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Merging Ethics and Economies: Modernizing Values in Viennese Farmers' Markets

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Abstract

With the recent rise in farmers' market popularity and their linkages in offering an alternative economic market place for many small farmers and start-up ventures for those in the alternative food community, it is curious that Viennese markets in Austria are experiencing a slower if not stagnant farmers' market following. Additionally, many specific values are associated to different markets in differing regions, yet there has been limited research done in examining the values in farmers' markets as individual entities. In this paper the initial results of a farmers' market comparison in Vienna and Minneapolis, Minnesota focusing on the role of values in the farmers' market arena are taken in consideration, specifically in the possibility of encouraging the integration of more modern values in Viennese farmers' markets.

Introduction

Among others, the rise in farmers' market popularity in the US and certain parts of Europe has been attributed to a want of local, quality products, small farmer support and a push against industrialized food procurement (Alkon, 2008; Brown & Miller, 2008; Byker et al., 2012). Along with the rise in farmers' market (FM) popularity among consumers and vendors, there has also been a surge of FM research. This growing body of FM literature, however, proposes few systematic assessments of the values embodied in FMs and the role such values might have in the market's economic architectures (Alkon, 2008). The IFOAM⁴ organic principles⁵ offer a normative framework of values with which to organize and analyze the interactions of FM economic architectures—as in the structure and logistics of farmers' markets—and their values.

Viennese FMs have a long tradition of civic policy assuring food access for city residents, yet during the past two decades, FMs there has been a shrinking in size, a reduction in the amount of days they are open, and a rise in the number of resellers than actual farmers as well as a general decline in overall direct market sales country wide (Schermer, 2008). This paper focuses on the role additional values might have in modernizing Viennese farmers markets and perhaps the possibility of integrating values of other successful markets in order to bolster popularity for both consumers and farmers.

While the focus of this paper is on FMs in Vienna, it stems from research that uses a value-based conceptual framework based on the IFOAM organic principles and those of the Generative Economy⁶ to examine the ethics and economics of farmers' markets in two major metropolitan areas, Vienna and Minneapolis. These two developed regions with a large farmers market history and fairly similar climactic and growing seasons exhibit different historical contexts and social situations, and thus offer an interesting comparison of social and environmental values embodied by these markets as economic activities. For the purpose of this preliminary paper, a plethora of values and differing situations of Minneapolis FMs are used to visit the possibility of Viennese markets adopting such values to accommodate a changing customer base. This paper also illustrates the possible benefit of applying and integrating IFOAM principles in the economic

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⁴ The International Federation of Organic Movements

⁵ The 4 IFOAM principles: **Health:** Organic Agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal and human as one and indivisible. **Ecology:** Organic Agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them. **Fairness:** Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities. **Care:** Organic Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment (IFOAM, 2009).

⁶ Generative Ownership Principles: **Living Purpose:** Ownership alternatives to create the conditions for life over long term—i.e. social enterprises, community land trusts, cooperatives, etc; **Rooted Membership:** Ownership in human hands, as opposed to corporations today that have absentee ownership; **Mission-Controlled Governance:** Control by those dedicated to social mission as opposed to governance by markets, where control is linked to share price; **Stakeholder Finance:** Capital as long-term friend as opposed to casino finance of traditional stock market ownership; **Ethical Networks:** Collective support for ecological and social norms (Kelly, 2012).

architectures of farmers' markets and other alternative food outlets around the world, showing the opportunity of extension the organic movement, not only in practices but also in values, may have. Additionally, Viennese markets and Austrian FM in general have seldom been included in scientific literature, therefore this study also aims to add to the very limited literature base on Austrian FMs.

Theoretical framework

While most studies of FMs look more at organizational FM analyses (Stephenson, 2008), by primarily focusing on values when examining FMs, this study uses an analytic framework that draws our attention to the ways in which specific values become rules and norms within the markets' operational architectures. These values, especially organized around Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care (see IFOAM) are expressed in what Kelly refers to as the "ownership design" of markets defined by their Purpose, Membership, Governance, Finance and Networks (see Generative Economy).

This analytic framework is illustrated in Figure 1. Here, the 5 'principles' of Generative Economy outline the operational architecture—the structure, logistics, and functions of the markets—and are embedded within the IFOAM values. The concept of Generative Economy was used by Kelly to examine ethical businesses; therefore implying a framework that is already value-based. In adding the IFOAM principles to this structure another level of depth helps to understand and assess the predominant values within FMs. This framework has shaped this study. It has influenced how the qualitative interviews have been structured, which key observation points in the participatory observation were selected and has influenced the analysis.

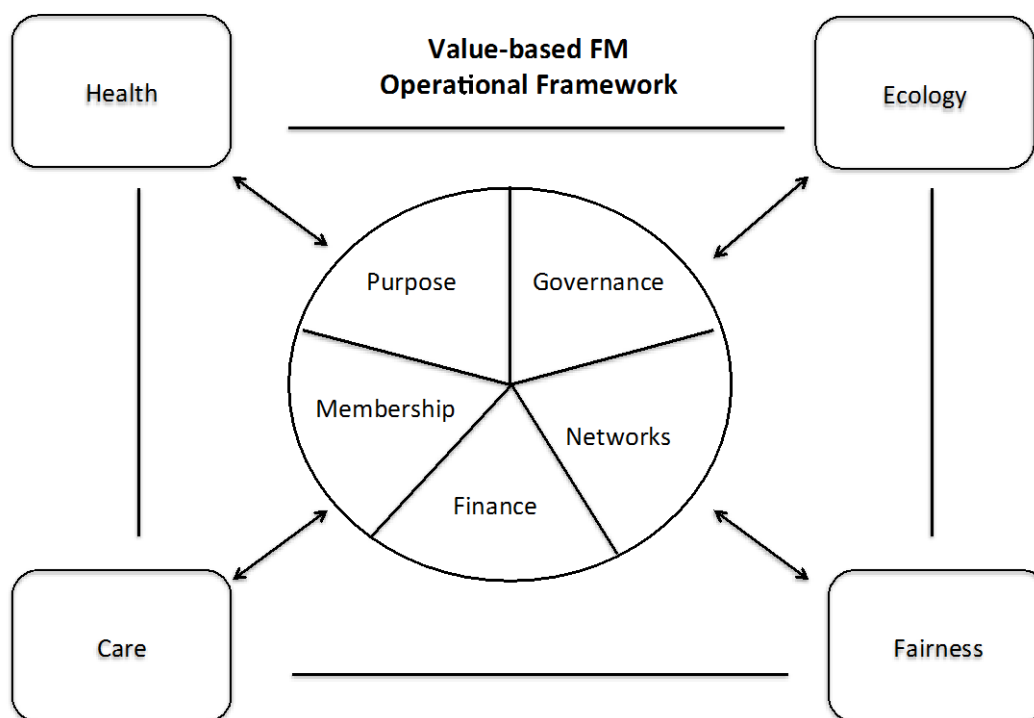


Figure 1. The Value-Based Farmers' Market Operational Framework used

In order to understand the evaluation of FMs better, two examples of Generative Economy principles applied to the operational architectures of farmers' markets would include: for Purpose—mission statements, goals, atmosphere, marketing, etc; for Governance—how is the market run, how is it organized, who makes the decisions, what is the vendor criteria? Moreover, the boundaries of the IFOAM principles are defined in relation to FMs and their accompanying values. These include examples such as: Health—food safety, healthy food, information about nutrition; Ecology—recycling, composting, supporting organic and sustainable practices; Fairness—food access, vendor selection, EBT use (electronic food stamps); Care—community issues, decision making processes, community education.

In addition to adding a level of depth in understanding FM values in the analysis, the IFOAM principles help organize the values to find which ones are acknowledged by the markets in becoming rules and norms. Finally, the principles are also embedded in an agricultural background, specifically an organic one that resonates in a FM context because of the high organic farming participation rate in FMs (Dimitri & Greene, 2000; Trobe, 2001; Rainey et al., 2011).

Methods

Data collection occurred during 2012-2013. 12 farmers' markets, 6 from Vienna and 6 from Minneapolis have been studied. Qualitative interviews, participatory observation and a reoccurring exchange between the researcher and key stakeholders were organized around the Generative Economy principles to be used as guiding categories.

The FM case studies have been preliminarily analyzed using the framework stated above to offer a value-based approach for an exchange of information and ideas between markets within the individual cities and between the markets of Minneapolis and Vienna. To create a holistic picture of the markets a wide-variety of stakeholders—from professionals in the farmers' market field, to market managers, vendors and consumers—as well as repeated meetings with key actors to discuss findings, meanings and relativity to market situations were arranged.

Results

The values, goals and mission statements described by FM managers and individual vendors have been examined to understand their role within FMs and how they may affect or what they may have to offer FMs in Austria and Minnesota.

Initial results for the purpose of this paper show that each of the 6 FMs examined in Vienna illustrated differing and rich characters due to their varied surroundings, vendors and customer basis. However, due predominantly to their governance structure—all city run—nearly every market has the very same goals and values and share these with their permanent market partners (in Vienna almost all FMs have a space to temporarily set up within a permanent market setting that includes textiles and restaurants open every day and also run by the city government), with the exception of the one strictly organic market exhibiting additional values of environmental and social health associated with organic.

The main purpose of the Viennese markets, including the farmers' markets, is the local availability of food. While also important, this purpose does not particularly support an agenda of local, fresh, small farmer products or their producers' values. The fact that FMs are seen as part of an existing permanent market sharing the same purpose and governance structures, inhibits the building of values and goals associated to actual farmers, food and farming rather than traders and resellers of all types of goods. The limited IFOAM principles seen from the market governance are health, in terms of food safety and hygiene and fairness concerning vendor participation due to a lottery system. Among the dwindling individual farmers a few innovative vendors exist that have added environmental and social pieces to their businesses, yet they tend to stand alone or partake in the specific organic market designations.

All 6 of the Minneapolis FMs studied exhibit a plethora of values. Most markets are organized around neighborhoods that rally together and organize and express their values including supporting their small, local farmers. This leads to innovative marketing campaigns and values focused on holistic health—healthy food, environment, farmers and communities. Collectively, the Minneapolis FMs and most of their individual vendors share and uphold a variety of the IFOAM principles, heavily reflecting the surrounding neighborhoods and customer values in which they partake.

Discussion

Initially, the strong following of FMs, sharing the values of the IFOAM normative principles in Minnesota, offers many possibilities to bolster popularity and support for small farmers and FMs in general and could be applicable to Viennese markets. Using this particular theoretical framework, the Value-Based Farmers' Market Operational Framework, offers FM managers and others in the alternative food movement to reflect and evaluate their own practices in a way to connect or reconnect to the original values behind their food communities and membership or customer base.

Viennese farmers' markets may be able to gather support for farmers and communities alike if FMs would be seen as independent entities from the more permanent Viennese markets. This would also allow for a separate purpose with different goals and values influencing the markets daily actions. Tradition is important

in Viennese culture, yet the customer base is changing and many younger and new customers are attracted to a global palate of taste and culture as well as values. The following offers more specific suggestions, taken from many of the Minneapolis observations and interviews that may help to modernize the traditional Viennese markets:

Purpose: Keeping a unified mission may be valuable, especially if it is updated towards more modern values and goals. Yet in order to meld tradition with modern possibilities, encouraging separate purposes or sub-purposes and missions for each individual market, catering to their differing surroundings and a specific customer-base may be beneficial, emphasizing traditional differences of each market yet allowing for new innovation and education.

Governance: The governance of the Viennese markets is often used here as justification for a less-than booming FM atmosphere, yet a motivated and liberated governance structure, of unnecessary bureaucratic technicalities would allow for partnerships to be made and higher involvement in marketing issues, selection, customer input, and vendors.

Membership: Increased small farmer integration can be instilled with more benefits as being part of a member i.e.—marketing, publicity, steady customer flow, and allowance of vendor participation in some market affairs.

Finance: Some of the finances could be covered by an organizational allowance—i.e. a farmers association, or organization of the farmers in the market—or through external sponsors with similar values that are allowed to participate in educational opportunities at the market.

Networks: Closer networks to the department of agriculture and the economic chamber of trade could be made to increase small farmer awareness and aid as well as marketing, and additionally invaluable would be networking with local businesses, restaurants, schools and organizations near and around each individual market.

These comparative farmers' market case studies permit the understanding of the logistics and values of farmers' markets in two cities independent of each other and across two continents. Preliminarily, a lack of prevalent values and ethics in Viennese markets due to the predominant market governance structure lead to a fragmented identity and purpose. The shared knowledge of this research should help both researchers and farmers' market managers to exchange information and ideas, specifically the modernization of the current FM instilled values in Vienna, which may contribute to the needed support of smaller farmers and ultimately the success of the FMs.

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