

## Between food ethics, solidarity and the social construction of alternative markets. Exploring the dimensions of grassroots food movements in Spain

Marta Soler Montiel<sup>a</sup>, Angel Calle Collado<sup>b</sup>, Henk Renting<sup>c</sup> and Mamen Cuéllar Padilla<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Applied Economics II, University of Sevilla, Spain, [msoler@us.es](mailto:msoler@us.es)

<sup>b</sup>Institute of Sociology and Peasant Studies, University of Córdoba, Spain, [angel.calle@nodo50.org](mailto:angel.calle@nodo50.org)

<sup>c</sup>Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University, The Netherlands, [henk.renting@wur.nl](mailto:henk.renting@wur.nl)

<sup>d</sup>Institute of Sociology and Peasant Studies, University of Córdoba, Spain, [ma2cupam@uco.es](mailto:ma2cupam@uco.es)

**Abstract:** *In recent years there has been growing attention for the emergence of alternative food networks, first as a possible strategy for farm households to counter deteriorating market conditions and respond to changing societal demands, and more recently as expression of a growing consumer involvement in the shaping of food systems. In debates on AFNs contributions from Spain have been relatively scarce, not because these tendencies do not occur but rather because applied analytical frameworks somehow did not seem to capture the specific nature of experiences in the peninsula. Against this background, this paper aims to analyze emerging grassroots food movements in Spain, explore to what extent different initiatives constitute a coherent alternative paradigm for sustainable local food systems, and identify relevant dimensions that shape their development and potential contribution to the sustainable development of rural areas and society at large. The paper is mainly based on case studies from Andalucía and the Basque country, and stresses that food initiatives have been largely driven by social movements, incl. peasant-based farmers and consumer groups but also agro-ecology movements. As a result, Spanish food movements often have a wider focus and combine ethical values like fairness, solidarity and participative democracy with economic and environmental concerns.*

**Keywords:** *alternative food networks, food disaffection, food ethics, social movements, agro-ecology*

### Food disaffection, agricultural crisis and alternative food networks

In recent years there has been growing attention for the emergence of alternative food networks across Europe and in industrialized 'First World' countries more generally, in response to a double crisis of contemporary mainstream agri-food systems. First, from a consumers' perspective we can witness a process which can be referred to as a growing disaffection from food. The BSE crisis, the occurrence of dioxines in chicken meat, antibiotics and growth hormones in animal fattening, and the use of food additives with carcinogenic risks are just some of the food scandals and controversies that have contributed to a growing distrust amongst citizens about the quality and safety of the food they consume (Calle, Soler & Vara, 2009). Moreover, this process of food disaffection is inserted into a more general process of growing discontent with institutionalized politics (Putnam, 2002; Sousa Santos & Avritzer, 2004; Crouch, 2004; Hermet, 2008).

Food disaffection refers to a process which is protagonized by social actors that do not produce their own food, and depend on a complex, increasingly industrialized and globalized, agri-food system that provides them with anonymous and standardized food stuffs through distant market relations. The material threats that are represented by potentially unsafe and harmful food products as an expression of contemporary risk society (Beck, 1992; Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993) are united to the social and cultural insecurity arising from a loss of heritage, knowledge and identity. Conversely, the increased socio-cultural uprooting in a *liquid* modern world marked by fragile human bonds (Bauman, 2003) induces the search for new mechanisms of belonging and rootedness, for which food is one of the most fundamental and existential. Therefore, around food new social relations emerge which centre on meeting (material and psycho-social) basic needs and which at the same time express other ways to interact with nature (Harris, 1989).

The social responses to this process of food disaffection are both individual and collective. Individual reactions are reflected in changes in consumption and buying habits that favour specific quality attributes of food products associated with naturalness, localness, environment friendliness, artisanality or authenticity. To a certain degree these values are reified and transformed into market niche commodities that are captured and controlled by main players in the globalized food system, e.g. by introducing functional food products or *nutraceuticals* with specific health claims or the supply of environmental-friendly and organic foods by large, transnational retail chains. However, at the same time food disaffection also promotes new forms of collective action, amongst which networks that aim to reconnect food production and consumption by more direct mechanisms to build trust and following new quality criteria stand out. (Pérez Neira & Vazquez Merens, 2008; Calle, Soler & Vara, 2009). In these networks persons seeking to access food by alternative ways from conventional food channels and producers trying to escape the pressures of food globalization converge.

The crisis of contemporary food systems that from a consumer perspective is expressed by food disaffection, on the producers' side has its counterpart in the 'double price-cost squeeze' that the industrialized and globalized food production model imposes on farmers and artisanal producers. The industrial food production model depends on a technological package of external inputs with increasing costs and at the same time has a strong productivist orientation, i.e. it primarily seeks the production of large quantities of standardized products as raw material for mass processing industries or large scale retailers with a strong degree of concentration. By controlling access to the market, both food industries and retailers have the power to impose declining prices. Farmers are thus trapped and subordinated within the socio-institutional and economic fabric of the global food system that promotes the destruction of cultural and biological diversity associated with traditional agro-ecosystems and local management practices.

In response to this agricultural crisis different strategies have been developed by farmers. Some continue within the treadmill of productivism and intend to make a 'flight forward' by increasing the scale and volume of production in the hope to increase economic margins by economics of scale. However, this strategy is only possible for a limited category of (large) farmers, goes at the cost of other producers, and in the medium term also undermines the social and environmental sustainability of agricultural and rural development (e.g. by the expulsion and overexploitation of hired labourers or increases of environmental pressure in search of cost reduction). Apart from this conventional response, farmers have developed various forms of (silent) resistance and (individual) survival strategies to defend a way of living linked to the countryside that have become denominated as 'multifunctional agriculture' (Ploeg, 2008; Renting et al., 2009). This covers a wide variety of strategies of farmers to 'make a living' and reinforce livelihoods linked to the countryside: family strategies to diversify income sources through pluriactivity and part-time farming; peasant-like management strategies for low-external input farming; differentiation of product quality as artisanal, natural or ecological; direct selling and short supply chains, etc.

Beyond the individual strategies of silent resistance (Scott, 1985, 1990; Foucault, 1992) in recent years also new strategies of collective resistance of farmers to the agricultural crisis appear, often in coalition with consumers' groups and/or other categories of rural actors. As a result new networks of food provisioning are being created that, apart from their collective and cooperative nature, are characterized by a redefinition and remodelling of exchange mechanisms and thereby (implicitly or explicitly) a questioning of competitive markets (Renting, 2008; Knickel et al., 2008; Renting & Oostindie, forthcoming).

### **Alternative food networks and short supply chains as mechanisms for constructing a sustainable society**

Currently there is an extensive academic debate in Europe, especially in the fields of rural sociology and geography, about the emergence of alternative food networks, short supply chains and

sustainable food systems. These debates are joined by reflections from the field of sociology of consumption, on the one hand, and the sociology of collective action, on the other.

European studies in the field of rural sociology and geography have pointed at new practices of farmers in response to the double 'squeeze' of rising costs and decreasing product prices, which together form the basis for a new 'rural development paradigm' (Ploeg et al., 2000). This new agricultural development paradigm, as opposed to the model of industrial food production, continues to base itself on 'farming styles' linked to family farming and peasant agriculture (Ploeg, 2008) which are reinforced by multifunctional strategies of product diversification (Renting et al., 2009), new processes of ecological modernization (Marsden, 2004) and the development of post-productivist societal demands to agriculture (Ilbery & Bowler, 1998, Shuckmith, 1993). The main criticisms of this approach question the scale of development and degree of generalization of these practices (Goodman, 2004) in a context of continued food globalization (McMichael, 2009; Friedman, 2009). However, at the same time they recognize the emergence of new food networks as an empirical reality and as a necessity in view of to socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts of food globalization (Hendrickson & Hefferman, 2002; Venn et al., 2006; Chiffolleau, 2009).

Short food supply chains are generally defined by Renting et al. (2003) as "*the interrelations between actors that are directly involved in the production, processing, distribution and consumption of new foods*" and that at the same time "*hold the potential for shifting food production out of its 'industrial mode' and to break out of the long, complex, and rationally organised industrial chains within which a decreasing proportion of total added value is captured by primary producers.*" (ibid, 394, 398). Another key characteristic of short food supply chains that is mentioned is "*their capacity to resocialise or respatialise food, thereby allowing the consumer to make new value judgments about the relative desirability of foods on the basis of their own knowledge, experience, or perceived imagery.*" (ibid, 394 and 398). Marsden et al. (2000) and Renting et al. (2003) classify short supply chains into three main categories: face-to-face, spatially proximate and spatially extended, noting that the 'shortening' of the marketing channel does not only concern the physical distance but also the organizational and cultural distance by means of information, trust, and shared values with respect to regional, ecological or natural quality attributes of the product.

The re-articulation of production and consumption by the application of criteria of proximity, trust and sustainability within short marketing channels has been identified as a key strategy for family farmers and therefore indirectly for rural development (Ploeg et al., 2000; Marsden et al., 2000, Renting et al., 2003). The study of this type of food networks therefore has mostly taken place as part of the search for alternative strategies or farming systems that are most vulnerable for agricultural globalisation processes. For this reason, studies of short food supply chains have to a considerable degree overlapped with debates on organic agriculture as an alternative mode of production and a possible strategy for rural development.

While initially presented as an alternative mode of production for the agricultural crisis, organic farming has progressively consolidated its market orientation and increasingly become integrated into conventional marketing channels – thereby reproducing the dominant organizational patterns of the global agri-food system. The case of California has been particularly emblematic (Guthman, 2004) as example of a flourishing business of organic food offered in supermarkets with home brands, in specialty shops aimed at high-income population segments or elite restaurants. Organic production as a market niche that serves the needs for social differentiation, health and the 'cult of the body' within globalization appears side-by-side with an agriculture based on input substitution (Rosset, 1997) in which large monoculture farms and contract farming dominate and that remain subordinated to and dependent on other segments of the food supply chain. This replicates within organic production the international division of labour which keeps producers and peripheral regions in a subordinate position (Raynolds, 2004) and limits the potential initially granted to organic production as an engine for a new ways of rural development. The limits of organic production as an alternative for rural areas are in direct connection with the marketing channels dominated by large corporations in which economic profitability criteria dominate and the attention for basic needs is overshadowed by price mechanisms.

Goodman and DuPuis (2002) have pointed to the materialistic bias of many existing studies of AFNs which almost exclusively on the production side of such networks. While this bias might be explained by the aim of many studies to assess the contribution of AFNs to rural development goals, a consequence is that the consumption side of networks remains largely a blind spot and is implicitly reduced to the commodity fetishism of Marx or to the totem of Durkheim. This materialistic bias is reinforced by the uncritical view of many studies on the nature of market exchange mechanisms. Food networks and especially short supply chains are principally understood as strategies to retain more value added by farmers thereby implicitly assuming as unquestionable the individual and competitive market allocation mechanism by prices. The market appears as an unquestioned institution in which at the best public policy can mediate. The consumer, at least implicitly, is principally regarded as individual actor operating in market contexts and primarily driven by complex individual motivations (quality, trust, taste, environmental concerns, etc.). With respect to market relations trust constructed by means of information transfer, transparency and proximity to the producer is considered to play a central role, thereby leaving intact a purely economic conception of the 'sovereign consumer'. In order to overcome the one-sided production bias in studies of alternative food networks, Goodman & DuPuis (2002) propose a more symmetric analytical approach that take both the production and consumption side of alternative food networks into account and that also critically addresses processes of agency and collective action in the sphere of consumption.

When attention is also directed to the sphere of consumption, new food networks appear as not only directed at the needs of producers but also at meeting new social demands of consumers and citizens in relation to food. From this perspective e.g. new satisfiers of (material, expressive, emotional, environmental) basic needs (Max-Neef, 1991; Jackson et al., 2004) come to the fore as important dimension of citizen's responses to discontents around food, which result in the creation of social innovations (Rodriguez & Alvarado, 2008) often strongly associated with new social movements (Calle, 2005; Calle, Soler & Vara, 2009). Individual and collective food consumption strategies are undoubtedly complex. Although there are institutional and symbolic structures that condition food consumption practices, also a contextualized and individual appropriation of these occurs from which people derive their capacity for agency. In this respect one could say that as individuals we are neither slaves nor sovereign (Cortina, 2002), and neither absolutely free nor made into robots (Alonso, 2005).

In relation to food, consumers manoeuvre between *integration* along the lines dictated by the global food market, *adaptation* because they lack other references, and *resistance* by means of alternative expressions of consumption practices. As a result, various strategies are applied by consumers, expressing different new food consumption habits ranging from fashionable consumption, defensive consumption, 'alternative' consumption of the bourgeois bohemians (*bobo's*), reflexive consumption and constructive consumption (Calle, Soler & Vara, 2009). It is these last two strategies that make a difference in the alternative food networks that drive short marketing channels. Reflexive consumption, on the basis of integral social, environmental and health criteria, has the capacity to activate ethical dimensions of consumption e.g. in the form of fair trade, ecological products or buying on local markets. Constructive consumption refers to consumption practices which, by conscious collective action, generate *food innovations* like the ones analyzed in this paper. From this perspective consumption emerges as a political process, while consumption itself is politicized by the actions of critical consumers (Weatherell et al., 2003; Clarke et al., 2006, 2008).

### **The specific nature of alternative food networks in Spain**

In the first section of this paper the main lines of international debates on alternative food networks and short food supply chains have been outlined, as well as a number of main positions in these. In debates on AFNs contributions from Spain have been surprisingly scarce, with a small number of important exceptions (Alonso Mielgo & Guzman Casado, 2001, 2002; Mauleon, 2001, 2003, 2005; Hoekstra, 2006). This limited number of contributions is not because similar tendencies did not occur

throughout Spain, but rather result from the fact that applied analytical frameworks somehow did not seem to capture the specific nature of experiences in the peninsula.

Against this background, this paper aims to present an alternative conceptual framework for the analysis of grassroots food movements in Spain, which is more suitable to address and explore the relevant dimensions shaping their emergence, dynamics and potential contribution to the sustainable development of rural areas and society at large. The conceptual framework will afterwards be tested and illustrated by its application to a number of case studies of alternative food networks, principally based in Andalucía. This paper is the first result of a cooperation of research groups in different parts of the peninsula (Andalucía, Basque country, Catalunya, Galicia), which all in their own specific geographical context have investigated and worked together with grassroots food movements, but until now have lacked the opportunity to exchange experiences and make a more thorough theoretical analysis of alternative food networks throughout Spain. In the nearby future, the idea is to further elaborate the proposed approach and apply it in-depth field research in different regions, with the aim to analyze to what extent different grassroots food initiatives constitute a coherent alternative 'paradigm' for sustainable local food systems and explore what are possible viable strategies for strengthening these.

While the research that lies at the basis of this paper is therefore still in progress, at the outset a number of remarks can be made about the specific nature of alternative food networks in Spain. A number of elements can be identified that characterize the particular context in which food movements in Spain have emerged and developed, that to a considerable degree condition their specific nature, potentials and possible future contradictions. They also to a considerable degree explain why conceptual frameworks from international debates on AFNs are not very well suited to this specific context. Five characteristics can be identified that differentiate initiatives in the Spanish peninsula from initiatives in the north of Europe.

A first characteristic is that ecological agriculture in Spain, and the development of differentiated quality food production systems (e.g. origin-labelled food products), traditionally have been strongly oriented to export and conventional marketing channels. Actually, even nowadays the organic sector in Spain continues to have a strong export orientation, especially for products such as wine and olive oil, and the domestic market is only slowly and gradually developing (include recent figures). As a result of this, the embeddedness of organic agricultural practices and their impact on sustainable rural development have been limited and changes in production systems were generally not encouraged by local consumption. Also the involvement of conventional marketing channels and supermarket chains with organic food has been limited, especially in comparison with some north-European countries such as the UK and Scandinavian countries, and if so organic products are generally provided against high, inaccessible prices and with poor product offers. As a consequence of this, new marketing channels for organic food have largely outside and without the involvement of mainstream market actors.

A second important feature is that the vast majority of alternative food networks in Spain identify and denominate themselves as *agroecological* social movements. They thereby recognize and express the ideological inspiration that the approach of agro-ecology has had in Spain in framing the environmental crisis of industrial and commercial agriculture, and in proposing alternative forms of agricultural development based on a reevaluation of peasant knowledge and management practices and emphasizing the social and political dimensions of this change (Altieri, 1991; Guzmán Casado et al., 2000; Sevilla Guzmán, 2006).

A third common characteristic is that the majority of alternative food networks have also emerged outside, or sometimes even in opposition to, public and institutional support. For initiatives in which public support plays a role, this has always come up when initiatives were already put in movement and in response to demands by social initiatives – often resulting complex and sometimes even conflictuous forms of institutional cooperation. In some cases there is an implicit refusal and rejection of the option of institutional support. The studied food networks and marketing initiatives therefore concern, and this is a fourth common characteristic, cooperative civic initiatives and forms

of collective action that are often linked to social and political movements and express a desire to exercise more radical forms of democracy (Calle, 2008).

Finally, the studied food networks in Spain are characterized by the fact that they challenge and redefine, in different ways and to different degrees, the predominance of competitive markets that are guided and structured by price mechanisms. With a small number of exceptions (e.g. specialized organic food/nature food shops) the studied marketing channels of ecological food products aim to generate alternative agreements, criteria and practices of exchange, take distance from price pressures and competitive mechanisms in mainstream markets, and intend to subject market exchanges to the control of other (social, political, etc.) institutions and forms of decision-making.

In response to the failure of market parties and a lack of involvement of public institutions to provide sustainable and organic food on domestic markets, food initiatives in Spain therefore have been largely driven by social movements - incl. more radical, peasant-based farmers unions and consumer groups but also agro-ecology movements and in some cases Slow Food movements. As a result, food movements often have a wider focus and combine ethical values such as fairness, solidarity and participative democracy with economic and environmental motivations and the need to create viable livelihoods.

### **Case studies of short marketing channels of ecological food**

In the last decade a wide diversity of initiatives that seek to create ecological short marketing channels based on direct selling and proximity have emerged, especially in Andalucía (Pérez Neira & Vazquez Merens, 2008) which is the leading region and most developed domestic market for organic food in Spain but also increasingly in other regions. In the following we will describe the main lines of a proposed conceptual framework for analyzing such initiatives, and illustrate this with a number of case study examples.

#### **Short marketing channels: between the market and collective action**

As indicated above, many anglo-saxon contributions have looked at the production side of short supply chains with an economic bias, while for the consumption side there is a strong emphasis on individualistic values. These analytical biases are shared by both neoclassical and liberal approaches and approaches departing from a Marxist view on economy and society. From the first point of view, producer strategies within AFNs are reduced to the capturing of value added, while consumer strategies are mainly interpreted as utility generation through the market. Alternatively, within approaches inspired by Marxist points of view the analysis in the sphere of production focuses on value creation based on labour processes, while consumers are reduced to a subordinate role by commodity fetishism (Goodman & Dupuis, 2002). Also the role of the state and of public policy is understood in these terms and mainly considered as an intermediary for market creation. Although a sociological concept of agency is applied, actor strategies are predominantly understood in terms of their operation within competitive markets and (certainly as far as consumers are concerned) in an individualistic manner.

These implicit analytical biases for a number of reasons are insufficient to understand the situation and dynamics of AFNs in Spain that has occurred in the last decades. Relate in a few points to characteristics in section 2 above. For this reason an alternative analytical framework is proposed that is better suited to the Spanish empirical reality.

The proposed alternative view takes as point of departure that persons have as priority objective to meet their basic needs – in this case in the area of food – and look for alternative satisfiers (in the terms defined by Max-Neef (1991)) to do so. Within alternative food networks consumers attempt to meet their basic food needs in ways that will free themselves from conventional channels, which respond to food quality and safety criteria different from those generated by the market, and in the definition of which they can more directly and actively participate. In the analysis of the attempts the

perspective of cooperation and collective organization as a strategy to secure food access and/or livelihoods is to be explicitly taken into account. This is not to say that these objectives are met perfectly and without contradiction in alternative ecological food channels. The main starting point of the analysis is that it goes beyond an individualistic and market-based approach of actors, and that it addresses acts of consumption just as those in the sphere of production, even when they clearly interact with the market, as the result of intentional consumer strategies and thereby as political processes (Goodman & Dupuis, 2002).

From this perspective an analytical framework of two main dimensions is proposed. On the one hand, the nature of exchange relations that are constructed is considered, and therefore the type of 'market' that is constructed. On the other hand, it considers the type and intensity of cooperation and collective interaction implied by participating in the food network or marketing channel under study, and thereby the type and intensity of human ties and interpersonal relations that are generated by these networks in the form of alternative social learning processes and codes and practices of cooperation and interaction.

Economic relations and the degree in which these meet basic needs from a critical perspective are often analyzed in a dichotomous way, opposing those that are integrated and form part of 'the market' with those that remain in the private or reproductive domain. This implicitly assumes the existence of one single type of 'market', i.e. the contemporary one, which Polanyi (1957) described as "*price-making markets*". The historical analysis of economic forms by this author shows how throughout history there have been various types of markets, and that the exchange and use of money as payment does not necessarily imply the supremacy of the competitive price mechanism characteristic for today's economy as only mechanism for allocating resources and satisfying needs. Actually, in various stages of history the market appears as subordinated to other social and political institutions which at that time had greater power to legitimize the access and distribution of resources, and which were often based on reciprocity, redistribution and exchange in stead of on competition.

Polanyi proposes a broader perspective that focuses the analysis on the *real economy*, understood as institutionalized activity, in order to overcome the liberal approach (called *formal economy* by Polanyi) which limits itself to logical decisions in markets assuming a situation of scarcity and allocative decisions through the price mechanism. "*Without the social conditions that determine individual's motivations there would be practically nothing that would sustain (...) the unity and stability of economic activity*" (ibid., 294-295). Similarly, alternative food networks may be regarded as institutionalized activities that seek to meet material needs through various types of agreements and allocation mechanisms that are subjected to particular values and goals, with price mechanisms playing a different role and having a different degree of importance in each of the networks.

In line with this approach two analytical dimensions appear to be relevant to guide the study of specific alternative food networks and short marketing channels. On the one hand, the degree in which "*price-making markets*" are dominant within a particular network/channel as a means to structure prices and quantities of exchange of products. On the other hand, the type and degree of collective action that is implied by the participation in each of the particular food networks, and therefore the degree of development of alternative market institutions. Combining both analytical dimensions allows to construct a graphic visualization in which different marketing channels of ecological produce in Spain/Andalucia can be positioned.

In the resulting figure 1 (above), different marketing channels and types of food networks appear as independent realities that each takes a specific position on the distinguished dimensions. However, in reality some of the actors will be involved in more than one of the channels and networks, and depending on the case cooperative or conflictuous interrelations exist. Thus, some producers will sell both in specialized shops and cooperative shops, participate in programs for social consumption and distribute ecological vegetable boxes (*Ecocajas*). Gardeners and technicians involved in vegetable gardens for home consumption will attend to cooperative and specialized shops. Moreover, there are shared spaces for debate, cooperation and political action in which actors involved in different

channels come together. It therefore concerns overlapping networks that are interconnected through some actors and interconnected activities.

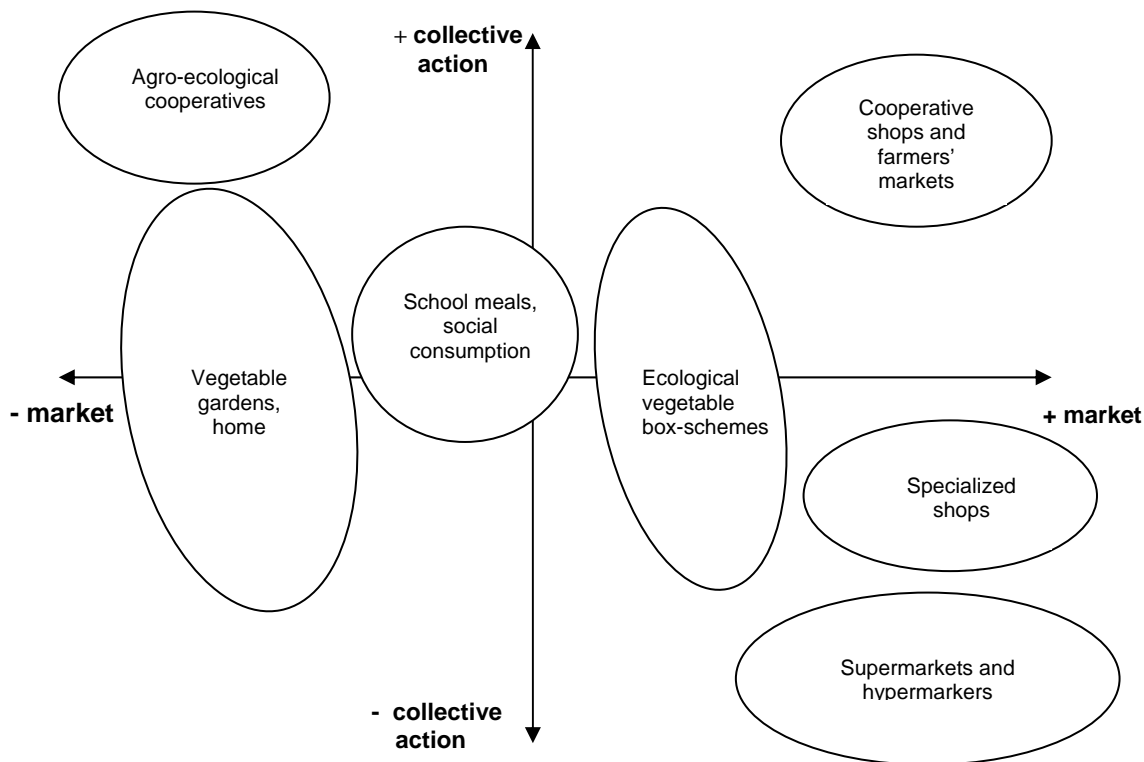


Figure 1. Typology of ecological marketing channels.

### Illustrative case-studies

The map of alternative food networks and short marketing channels in Spain is complex and its analysis, which is still under construction, goes beyond the limits of this paper. By means of illustration and to further ground our argumentation we present three cases: 1) the network of associative and cooperative shops *Federación Andaluza de Consumidores y Productores Ecológicos* (FACPE, Andalusian Federation of Ecological Consumers and Producers); 2) consumer groups linked to ecological vegetable box-schemes (*Ecocajas*) and the Community supported agriculture initiative *Agricultura de Responsabilidad Compartida* (ARCO, Agriculture with Shared Responsibility); and 3) agro-ecological cooperatives of production, distribution and consumption.

#### *The FACPE network of cooperative shops*

The FACPE is currently the main local marketing channel of fresh ecological foods in Andalucía. Its origins lie in the early 1990s as a confluence of the initiative of ecological producers and urban consumer groups with a high political and ecological consciousness.

Amongst the involved producers especially agricultural cooperatives related to the *Sindicato de Obreros del Campo* (SOC, Union of Land Workers) stand. This trade union of day labourers in the 1970s and 80s led a hard and active struggle for agrarian reforms in Andalucía, a region historically dominated by large land estates (*latifundios*). The approval of the *Ley de Reforma Agraria* (Agrarian Reform Law) of 1985, which was poorly applied, in a small number of cases resulted in access to land and gave rise to the creation of cooperatives. With technical support of the *Instituto de Sociología y Estudios Campesinos* (ISEC, Institute for Sociology and Peasant Studies) some of these worker's cooperatives opted for organic agriculture as a strategy to increase their autonomy from input



markets and as an alternative connection with consumers based on trust and the meeting of basic needs.

By escaping from the demands and pressures of export markets, these cooperatives and especially the cooperative *La Verde* (The Green) focussed their strategy on the creation of local alternatives. In the sphere of production, the alliance focused on the cooperation between peasant and family farmers in the Sierra de Cadiz centred around the recovery of local varieties and peasant-type of low-input management strategies. In the sphere of consumption, the first domestic marketing channels were created by means of political contacts with support groups from the land reform struggle, environmental groups and critical and politicized consumer groups.

Initially the network was organized through a system of weekly orders and delivery of product baskets. Over time, FACPE transformed itself into a network of associative and cooperative shops while simultaneously developing activities for awareness raising and political participation in agro-ecological social movements and around the concept of Food Sovereignty. Internally FACPE functions as a cooperative and its aim is *"to promote values of participation and solidarity based on social and economic democracy by means of an assembly grassroots movement."*

The social motivations are linked to ecological ones in the achievement of *"a more just society that respects people and the environment."* Therefore, more individualistic consumer motivations are outweighed by environmental and social values with a clear political proposal to redefine power relations and socio-economic organizations around food. This political objective focuses on constructing short marketing channels in which power relations between production and consumption within the agro-food system is rebalanced as an alternative to the model of globalization: *"We are transforming the conditions of production, supply, payment and marketing that prevail in a globalized market economy and creating a mechanism for affirmative action, monitoring and verification as well as for redistribution and solidarity."* The motivations in the sphere of production and demand are intended to be put at the same level: *"We wanted to consume and produce fresh, natural fruits & vegetables, free from pesticides and without any chemicals, coming from our own gardens and Andalusian fields. Besides, we wanted to do so at reasonable prices for consumers' families that on their turn allow farmers and craftsmen to live with dignity, stay away from speculations on agricultural markets, and to avoiding as much as possible intermediaries."* Therefore, explicit criticism of globalized food markets, the search for an alternative economy and autonomy from public policy and institutional initiatives are characteristic for this short marketing channel.

#### *Consumer groups, ecological vegetable box-schemes and the ARCO initiative*

The direct distribution of ecological vegetable boxes (*Ecocajas*) to consumer groups is another short marketing channel that currently growing strongly and reinforced by a double dynamics. Consumers organize themselves in the search for local producers that meet quality as well as socio-political and cultural criteria. At the same time, producers organize themselves to offer a wider range of seasonal ecological fresh produce.

We will take the case of the *Pueblos Blancos* (White Villages) cooperative, in which currently also the previously mentioned cooperative farm *La Verde* is involved. By making use of its distribution network in different cities, the cooperative has promoted the creation of consumer groups to which once a week and boxes with seasonal fresh fruits & vegetables are supplied. The boxes have a fixed price of €20 and a composition that varies each week depending on the available supply. *Pueblos Blancos* requires a minimum order of five boxes to make deliveries on a fixed day of the week to a pre-arranged delivery point.

This organization according to consumer groups with minimum orders brings stability to producers, who find market outlets for their seasonal products. On the other hand, the persons who receive the vegetable boxes give up their role as 'consumer; and the negotiation of prices and quantities in the market. Moreover, this distribution of boxes fosters cooperation between consumers who need to

organize their weekly orders and the collection and subsequent distribution of the boxes. This dynamic changes the practice of individual purchasing a shop or supermarket, and creates a space for encounter and cooperation around seasonal ecological foods. Often these groups organize themselves to increase their orders by contacting various local producers who are selected according to complex productive, social and cultural criteria.

Another initiative which bases itself on bringing together consumer groups comes from the farmers' union *Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos* (COAG, Coordination of Farmers' Organizations). COAG currently promotes the initiative *Agricultura de Responsabilidad Compartida* (ARCO, Agriculture with Shared Responsibility) which follows the principles of community supported agriculture and is strongly inspired by the French AMAP movement (Lamine, 2005; Girou, 2008). COAG is the national farmers' union which has developed the most critical view on the globalized agro-food system and has participated in alliances with new social movements. This political position is also reflected by the participation of COAG in *Via Campesina*, an international organization of peasants, small and medium farmers, and landless agricultural workers that focuses its policy proposal on the topic of Food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty was initially defined as *"the right of peoples, countries, and state unions to define their agricultural and food policy without the dumping of agricultural commodities into foreign countries."* However, this critical discourse has given rise to proposals for the building of an alternative agro-food system, and in line with this food sovereignty was further detailed as *"organizing food production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption"* ([www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)). It therefore defends a peasant-based model for the production of healthy food on the basis of biodiversity management, sustainability and farmers' knowledge and the decentralization of food production and distribution channels.

Currently, the ARCO initiative is in a founding stage through the establishment of local producer groups who commit themselves to sell directly to a group of consumers by the weekly delivery of boxes of fruits and vegetables. The initiative is not restricted to ecological producers, but aims at a wider collective of traditional farmers and peasants. The initiative is the most advanced in the region of the Basque Country, where it is promoted by the Basque farmers' union EHNE under the name *NEKASARE* (a contraction of the words 'nekazaritza' – agriculture – and 'sarea' – network – in Basque). NEKASARE currently brings together ca. 400 consumers in ca. 20-25 groups. Each producer is directly linked with a fixed group of ca 15-20 consumers, which amongst each other agree on the specific arrangements and details of delivery. Generally a weekly box with a fixed price of €20 is delivered, consisting of seasonal products but also eggs and dairy products. Producers who participate need to subscribe a general charter of regulations, in which they commit themselves to the principles of Food sovereignty and a socially and environmentally sustainable mode of production. The production criteria set by NEKASARE come close to organic farming, but the initiative does not aim at formal labelling and rather foresees the elaboration of participatory forms of certification in the nearby future. The ARCO/NEKASARE initiative thereby implies a redefinition of the agro-food system by the initiative of farmers who seek to build direct contacts and alliances with consumers and thereby progressively implement social and environmental criteria of sustainability.

#### *Agro-ecological cooperatives of production, consumption and consumption*

In the last decade a number of agro-ecological cooperatives have emerged with a strong political component and critical of mainstream agro-food capitalism both in its views and practice. There are now more than a dozen of such initiatives, including cooperatives like *La Acequia* and *Rehuerta* (Córdoba), *Hortiga* (Granada), *Terratrèmol* (Alicante), *Uztaro Kooperatiba* (Guipúzcoa), *Groove to Groove* (Toledo, Madrid), *Tomato Gorriak* (Pamplona) and *Bajo el Asfalto está la Huerta* (Madrid, Guadalajara, Valladolid). This last group, *Bajo el Asfalto está la Huerta* (BAH, Under the Asphalt is the Garden) in many respects is the driving force and initiator of this movement. BAH describes itself as *"a collective dedicated to agroecology that proposes an alternative model of agricultural production,*

*distribution and consumption. This model is based on self-management, supported by a horizontal assembly structure which enables direct producer-consumer relations, and implies the participation of workers' collectives and consumer groups of different neighbourhoods, localities and collectivities".* (<http://bah.ourproject.org>)

These cooperatives mostly emerge in urban areas by the initiative of persons linked to social movements. Food is seen as an important tool and instrument to construct economic, social and political alternatives, based on a more general critique of commercial city development models, the struggle over green areas within city centres and urban fringes, and the questioning of agro-food industrialization processes (Lopez & Lopez, 2003; Calle, Soler & Vara, 2009).

The agro-ecological cooperatives try to bridge the gap between production, distribution and consumption by integrating and redefining the figures of the 'producer' and the 'consumer'. This redefinition consists, on the one hand, of overcoming price mechanism of the market and individual decision-making associated with consumption; on the other hand, it consists of overcoming wage relations. These cooperatives constitute a particular case of "community supported agriculture", in which the box-scheme is associated with a very strong commitment to stability and need satisfaction unlinked from prices. Within these networks the influence of market relations is minimized, while mechanisms of collective action are maximised through a political redefinition of everyday life (Calle Collado, 2008). But in turn, these politicized proposals are integrated into a broader agro-ecological social movement (Lopez & Bardal, 2006; Calle, Soler & Vara, 2009).

A key aspect of these projects is the redefinition of the relationship with markets, since food products that are distributed with the cooperative are not assigned a price. The financing of cooperatives is based on the contribution of fees according to the needs of the overall project. Revenue is dedicated to purchasing the requirements for production and to remunerate the people who work within the gardens, but there is no direct link with what is produced. The generated produce is distributed weekly amongst all persons that are member "*without the existence of prices, nor surpluses, nor profits*" (Lopez & Lopez, 2003). Therefore, these cooperatives constitute a practical attempt to meet basic food needs outside the price-making market by building "*an economic activity within a social movement*" (ibid.).

The term 'ecological' is used to express that the studied initiatives are not restricted to officially certified organic food products. This refers to food products that are produced with the use of chemical inputs and by means of biological management practices even when these are not specifically approved by responsible certification agencies. With this we intend to respect the perception of involved actors in the sense that products are 'certified' by the Networks that produce, distribute and consume them independent from the use of formal labels and certifications.

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