper 766. Published online <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=729324>>, accessed on 12 July 2008.
- FONTE, M. (2008) Knowledge, food and place: a way of producing, a way of knowing, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 48(3), pp. 200–222.
- FUKUYAMA, F. (2002) Social capital and development: the coming agenda, *SAIS Review*, 22(1), pp. 23–37.

- GALBREATH, D. and ROSE, R. (2008) Fair treatment in a divided society: a bottom-up assessment of bureaucratic encounters in Latvia, *Governance*, 21(1), pp. 53–73.
- GALLA, K. (1937) *Sány – Příspěvek k Sociologii Družstevnictví v Československé Vsi*, Praha: Spolek péče o blaho venkova.
- GRANOVETTER, M. (1985) Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness, *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3), pp. 481–510.
- GUNST, P. (1998) *Hungarian Agrarian Society from the Emancipation of Serfs (1848) to the Emancipation of Re-Privatization of Land*. Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research and Publications.
- HALAMSKA, M. (2008) Changing property structures in Central European agriculture in the process of decollectivization: the social aspects of appropriation, *Eastern European Countryside*, 14, pp. 7–25.
- HARCSA, I., KOVÁCH, I. and SZELÉNYI, I. (1998) The Hungarian agricultural ‘miracle’ and the limits of socialist reforms, in: I. SZELÉNYI (ed.) *Privatizing the Land: Rural Political Economy in Post-Communist Society*, London: Routledge, pp. 21–42.
- HELEŠIC, F. (2002) *První Slovník Českého Družstevního Práva*. Praha: Prospektum.
- HINRICH, C. (2000) Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural market, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16, pp. 295–303.
- HUDEČKOVÁ, H. and LOŠŤÁK, M. (1992) Privatization in Czechoslovak agriculture: results of a 1990 sociological survey, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 32(2–3), pp. 287–304.
- HUDEČKOVÁ, H. and LOŠŤÁK, M. (1997) Reactions to globalization and integration in the Czech agro-food complex, *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, 25(2), pp. 83–99.
- KABELE, J. (2005) *Z Kapitalismu do Socialismu a Zpět*. Praha: Karolinum.
- KANEMASU, Y., SONNINO, R., MARSDEN, T. and SCHNEIDER, S. (2008) Testing the web: a comparative analysis, in: J.D. VAN DER PLOEG and T. MARSDEN (eds) *Unfolding Webs: The Dynamics of Regional Rural Development*, Assen: Van Gorcum, pp. 175–208.
- KELEMEN, E. and MEGYESI, B. (2007) The role of collective marketing initiatives in Hungarian agriculture, *Eastern European Countryside*, 13(1), pp. 83–97.
- KIRWAN, J., SLEE, B., FOSTER, C. and VORLEY, B. (2004) *Macro-Level Overview of Food Supply Chain Dynamics and Diversity in Europe*, SUS-CHAIN WP2 Synthesis report. Published online <[http://www.sus-chain.org/results/WP2/suschain_deliverable_10\(wp2_synthesis_report\).pdf](http://www.sus-chain.org/results/WP2/suschain_deliverable_10(wp2_synthesis_report).pdf)>, accessed on 13 February, 2009.
- KOVÁCH, I. (1994) Privatization and family farms in Central and Eastern Europe, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 34(4), pp. 369–382.
- KOVÁCH, I. (1999) Hungary: cooperative and household plot, in: M. MEURS (ed.) *Many Shades of Red: State Policy and Collective*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 125–151.
- KOVÁCH, I. and MEGYESI, B. (2006) Local food production and knowledge dynamics in rural sustainable development, in: K. GORLACH and I. KOVACH (eds) *Local Food Production, Non-Agricultural Economies and Knowledge Dynamics in Rural Sustainable Development: The Czech, Hungarian and Polish Cases*, E-books Working Papers (7) 2006/5, Budapest: HAS Institute for Political Science, pp. 24–36.
- KUCĪNSKIS, J. (2004) *Kooperācijas Atstība Latvija un Pasaulē*. Rīga: Latvijas Hipotēku un zemes banka.
- LATVIAN STATE INSTITUTE OF AGRARIAN ECONOMICS (2005) *Agricultural Holdings: Results of Economic Analysis 2004*. Rīga: Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics.
- LEDENEVA, A. (2009) From Russia with blat: can informal networks help modernize Russia?, *Social Research*, 76(1), pp. 257–288.
- LIN, N. (2001) Building a network theory of social capital, in: N. LIN, K. COOK and R.S. BURT (eds) *Social Capital: Theory and Research*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, pp. 3–29.
- MARSDEN, T. (2009) Mobilities, vulnerabilities and sustainabilities: exploring pathways from denial to sustainable rural development, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 49(2), pp. 113–131.
- MAUREL, M.C. (1998) Decollectivization paths in Central Europe: towards which new models?, *Eastern European Countryside*, 4, pp. 19–36.
- MEURS, M. (1999) The continuing importance of collectivization, in: M. MEURS (ed.) *Many Shades of Red: State Policy and Collective*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 1–35.
- MLČOCH, L. (1997) *Zastřená Vize Ekonomické Transformace*. Praha: Karolinum.
- MORGAN, K., MARSDEN, T. and MURDOCH, J. (2006) *Worlds of Food: Place, Power and Provenance in the Food Chain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MURRAY, C. (2008) Social capital and cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe: a framework for research on governance, *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, 36(1), pp. 3–20.
- NIKULA, J. (2000) Enterprises and rural community in Estonia: a basis for future development?, in: M. TALJUNAITE (ed.) *Social Studies: Streaming Towards Social Stability*, Vilnius: Lithuanian Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, pp. 109–118.
- NISSINEN, M. (1999) *Latvia's Transition to a Market Economy. Political Determinants of Economic Reform Policy*. London: Macmillan Press.

- PALDAM, M. and SVENDSEN, G.T. (2000) An essay on social capital: looking for the fire behind the smoke, *European Journal of Political Economy*, 16(2), pp. 339–366.
- PLOEG, J.D. VAN DER (2008) *The New Peasantries. Struggles for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalization*. London: Earthscan.
- PUTNAM, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- RISCH, W.J. (2005) Soviet ‘flower children’: hippies and the youth counter-culture in 1970s Lviv, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40(3), pp. 565–584.
- SOTIROPOULOS, D.A. (2005) Positive and negative social capital and the uneven development of civil society in Southeastern Europe, *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 5(2), pp. 243–256.
- STRYJAN, Y. (1993) Czechoslovak agriculture: institutional change and cooperative solutions, *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, 20(2), pp. 139–165.
- SVATOŠ, M. (2008) Selected trends forming European agriculture, *Agricultural Economics (Zemědělská ekonomika)*, 54(3), pp. 93–101.
- SWAIN, N. (1998) A framework for comparing social change in the post-socialist countryside, *Eastern European Countryside*, 4, pp. 5–18.
- TÁTRAI, A. (2003) The implementation of successful industrial SCM methods into food processing and agricultural company’s practice through process (generic) benchmarking, *EU Working Papers*, 1/2003, pp. 30–39.
- TISENKOPFS, T., LÁČE, I. and MIERIŃA, I. (2008) Social capital, in: J.D. VAN DER PLOEG and T. MARSDEN (eds) *Unfolding Webs: The Dynamics of Regional Rural Development*, Assen: Van Gorcum, pp. 87–110.
- VAN HUYLENBROECK, G. and DURAND, G. (2003) *Multifunctional Agriculture: A New Paradigm for European Agriculture*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- WINTER, M. (2003) Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19, pp. 23–32.
- WOOLCOCK, M. (2001) The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes, *Isuma Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, 2(1), pp. 1–17.



Social Capital as a Success Factor for Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives

BOLDIZSÁR MEGYESI, ESZTER KELEMEN AND MARKUS SCHERMER

[Paper first received, 1 February 2010; in final form, 13 December 2010]

Abstract. This study aims at uncovering how social capital at micro and macro levels contributes to the success of farmers' co-operation and how imbalances between the different forms of social capital can hamper collective action among farmers. Using a case-study approach, we analyse two collective farmers marketing initiatives from Austria and Hungary, which have emerged in very diverse political and social environments and followed different development paths. Differences in the performance of these organizations can be partly traced back to variations in the contextual environment. However, the empirical data suggest that social capital plays an important role as well, since it is crucial for mobilizing the initial set of different forms of other capitals like natural, physical, financial and human capitals. The aim of this article is to understand the dynamics and impacts of different configurations of social capital and its contribution to the economic success of collective initiatives. Based on the empirical findings collective farmers marketing initiatives can deduct ways to consciously appraise and invest in social capital.

Introduction

Natural conditions, markets, social structures, institutional and political frameworks, together with the available capital assets to respond to these external framework conditions, constitute limiting and enabling factors for the development of collective farmers marketing initiatives (COFAMIs) and define their choice of strategies. During the process of development, configuration, and reconfiguration in the different lifecycle stages, the availability of the different forms of capital assets determines the ability to deal with changes, to react on trends, and manage processes of adaptation to changing environments. Commonly five different forms of capital assets are

Boldizsár Megyesi is Research Fellow at the Institute for Political Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest Országház utca 30. Hungary; e-mail: <bmegyesi@mtapti.hu>. His main research area is rural sociology. He studies rural development and its effects on local society, local institutions and images of the countryside. Eszter Kelemen is Research Fellow and Lecturer of ecological economics at the Environmental Social Science Research Group, Szent István University, Gödöllő, Hungary. She currently conducts research into ecosystem services, nature–society interactions and environmental conflicts. Markus Schermer is Associate Professor for agricultural and rural sociology at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. He works on rural changes, alternative food systems and changes in cultural landscapes, focusing mainly on developments in mountain areas.

distinguished (Goodwin, 2003) namely financial capital, natural capital, physical (or built) capital, human capital and social capital. The results of the COFAMI project¹ suggest that, within these, social capital has a special role as it enables to mobilize other forms of capital. To shed light on the contribution of social capital to the success of collective farmers marketing initiatives, this article presents a comparison of two case-studies focusing on how different configurations of bridging, bonding and linking social capital affect the success of COFAMIs.

The concept of social capital is widely used and the various definitions have proliferated in scientific literature during recent years. Despite the criticism often posed to social capital research concerning the heterogeneity of the concept and the methodological difficulties to measure it (for instance, see Portes, 2000; Deth, 2003; Schafft and Brown, 2003), Portes emphasizes that, 'as a label of sociability, social capital has... a place in theory and research provided that its different sources and effects are recognised and that their downsides are examined with equal attention' (Portes, 1998, p. 22). Social capital is a widely used concept, also in rural research (for example, see Hofferth and Iceland, 1998; Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000; Castle, 2002), and there are detailed studies on farmers' co-operation and social capital (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2000; Uphoff and Wijayaratra, 2000; Chloupkova et al., 2003). However, most authors relate collective action in agriculture to social capital as a potential investment to develop the social relations within a particular community, and do not aim to examine the role social capital plays in the economic success of collective farmers marketing initiatives. In this study we use the latter approach. We assume that different forms of social capital may contribute greatly to the development of COFAMIs, but that at the same time 'social traps' (Rothstein cited by Svendsen, 2006) might exist in rural communities that hamper co-operation among farmers. Thus, the questions addressed in this article are the following: 1. through which mechanisms do different forms of social capital enhance the performance of COFAMIs; and 2. do any forms of social capital limit collective action among farmers?

This article builds upon the empirical material collected and analysed during the COFAMI project. For the comparison, we chose two cases by using the method of maximum contrast – the Walserstolz case from Austria and the Arany Sárfehér (ASF) case from Hungary – which emerged in very diverse political and social environments and which are in different life-cycle stages. Conscious networking activities, as well as unintended effects of social capital (highly determined by the general socio-political context), had considerable impacts on the present performance of both cases. Thus, the analysis of how these COFAMIs employ social capital helps us to understand better how social capital generally works and how negative effects of social capital can be overcome by balancing between its different forms. The methods used for these case-studies include document analysis, transect walking, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Csurgó et al., 2007; Schermer and Rieder, 2007). For this comparison a secondary analysis of the case-studies was accomplished, although if required the original interviews were reconsidered and analysed to look up important details of the role social capital plays in each initiative.

The article is structured as follows: this introduction is followed by the explanation of the conceptual model we employed in the case-study analysis. The interpretation of social capital as used for the purpose of this article is presented on the basis of a literature review of definitions and typologies. The next section briefly presents the two case-studies, addressing the occurrence and impact of different forms of (bonding, bridging and linking) social capital. In the fourth section, we compare

the two cases and analyse the mechanisms through which social capital impacts, either positively or negatively, on the performance of COFAMIs. The article concludes with some suggestions on how to use social capital to mobilize capital assets (both tangible and intangible) within the frame of collective farmers marketing initiatives.

Social Capital and Farmers' Collective Action: A Conceptual Model

The Definition of Social Capital

One of the first attempts to systemize different definitions of social capital distinguishes three interpretations according to the source of social capital: an external resource view on social capital, an internal view on characteristics of social capital, and a third view which does not emphasize this difference (Adler and Kwon, 2000). Theories adopting the external resource view consider social capital 'a resource located in the external linkages of a focal actor'; accordingly, social capital is defined by networks of linkages among different actors, the focal actor being one of them. The second bunch of interpretations 'focus on social capital as a characteristic of the internal linkages that constitute collective actors and which can give these actors cohesiveness and associated benefits' (Adler and Kwon, 2000, p. 4), emphasizing the role of social capital to enable collective actors to reach common goals. In both of these interpretations, social norms, reciprocity and trust have an eminent role, while the third group of definitions rather focuses on the effects of social capital and does not distinguish between external and internal linkages.

Another categorization differentiates between two types of theories: single actor-oriented and the group-oriented theories, both investigating the positive as well as negative effects of social capital (Lin, 2001). According to Lin (2001) actor-oriented theories of social capital understand the benefits of networks and relations at individual level, while group-oriented theories aim to explain how groups accumulate this resource and how their members can benefit from it. Both of the above described categorizations suggest that social capital can be understood either as a resource developed and owned by individuals or as a common-pool resource that cannot be owned individually but which contributes to the prosperity of the individual. Based on the above presented theories, we use in our analysis a definition that combines the individual and community-based approaches by considering social capital 'the property of individuals, but only by virtue of their membership in a group' (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004, p. 654).

Different Forms of Social Capital

In his early work on social capital, Woolcock (1998) created a theoretically sound framework by integrating the earlier micro- and macro-level approaches of social capital to systematically explore potential policy implications. He traced back the micro level to the studies on ethnic entrepreneurship, which have the individual in their focus, and grounded the macro level in comparative institutionalist studies concentrating on 'the formal business, political and social organisations of society', by which he generally meant the state institutions and governance structures (Woolcock, 1998, p. 198). He divided social capital into two forms: embeddedness (tracing the term back to Polányi (1944) and Granovetter (1985) as the inherent social determinateness of all economic activity) and autonomy (a set of weak social rela-

tions often balancing the negative effects of embeddedness). At the micro level, embeddedness refers to intra-community relationships based on shared identity and solidarity, while autonomy relies on loose networks extending beyond the community. At the macro level, embeddedness means state–society interactions (also called synergy) – that is, weak ties connecting representatives of formal organizations and citizens – and autonomy means institutional capacity and credibility, which refers to the institutionalised rules, norms and conventions originated in the Weberian notion of formal bureaucracy (Woolcock, 1998).

The distinction between embeddedness and autonomy at the micro level became popular later as bonding versus bridging social capital, a terminology that was disseminated by Woolcock and others (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000; Woolcock, 2001) but originates from Gittel and Vidal (1998). Bonding social capital generally refers to horizontal, face-to-face relationships occurring in homogenous groups (like a family or neighbourhood) where members share identities, histories and viewpoints. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, links members of more distant groups (either horizontally or vertically) through which external resources can be mobilized (Woolcock, 2001). The division of inter-community ties according to their horizontal or vertical nature resulted in a third category of social capital, called linking (or sometimes bracing) capital (Woolcock, 2001; Rydin and Holman, 2004; Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). In general, linking social capital refers to linkages ‘between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalised power or authority gradients in society’ (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004, p. 655). Through the cross-level relationships manifested in linking social capital, power holders can be approached and the activities of the poor and powerless can be scaled up.

Concerning the benefits that different forms of social capital provide to individuals and communities, much of the literature accepts that bridging and linking social capital are essential to mobilize external resources and to earn network-mediated gains, while bonding social capital maintains family support and social control (Portes, 1998; Woolcock, 1998). Some authors argue also that bonding capital can serve as a resource when building bridging social capital (Svendsen, 2006). However, the negative effects of strong bonding capital can be overwhelming by restricting individual freedom and access to opportunities, or by creating downward leveling norms and excessive claims on group members (Portes, 1998; Leonard, 2004). Linking social capital can also lead to undesirable outcomes such as corruption or suppression (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). Negative effects of social capital have been described especially in immigrant communities and minorities (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993), or in transition societies (Chloupkova et al., 2003; Kluvankova-Oravska and Chobotova, 2006; Bodorkós and Kelemen, 2007).

Social Capital in Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives

The literature presented above offers two theoretically sound options to apply the social capital literature to COFAMIs. On the one hand, we can limit the analysis solely to the organization, and interpret the micro level as linkages between the members of the COFAMI and the macro level as the relationship between members and the organization itself.² In this way, trust and coherence among members and good links between them resulting in various flexible forms of co-operation would be the micro level. At the macro level, the institutional coherence of a COFAMI, e.g. the formalization of decision-making processes and the stability of structures, would

correspond to the organizational integrity, and synergy is provided by a constant flow of information and consultation between the organization and its members. In our case, we broaden the scope of the analysis and include the relationships of the COFAMI members outside of the organization, both within the local community (as the micro level) and towards the power holders (as the macro level). Based on this interpretation, Table 1 presents a social capital typology.

The case-studies will mainly focus on bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Individual trust and loyalty to the COFAMI and the local identity of members will be used as indicators to explore the role of bonding social capital. The multitude and nature of networks of members within and beyond the community, as well as the reciprocity of relations, will be analysed to discover the importance of bridging and linking social capital. Manifestations of macro-level social capital will not be analysed comprehensively; we rather use the macro-level approach to better understand how the three other forms of social capital work. General trust in the case-studies will be analysed and earlier research results (where available) will be referred to for this aim.

Case-studies

Walserstolz Cheese

The Walserstolz initiative was established in consequence to the changes of the Austrian dairy market with the country's accession to the European Union (EU) in 1995 (Schermer and Rieder, 2007). Today, Walserstolz consists of three co-operative dairies producing cheese (Marul, Sonntag, Thüringerberg) and a large-scale commercial enterprise (EMMI Austria), which is their partner for cheese ripening and marketing. Alpine summer pasturing is of special importance to the agricultural system. On 21 of the total of 48 collective alpine summer farms, milk is processed into cheese, some of them supply also Walserstolz cheese to the initiative.

All farmers belonging to the initiative are inhabitants of one valley, the Großes Walsertal, a tributary of the Rhine valley in the most western province of Austria, Vorarlberg. About 150 farms are members of one of the three dairy co-operatives. This includes almost all dairy producers of the valley. Farms are relatively small with about 15 hectares cultivated agricultural area, an average of 10 cows and 48 000 kilogram yearly average milk quota. About 50% are part-time farmers. Altogether they keep about 2,800 head of cattle. The main objective of the COFAMI is to main-

Table 1. Social capital of COFAMIs at the micro and macro level.

	Embeddedness	Autonomy
Macro	<i>Synergy</i> Weak ties connecting representatives of formal organisations – the ability of the state to ease the operation of COFAMIs through the connectivity of policy makers and policies.	<i>Organisational integrity</i> The credibility and capacity of state institutions – the ability of the state to build general trust in rules, norms and conventions making up the legislative environment of COFAMIs.
	<i>Linking/Bracing social capital</i>	
	The loosely structured vertical relations of members of the COFAMI, which link the COFAMI to government officials, decision makers and external financial sources.	
Micro	<i>Bonding social capital</i> Embeddedness of the COFAMI into the local community through its members.	<i>Bridging social capital</i> The weak ties members of the COFAMI have outside the organisation and the close community.

tain a high milk price for the participating farmers by selling a premium product directly in the valley and on national and international markets. After the accession of Austria to the EU at the beginning of 1995 producer prices had dropped considerably. The forging of a strategic alliance along the supply chain was proposed as a means to maintain an acceptable milk price for dairy producers.

The initiative operates a joint maturing cellar. The three co-operative dairies and (during summer months) some collective alpine summer farms produce mountain cheese, which is brought 'green' (unripe) to the collective maturing facility at the premises of the market partner. Walserstolz cheese is sold in two stages of maturity: eight months old (the traditional one) and 12 months old (the aromatic one). Thus far, the farmers receive a 10% higher price for all the milk processed into mountain cheese, regardless of the marketing possibilities for Walserstolz.

Walserstolz (the name meaning literally 'pride of the Walser people') builds on local traditional skills: the Walser people were originally inhabitants of the Wallis region in Switzerland, and had been called by their rulers in the late Middle Ages to colonize the valley. The Walser people were specialists in dairy farming and cheese-making. This constitutes the historical roots for the human capital of cheese-makers and dairy farmers. In addition, the Große Walsertal is a valley of outstanding natural beauty and for this reason has been declared as a UNESCO biosphere reserve. This designation happened almost in parallel to the Walserstolz initiative and assisted the marketing of cheese by providing a pristine mountain image.

When setting up the initiative, social capital had played a decisive role: the existing bonding capital among the members of the various village dairies and the level of trust in their leaders was a necessary precondition. Village co-operative dairies used to be the focal point for farmers' identification and usually the pride of each co-operative was to pay a higher milk price than the neighbouring one. At the time of EU accession, new and younger functionaries had been elected in some co-operatives. The farmers expected from them to find a solution to their problem with declining product prices. A local farmer, who was at the same time a regional politician holding a multitude of functions, acted as integrating figure for the establishment of the initiative. He brought together the new and energetic functionaries of the then seven local dairies and the owner of a cheese marketing firm. These initial stakeholders worked out the concept together with an administrative official responsible for the financial support. A collective maturing cellar was built, and a dairy union consisting of all dairies of the valley was established to handle the financial support and to arrange the conditions for production and marketing of Walserstolz cheese with the marketing partner.

However, after the initial negotiations this dairy union had no further tasks (besides administering the subsidies for the collective maturing cellar) and could not create a structure for farmers' identification. The functionaries (chairmen and directors) of the different dairies concentrated on their own co-operative and delegated all other responsibilities to the chairperson of the dairy union. This function was filled again by the initiating local farmer politician. He achieved mobilizing sufficient subsidies, so that the farmers did not have to invest their own money into the collective maturing cellar. As no personal commitment of the individual members was required, local farmers retained a strong relationship to the primary dairy co-operative, but they did not develop a sense of membership to the collective marketing by means of the dairy union. Thus, bonding social capital remained on the level of the primary co-operative.

During the last 10 years, the initially seven village dairy co-operatives had declined to three. The co-operative of Marul has remained a small village dairy, producing organic cheese only and acting quite independent. This dairy tries to sell as much of the cheese directly and uses the Walsterstolz initiative only for marketing the remainder. The co-operatives of Thüringerberg and Sonntag followed a growth strategy and took farmers of the dairies that had stopped business as new members on board. This new member structure reduced the bonding social capital of the former closely knit relations within the co-operatives.

When Thüringerberg signed a contract with a milk buyer from outside the region, underlying conflicts of interests within the initiative emerged. The two dairies started to compete for the local milk supply, especially concerning organic milk. The milk buyer, besides processing part of the milk into Walserstolz cheese, transfers organic milk to his second dairy outside of the valley. He pays a higher price for organic milk, while the other dairy is not collecting organic milk separately and thus does not pay a price premium. The decreased bonding social capital within the co-operatives motivated some organic producers to switch membership, which increased the tensions between the two dairies. Another point of dispute became the ownership of the brand, which lies with the marketing partner. Some think this assists to maintain quality discipline, as grading and branding of the cheese is not done by the co-operatives themselves. Others, especially the milk buyer, argue that this increases the dependency of the dairies on the marketing partner.

The initiative has been quite successful in terms of market performance. The market partner was originally a family owned entrepreneur, who merged into the national branch of an international enterprise specialized in dairy products. Walserstolz is the show case of the enterprise with growing sales nationally and internationally. Walserstolz serves also as the flagship project for the biosphere reserve, despite their internal problems. High synergy at the macro level is documented by the fact that again for a new investment currently the maximum possible subsidy is offered. However, this time also a contribution of the farmers will be necessary.

Thus far, the local politician, who had been instrumental in founding the initiative, managed to mediate between the diverging interests of the local dairies. He was not only the central figure in founding the initiative, but also in setting up the biosphere reserve. Until today he acts as the mayor of one of the municipalities of the valley, is the head of the regional planning association, the head of the dairy association as well as a member of the regional parliament and agricultural spokesman for the ruling conservative party. This multitude of functions provided the linking social capital necessary to mobilize high levels of external financial support.

The main problem appears to be that a strong co-ordinating governance structure along the entire supply chain has not been established yet. The dairy union remained a weak structure on paper and the co-operation between the functionaries of the primary dairies remained low. The bridging and linking social capital is still tied to one central person and was not institutionalized. It is doubtful whether this leader will succeed to maintain a balance between the individual interests of the dairy co-operatives and the cheese trader, and the overall goals of the initiative.

Arany Sárfehér Co-operative

The Arany Sárfehér Grape and Wine Producers' Co-operative (ASF) was established in 2003 by 154 farmers in order to join forces and help farmers to produce and mar-

ket their products (Csurgó et al., 2007). In 2007, the co-operative had 546 members with a cultivated area of 1,211 hectares. Members are mainly small-scale farmers but some family enterprises joined as well. The heterogeneity of the membership is well indicated by the farm size, which varies between 0.3 and 130 hectares, with an average of 1 hectare. Members are mostly part-time farmers, who only produce the grape but do not process it, although some bigger farmers have their own cellars to make wine from the produced grape. The membership shows a continuous growth from the establishment of the initiative. Most of the farmers are from Izsák, a small town 150 km from the capital city (more than 50% of the vine-growers in Izsák joined the co-operative), but the COFAMI covers geographically 19 neighbouring settlements of the Hungarian Great Plain, within a radius of 20 km.

Building on the local traditions of viticulture, the overall aim of the initiative was to maintain the role of viticulture in the local employment through enhancing its profitability. Initially, the most important goal was to hold together farmers³ in order to achieve higher prices for the grapes produced in the region – as the chairman said: ‘A thought came then that we should try to unite those people who still have confidence in agriculture and horticulture, which was reinforced by the state’s regulation about subsidizing producers’ groups’. This main goal is accompanied by a number of activities in order to motivate farmers to join the co-operative. Thus, the COFAMI supports farmers in the input markets, provides professional consulting and administrative assistance, and offers farming services such as mechanic harvesting, forecasting systems and collective processing and marketing.

The most important products of the COFAMI are grapes and semi-processed products, as well as end-products such as quality wine, champagne and fruit juices. However, the co-operative itself only sells grapes and semi-processed products, while the end-products are produced by HELIBOR, a champagne factory owned by three producers’ groups (among them the ASF Co-op). In 2006, member farmers produced 5,600 tons of grape, from which 2,000 tons was processed in the own cellars of the co-operative. The net average price of grapes was 50% higher (0.23 €/kg) than in 2004 and 2005.

Bonding social capital is one of the most important forms of social capital employed by ASF as it contributes to the high appreciation of farming and enhances the responsibility and solidarity felt towards the co-operative, thereby lowering transaction costs. The main manifestations of the bonding relationships are intense face-to-face relationships enmeshing the whole local community, local norms on helping each other and accepting the success of others without envy, and personal trust towards the leader and the staff of the COFAMI. At first sight, the roots of these bonds are twofold. On the one hand, group solidarity stems from the socialist times when passive resistance and cheating held together the members of the co-operative. This is a common behaviour of marginalized groups against the dominating forces (Chloupkova et al., 2003; Kluvankova-Oravska and Chobotova, 2006). On the other hand, the role viticulture has played traditionally in local livelihoods is decisive. As viticulture has spread and is now one of the most important income sources for locals, it became part of their identity: a highly esteemed activity and a ground for common activities and interests.

Although locals had both positive and negative experiences with socialist-type co-operatives, members of the COFAMI mainly mentioned their advantages during the interviews. They experienced that the productivity of the plantations cannot be maintained individually, because of the problems of plant protection and harvest-

ing. The negative consequences of independence and the presence of a leading and trustworthy person have encouraged collective action. However, if we analyse the mutual trust between the leader and the membership more deeply, we find it is the result of a complex system of interests. As the leader has worked for three decades to flourish the viticultural sector in the region (which is one of the main goals of the COFAMI), the success of the COFAMI means a personal mission for him. At the same time, the members have interest to authorize the leader because he has the experience and knowledge to manage the COFAMI.

Personal interactions have become less dense by geographical distances, both between ASF members and members of other partner organizations, and between members and non-members. This decline of bridging social capital is also indicated by the fact that members living in more distant villages meet less frequently and rarely help each other in seasonal works on a reciprocal basis compared to those who live in the central settlement. Weak bridging capital of the members is counterbalanced by the dense personal network of the leader, who is chairman or elected member in several regional and national professional associations. During his activity he constantly widened and deepened his personal network and used it to strengthen the initiative. In spite of his strong and dense network, the bridging social capital of ASF is rather low as it has no other sources yet. This strongly focused nature of the external network may partly be traced back to the early life-cycle stage of the initiative. In the long term, however, bridging social capital will probably increase due to the ASF's good reputation in professional and policy circles which contributes to the widening of its horizontal network.

Linking social capital is very high in the analysed case, as is shown by several accomplishments: the initiative successfully mobilized available state subsidies, it managed to register the local grape variety as protected origin product, and the agricultural minister took part at one of the local events. Furthermore, the national government provided a guarantee for the loans covering the costs of acquiring the local champagne factory – without these processing capacities the ASF would not be able to sell its products in the long term. The ASF is strongly supported by the local mayor too, who offered the COFAMI his personal connections to several influential decision-makers and investors. The leader of the initiative is well connected to the mayor and, during the last years' activities, he developed further his political network; these connections create a basis for strengthening linking social capital. The influential relations of these two actors are a major source of the present success of ASF.

Low synergy is manifested by the fact that, although the COFAMI gained subsidy to buy the local processing company, privatization of the sector resulted in the market dominance of one huge multinational company. Also the subsidy system generates confusion: on the one hand, farmers can obtain subsidy for terminating viticulture, but in certain cases also new plantations are subsidised. The government policy on agriculture and food industry is not transparent and local stakeholders do not trust the central governments' institutions. These factors limit the market opportunities of ASF and lower the farmers' motivation to produce grapes.

Although the financial resources and market position obtained so far by the initiative are still quite weak, the human, physical and even the social capital assets of the ASF augmented significantly. This makes it promising to remain successful in the future as well.⁴ The COFAMI gained financial support using its linking social capital, which enabled it to increase its physical capital (processing facilities). The

huge grants and the quick market penetration made the initiative attractive, not only for producers and consumers, but also for professionals, with interest to work for the co-operative. Thus social capital – the strong bridging and linking social capital of the leader and the bonding social capital within the community – resulted in the continuous increase of financial, physical and human capital.

Discussion

In spite of the contrasting socio-economic and political-institutional environment, which to a great extent determines the strategy of the two COFAMIs, we can find interesting similarities between the cases concerning the presence of different forms of social capital and how these are employed. In both cases, the agricultural activity is a constitutive part of local identity; the farming activity is based on ecologically sound production methods, which have a long tradition in the region. Ecological circumstances determine the choice of a certain type of agriculture, which in turn shapes the landscape in both regions. In the case of Walserstolz, dairy farming has almost 500 years of tradition, while in the case of ASF the traditions of viticulture go back to the nineteenth century. Due to the long history of the specific mode of production in each of the two cases, locals have inherited deep ecological and agricultural knowledge from their ancestors contributing to a high level of human capital in both cases. Furthermore, farming has become an important part of the local identity in both case study areas, and serves as a basis for strong bonding relations.

Another similarity is the role of personal trust in both initiatives. In both COFAMIs, the present leader had a crucial role in the establishment of the initiative, and the members demonstrated trust in them not only as the leader of the initiative but also as member of their local community. Both leaders had already proven that they were able to support the goals of their communities at (inter)national level: the leader of ASF had played a key role in acknowledging the local grape variety as protected origin grape, while the Walserstolz leader had a similar role in establishing the UNESCO biosphere reserve. In both cases, the cultural and economic relevance of agricultural activities led to strong local community ties, which is the source of high bonding social capital. The leaders are well-known and respected members of the community; the trust stemming from their local embeddedness also strengthens bonding social capital.

There are, however, also important differences between the two cases concerning bonding social capital. In ASF bonding social capital was pre-existing due to the collective history of passive resistance in socialist times. In the Austrian case, bonding relations were confined to the primary village co-operative and Walserstolz failed to transform it to the level of the initiative. Whilst in the Hungarian case the members themselves had to contribute financially to the investments of the COFAMI, in the Austrian case investments were financed entirely by subsidies. This resulted in a high commitment of the members toward the ASF, while the commitment to the collective initiative remained rather low in the case of Walserstolz. Bonding social capital appears to be one of the preconditions for identification with the initiative and, in the end, also with the product of the COFAMI. This is a crucial prerequisite for long-term economic success.

Bridging social capital is rather low in both cases. In the ASF initiative it is a result of limited personal interactions between non-members and members, as well as between ASF members and members of partner organizations. Within the Wal-

serstolz initiative, the dispute over brand ownership and a rivalry for milk supply encourages each dairy to build its own (sometimes even competing) bridging networks to non-members and partner organizations. In both cases, low bridging social capital of members is counterbalanced by the dense personal network of leaders. In the Hungarian case, the leader has strong personal relationships to professional organisations, while the mayor supports the COFAMI by sharing his dense political network with the leader. This enabled ASF to link the intentions of the Ministry of Agriculture to support farmers in developing their own processing facilities with the strategic decision to buy up the local champagne factory in partnership with similar organisations. Thus ASF – as one of the owners of the first co-operative champagne factory – became a flagship in Hungary. In the Walserstolz case, the leader is head of the regional planning association. Within the valley he coordinates the mayors of the different municipalities and the biosphere reserve as the focal point of reference for regional development. In this context, he places the Walserstolz initiative as a positive example for communicating the entire region to the outside. Thus, he ensures local support as well as regional support for the goals of the initiative, both in material and immaterial terms. The horizontal and especially the vertical networks of the leaders – the bridging and linking social capital bounded to one or a few persons – in both cases were mainly used to mobilize maximum financial support from regional and national institutions.

Concerning the macro level, we can find considerable differences in the impact of social capital. In Austria trust into governmental institutions is generally quite high and uncertainty towards future prospects are to a large extent connected to the EU's decision to abolish milk quota systems in the near future. So far, against this background government institutions on a national and regional scale have supported the emergence and development of innovative COFAMIs.

In Hungary, however, trust in politicians in general is very low as is the case with the appreciation of local authorities or state institutions (the police or the jurisdiction; see Péterfi, 2008). Central decisions on the privatization of Hungarian processing capacities and confusions around the subsidy system increases the uncertainty of farming and makes farmers feel to be exposed to non-professional central decision-makers. In the case-study area, the privatization of the champagne sector as well as previous changes in the ownership of the local champagne factory were not transparent to stakeholders, who had almost no possibilities to influence the process. As a result of these uncertainties, organizational integrity and the trust toward state institutions remains very low. Mainly the good relations of the leader allowed ASF to survive under such adverse macro-level conditions.

Table 2 provides an overview over the configurations of social capital in both initiatives. The two cases show how linking social capital impacts on the economic success of the initiatives. It is decisive for the mobilization of initial financial capital from government sources. In the Hungarian case, a government guarantee for the loans made it possible for ASF to buy the champagne factory, in Austria public money financed the collective maturing cellar. Both cases of financial support would not have been possible without linking social capital, and in both cases this support was necessary to enable the first stages of development of the initiative. Obviously, as is emphasized by stakeholders in both cases, in a mature phase the initiative needs to run without subsidies.

The cases also show the downside of personalized linking social capital. In both initiatives, members trust their leaders to a high extent. They were not only the

Table 2. Comparison of social capital in the ASF and Walserstolz initiatives.

Form of Social Capital	Arany Sárfehér (ASF)		Walserstolz	
	Manifestation	Level	Manifestation	Level
Bonding	Intense face-to-face relationships; local norms on helping each other; tolerating the success of others without envy, personal trust.	High	Intense face-to-face relationships; personal trust on the level of primary dairy co-operatives, but low on the level of the initiative due to conflicts of interests within the initiative (dispute over brand ownership rivalry for organic milk).	High, but decreasing Low
Bridging	Weak personal relations with other initiatives. Other wholesalers also aim to buy up the vine. Relations tied to personal network of the leader.	Low	Every dairy builds up its own network. Relations of the initiative tied to the personal network of the leader.	Low High
Linking	Connected to the leader of the initiative ASF received state subsidies. Ministry for Agriculture took part at one of the local events. It also gave a guarantee for the loans covering the costs of buying up the local champagne factory. ASF is strongly supported by the local mayor.	High High	Multitude of relations to institutional level, but tied to the leader. He is the head of the regional planning association, a member of the regional parliament, agricultural spokesman of the ruling conservative party, and president of the Biosphere Reserve which uses the initiative as the flagship project	High
Synergy	Privatisation of wine-sector resulted in market dominance of one multinational company. Subsidy system results in confusion.	Very low	Subsidies for COFAMIs are provided. Positive climate for COFAMIs in general.	High
Organisational integrity	In general trust in government institutions is rather low. Decision making processes are not transparent for local people, thus they are more likely to think that bribery makes the system function than to trust in institutions.	Very low	In general trust in government institutions is high, especially in the agricultural sector. Relations to regional administrative personnel are good. However, uncertainty over future options when milk quota are abolished by EU legislation.	High

founders, but are still the driving forces for the present development of the initiatives. On the one hand, they manage everyday issues; on the other, they dispose over the necessary linking social capital to represent the COFAMI's interests at the macro level. The leaders have the knowledge to manage the co-operative, which makes it difficult to replace them at the local level. Their personal relationships are able to counterbalance deficiencies of the social capital configuration of the initiative as a whole. For instance, in the Austrian case the leader so far was able to pacify internal rivalries to a considerable extent. In the case of ASF, the leader used his linking ties to counterbalances the low synergy and organizational integrity. This continued dependency on their leaders makes the initiatives rather vulnerable for their future development, and in the long run through the institutionalization of capacities needs to be transformed into a professionalised organizational structure.

In the Austrian case, it is not likely that one person will be able to balance the diverging interests of different dairies in the long run. A new organizational set-up with a governance structure including all relevant actor groups will be needed to transform personal relationships into a collective asset. In the Hungarian case, the intensification of professional relationships helps to make bridging capital more collectively owned. Nevertheless, it still seems unavoidable to increasingly share responsibilities within the management staff.

Similarly, changes on the macro level of social capital are needed to reduce the dependency on personal relations of leaders. Especially the Hungarian case shows that the uncertain policy changes and the lack of general trust towards decision-makers makes linking social capital a crucial success factor. But where macro-level social capital is low, the intensive use of linking social capital reduces transparency within the COFAMI, and reinforces the position of those having valuable links to policy-makers – finally, making the initiative more exposed. The comparison of both cases, however, suggests that with the increase of organizational integrity the relevance of linking social capital diminishes. Similarly, if personal relations between members of the initiative and other actors become denser and bridging capital increases, the linking social capital of leaders will become less important. Both changes stabilize the initiative, as they make it easier to replace the leader, if needed.

Conclusions

The results of the case-study analysis demonstrate two main points. First, social capital has a significant impact on the economic success of collective marketing initiatives by improving the mobilization of financial, physical and human capital assets. Second, different negative aspects of social capital are the result of an unbalanced composition of social capital, which may result in so called ‘social traps’ (Rothstein, cited by Svendsen, 2006). Three possible configurations of unbalanced social capital assets can be distinguished. The first is a lack of balance between the different types of social capital – e.g. between bonding and bridging (as in the case of Walserstolz) or between bridging and linking social capital (as in the case of ASF) – which may lead to internal conflicts and marginalization of certain actor groups. Another set of problems arises if there is no balance between the macro and the micro levels of social capital – as in the Hungarian case – which may result in an excessive role for linking social capital and a reduction of the transparency within the organization. Finally, social capital may be distributed unequally between different actor groups – e.g. between members and their leaders – which makes the initiative highly dependent on the leading person and raises its vulnerability. These examples indicate that, while high levels of one type of social capital may compensate other types in the short run, such imbalances may be detrimental for the long-term development of an initiative.

Special attention has to be given to the concentration of social relations with leading persons. Their power status makes them indispensable for the initiative. This might result in a twofold problem. First, the leaders cannot be replaced easily in case of emergency; all relations are fixed to the person and lost if the leader drops out (e.g. in case of an accident). Second, persons who remain too long in power tend to develop blinders, which reduces their ability to adapt to changing framework conditions fast enough. A conscious formalization of the organizational set-up and a good sharing of responsibilities may avoid such problems.

Notes

1. The research for this article was conducted as part of the project ‘Encouraging Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives’ (COFAMI) from 2005 to 2008 and funded by the European Commission under the 6th Research Framework Programme (SSPE-CT-2005-006541). The COFAMI project looked into experiences and policies related to collective farmers marketing initiatives in 10 countries (Austria, Czech

- Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Latvia and Switzerland) in order to obtain an overview of the development and dynamics of such initiatives across Europe.
2. The interpretation of the macro level by Woolcock (1998) justifies this approach, since he defines the macro level rather as meso, i.e. the formal business, political, and social organizations of society.
 3. Before the COFAMI was established, there used to be five individual contractors in the surrounding villages who bought up and processed the grapes. These contractors acted in the market as an oligopoly, they together decided on the price and the terms of the contracts. Thus farmers did not have any opportunity to sell their products with better conditions, only if they joined forces and tried to influence the price by retaining sales or process and market the products themselves.
 4. Since drafting this paper, the vertical embeddedness of the COFAMI went through considerable changes. As HELIBOR (the champagne factory previously partly owned by the ASF Co-op) went bankrupt due to its loans and the ongoing market concentration, local and locally rooted businessmen bought up the factory from the co-operatives. Although ASF members can still sell the grapes to the champagne factory and the leadership of the organization has not changed, the factory itself has become a business enterprise.

References

- ADLER, P.S. and KWON, S. (2000) Social capital: the good the bad and the ugly, in: E.L. LESSER (ed.) *Knowledge and Social Capital: Foundations and Applications*, Boston, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, pp. 89–115.
- BODORKÓS, B. and KELEMEN, E. (2007) *Re-establishing a Co-operative in a Disadvantaged Region of Hungary: Social Capital, Action Research and the Role of Researchers*. Draft paper for the XXII. ESRS Conference, Wageningen, Netherlands, 20–24 August.
- CASTLE, E.N. (2002) Social capital: an interdisciplinary concept, *Rural Sociology*, 67(3), pp. 331–349.
- CHLOUPKOVA, J., SVENDSEN, G.L.H. and SVENDSEN, G.T. (2003) Building and destroying social capital: the case of cooperative movements in Denmark and Poland, *Agriculture and Human Values*, 20, pp. 241–252.
- CSURGÓ, B., KELEMEN, E., KOVÁCH, I. and MEGYESI, B. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Hungary, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- GITTELL, R.J. and VIDAL, A. (1998) *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- GOODWIN, M. (2003) *Five Kinds of Capital: Useful Concepts for Sustainable Development*, Global Development and Environment Institute Working Paper No. 03-07. Published online <http://ase.tufts.edu/gdae/publications/working_papers/03-07sustainabledevelopment.PDF>, accessed 27 March 2010.
- GRANOVETTER, M. (1985) Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness, *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3), pp. 481–510.
- FALK, I. and KILPATRICK, S. (2000) What is social capital? A study of interaction in a rural community, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(1), pp. 87–109.
- HOFFERTH, S.L. and ICELAND, J. (1998) Social capital in rural and urban communities, *Rural Sociology*, 63, pp. 574–598.
- KLUVÁNKOVÁ-ORÁVSKÁ, T. and CHOBOTOVÁ, V. (2006) *Shifting Governance in Slovensky Raj National Park*, ICAR discussion paper 15/2006. Bratislava: Institute for Forecasting, Slovak Academy of Sciences.
- LEONARD, M. (2004) Bonding and bridging social capital: reflections from Belfast, *Sociology*, 38(5), pp. 927–944.
- LIN, N. (2001) *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- PÉTERFI, F. (2008) *A Közbizalom és a Részvétel Helyzete Magyarországon 2008 Őszén*. Budapest: Közösségfejlesztők Egyesülete, published online <<http://einclusion.hu/ftp/kozbizalom.pdf>>, accessed 27 March 2010.
- POLÁNYI, K. (1944) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- PORTES, A. (1998) Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, pp. 1–24.
- PORTES, A. (2000) The two meanings of social capital, *Sociological Forum*, 15(1), pp. 1–12.
- PORTES, A. and SENSENBRENNER, J. (1993) Embeddedness and immigration: notes on the social determinants of economic action, *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, pp. 1320–1350.
- PUTNAM, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- RYDIN, Y. and HOLMAN, N. (2004) Re-evaluating the contribution of social capital in achieving sustainable development, *Local Environment*, 9(2), pp. 117–133.

- SCHAFFT, K.A. and BROWN, D.L. (2003) Social capital, social networks, and social power, *Social Epistemology*, 17(4), pp. 329–342.
- SCHERMER, M. and RIEDER, E. (2007) *National Synthesis Report on Case Studies in Austria, COFAMI-project*. Published online <<http://www.cofami.org/publications.html>>, accessed 18 May 2010.
- SVENDSEN, G.L.H. (2006) Studying social capital in situ: a qualitative approach, *Theory and Society*, 35, pp. 39–70.
- SVENDSEN, G.L.H. and SVENDSEN, G.T. (2000) Measuring social capital: the danish co-operative dairy movement, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(1), pp. 72–86.
- SZRETER, S. and WOOLCOCK, M. (2004) Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 33, pp. 650–667.
- UPHOFF, N. and WIJAYARATNA, C.M. (2000) Demonstrated benefits from social capital: the productivity of farmer organizations in Gal Oya, Sri Lanka, *World Development*, 28(11), pp. 1875–1890.
- VAN DETH, J.W. (2003) Measuring social capital: orthodoxies and continuing controversies, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(1), pp. 79–92.
- WOOLCOCK, M. (1998) Social capital and economic development: toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework, *Theory and Society*, 27, pp. 151–208.
- WOOLCOCK, M. (2001) The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes, *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, 2(1), pp. 1–17.
- WOOLCOCK, M. and NARAYAN, D. (2000) Social capital: implications for development theory, research, and policy, *World Bank Research Observer*, 15(2), pp. 225–249, published online <<http://www.csae.ox.ac.uk/conferences/2000-OiA/pdfpapers/woolcock.PDF>>, accessed 27 March 2010.