ALTERNATIVE AGRI-FOOD NETWORKS: CONVERGENCES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decades, we have witnessing a huge growth in the search for alternative ways of buying food in several countries. The Alternative Agri-Food Networks (AAFN), or Alternative food markets, are built on a turn by consumers away from industrial food provisioning towards quality. This article aims to compare three of the most important alternative food markets (organic food, local food and fair trade), stressing the convergences and divergences among these markets, especially the role exerted by diverse actors, the agency mechanisms, market devices and different modes of exchange and qualification processes. The analysis was based on secondary data from British markets, especially on websites, and fieldwork observation of products, packaging and advertising material on several food points of sale (supermarkets, small shops, farmers markets, etc.) on Lancaster, Northwest England. The analysis of alternative food markets focusing on their evolution shows that the complex process of development involves a multiplicity of actors, making use of a set of market devices to format transactions and qualify the goods. Two special set of actors stand out as the most powerful ones, at least for fair trade and organic markets: certification bodies and retailers. Through two fundamental market devices, standardization and discourse, they aim to qualify food products mainly because of their credence attributes, especially the ethical trade and sustainable production dimensions. Local food markets, on the other hand, constitute a much unstable market construction, locally variable and with no clear leading actor, even though the power of retailers is growing in the last years. Despite convergences on the discourse, a unified strategic approach for the several alternative food chains does not seem feasible due to the multiplicity of actors and interests involved.
Key words: alternative agri-food networks, fair trade, local food, organic agriculture, actor-network theory, market devices, food marketing

RESUMEN

En las últimas décadas se ha evidenciado un enorme crecimiento en la búsqueda de formas alternativas de compra de alimentos en varios países. Las Redes Agroalimentarias Alternativas, o mercados alternativos de alimentos, se construyeron a partir de los cambios de los hábitos alimenticios industrializados hacia alimentos de calidad. El presente estudio tiene por objetivo elaborar un análisis comparativo de tres mercados alternativos de alimentos más importantes (alimentos orgánicos, alimentos locales y comercio justo), destacando las convergencias y divergencias entre estos mercados; y, de modo particular, el papel desempeñado por los diversos actores, los mecanismos de mercado, las modalidades de intercambio y el establecimiento de procesos de calificación. El análisis se basó en datos secundarios de los mercados británicos, especialmente en páginas web, así como en la observación sobre productos locales, los envases y el material publicitario en diversos puntos de venta (supermercados, pequeñas tiendas, mercados de agricultores, entre otros) en Lancaster, al noroeste de Inglaterra. El análisis de los mercados de alimentos

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alternativos focalizado en su evolución muestra un complejo proceso de desarrollo que involucra una multiplicidad de actores, utilizando un conjunto de dispositivos de mercado para organizar las transacciones y calificar sus productos. Dos grupos especiales de actores se destacaron como los más influyentes para el comercio justo y los productos orgánicos: los organismos de certificación y los minoristas. Por otro lado, los productos alimenticios se califican principalmente a través de dos dispositivos fundamentales del mercado, la estandarización y el discurso, debido a sus atributos de credibilidad, especialmente en las dimensiones éticas del comercio y de la producción sostenible. Sin embargo, los mercados locales de alimentos constituyen una estructura inestable de mercado, muy variables al nivel local, sin un liderazgo evidente, si bien el poder de los minoristas está creciendo en los últimos años. No obstante la convergencia en el discurso, un enfoque estratégico unificado para las diversas redes agroalimentarias alternativas no parece factible, debido a la multiplicidad de actores y de los intereses involucrados.
Palabras clave: redes agroalimentarias alternativas, comercio justo, comida local, agricultura orgánica, teoría actor-red, dispositivos del mercado, comercialización de alimentos

RÉSUMÉ

Au cours des dernières décennies, nous sommes témoins d'une grande croissance dans la recherche de façons alternatives d'acheter la nourriture dans plusieurs pays. Les Réseaux agro-alimentaires alternatifs ou des Marchés alimentaires alternatifs sont construits sur un changement d'intérêts des consommateurs de la nourriture industrielle vers la qualité. L'article a le but de tracer une analyse comparative de trois des marchés alimentaires alternatifs les plus importants (les aliments biologiques, la nourriture locale et le commerce équitable), soulignant les convergences et les divergences parmi ces marchés, particulièrement le rôle exercé par des acteurs divers, les mécanismes de l'agence, des dispositifs du marché et les différents modes d'échange et de processus de qualification établis. L'analyse a été basée sur des données secondaires des marchés britanniques, particulièrement sur des sites Web et l'observation des produits, emballage et matériel publicitaire sur plusieurs points de vente alimentaires (supermarchés, petits magasins, marchés de fermiers, etc.) à Lancaster, au Nord-Ouest en Angleterre. L'analyse des marchés alimentaires alternatifs se concentre sur leur évolution montre que le processus complexe de développement qui implique une multiplicité d'acteurs se servant d'un ensemble de dispositifs du marché pour configurer les transactions et qualifier les marchandises. Deux acteurs en spécial se distinguent comme étant les plus importants, au moins pour le commerce équitable et des marchés organiques: les organismes de certification et les détaillants. Grâce à deux dispositifs fondamentaux du marché, la standardisation et le discours, ils aspirent à qualifier des produits alimentaires principalement à cause de leurs attributs de confiance, particulièrement les dimensions éthiques et soutenables de production. Les marchés d'alimentation locaux, d'autre part, constituent un marché de construction beaucoup plus instable, localement variable et sans aucun acteur principal clair, bien que la puissance des détaillants est de plus en plus présente dans les dernières années. Malgré des convergences sur le discours, cela ne semble pas réalisable une approche stratégique unifiée pour plusieurs chaînes d'alimentation alternative, en raison de la multiplicité d'acteurs et d'intérêts en impliqués.
Mots-clé: réseaux agro-alimentaires alternatifs, le commerce équitable, la nourriture locale, l'agriculture biologique, théorie acteur-réseau, dispositifs de marché

RESUMO

Nas últimas décadas, houve um considerável crescimento no que tange à busca de formas alternativas de compra de alimentos em vários países, emergindo Redes agroalimentares alternativas, em consonância com as mudanças nos hábitos alimentares. O estudo tem como objetivo desenvolver uma análise comparativa das três modalidades mais importantes de mercados alternativos de alimento (orgânicos, locais e do comércio justo), destacando as suas semelhanças e diferenças, à luz da contribuição de diversos autores. A ênfase esteve posta nos mecanismos de mercado, nas modalidades do comércio e no estabelecimento de processos de rating. A análise foi baseada em dados secundários dos mercados britânicos, especialmente em páginas web, na observação de produtos locais, de embalagens e materiais de propaganda obtidos em vários estabelecimentos (supermercados, lojas, mercados de agricultores, etc.) de Lancaster, no noroeste da Inglaterra. A análise dos mercados de alimentos alternativos, com foco na sua evolução mostra um

processo de desenvolvimento complexo que envolve uma multiplicidade de atores, usando um conjunto de dispositivos para formatar as transações de mercado e qualificar produtos. Dois grupos especiais de atores foram destacados como os mais influentes para o comércio justo e produtos orgânicos: agências de certificação e varejistas. Mercados locais de alimentos, apresentam uma estrutura do mercado instável, com e sem um líder claro, embora o poder de retalhistas é crescente nos últimos anos. Apesar da convergência no discurso, parece improvável uma abordagem estratégica unificada para as várias redes agro-alimentares alternativas, em face da multiplicidade de atores e de interesses envolvidos.
Palavras-chave: redes alternativas agroalimentares, comércio justo, comida local, a agricultura biológica, a teoria ator-rede, dispositivos de mercado, marketing de alimentos

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, we are witnessing a huge growth in the search for alternative ways of buying food in several countries. This trend relates directly to a reaction to the dominant food distribution model established after World War II, in which the control, calculability and predictability, orchestrated across long distances by a few large-scale economic actors, usually transnational corporations, have been established as the most important dimensions on food markets (Ritzer, 2008; Murdoch, Marsden & Banks, 2000).

The dominant (also called conventional) model is being challenged, as it presents some strong vulnerabilities: food safety issues, obesity epidemic, erasure of long crafted knowledge, practices and livelihoods associated with traditional farming systems, difficult to serve smaller, more differentiated markets, difficult to develop a trusting relationship with consumers (consumers often distrust the large global firms, thinking they are primarily motivated by profits), social and environmental problems they create (for example, food shipped from the far corners of the world, requiring refrigeration and huge logistics costs and pollution of soil, water and atmosphere caused by industrial farming methods) (Kneafsey, 2010; Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2002). Some episodic food «scares», as the BSE, leaded to increased concerns about food safety and nutrition, making many consumers, especially in advanced capitalist countries, to exercise more caution in their food consumption habits (Goodman, 2004; Murdoch *et al.,* 2000; Ponte & Gibbon, 2005; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006).

Simon (2011) suggests that consumers over the last decade are practicing an alternative and not necessarily narrower model of politics, when they make their consumption choices taking into account civic concerns. By buying, or not buying, something in the marketplace, consumers make themselves heard, and thus show their continued engagement in the public. In the food sector, this «politic model» has been influential, and leaded to a proliferation of case studies on the development of «alternative» food markets or networks. Variously and loosely defined in terms of «quality», «transparency», «fairness» and «locality», such newly emerging networks are signalling a shift away from the industrialized and conventional food sector, towards a re-localized food and farming regime (Sonnino &Marsden, 2006).

The Alternative Agro-Food Networks (AAFN), or Alternative food markets, are built on a turn by consumers away from industrial food provisioning towards quality. A partial list of the production and institutional innovations associated with the so-called quality «turn» would include fair trade, conversion to organic and low external input farming practices, new premium quality food production, place-based production and marketing initiatives, and new modes of food provision (short food supply chains and farmers markets) (Goodman,2004). Alternative trade is claimed to operate under a different set of values and objectives than traditional trade, putting people and their well-being and preservation of the natural environment before the chase for profit (Renard, 2003). However, with the proliferation on sustainability standards operated by third-party certification to allow the growth of organic and fair trade markets, there are claims that this alternative model is being distorted by market actors probably leading to more inequality in food markets (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011).

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The creation –or re-creation– of this alternative markets is being made through several actors, in a heterogeneous and diverse «modus operandi», loosely defined and structured. The understanding of the mechanisms that influence the evolution of the alternative food markets is yet to be explored.

Some specialists on marketing theory are proposing a new way to analyse markets (Araujo, Finch & Kejellberg, 2010), influenced mainly by economic sociology. They conceive markets are plastic phenomena, that are always «in the making» rather than «ready-made» (Latour, 1987), and that therefore emerge and evolve from several strategies and agency mechanisms on a continuum process. So, to understand how marketing produces markets one should take into account a wide range of practices including regulatory efforts, scientific work, strategic action, and ordinary acts of daily market activities that make transactions happen, such as the production and distribution circuits (Araujo, 2007).

These specialists remember that marketing as a practice is deeply rooted in specific market contexts, spatially distributed, and dependent on complex forms of coordination amongst different actors, and involving heterogeneous bodies of expertise. Thus, a market is not just a locus where pre-defined supply and demand functions intersect within static institutional frameworks, but a setting where entanglements between demand and supply are continuously reshaped and, as a consequence, institutional frameworks redefined (Araujo, 2007).

This paper aims to bring the discussion of alternative food chains to a marketing perspective, as it is being studied mainly by sociology, economy, rural studies, geography, and other sciences. In order to achieve this objective, a comparative analysis of three of the most important alternative food markets – organic food, local food and fair trade– is made. In this analysis, we stress the convergences and divergences among these markets, the criticisms and challenges for their growth, and the features related to their development, especially the role exerted by diverse actors, the agency mechanisms, market devices and the different modes of exchange and qualification processes established. The main theoretical framework for the analysis is the Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

The analysis was based on secondary data from British markets, especially on websites, and fieldwork observation of products, packaging and advertising material on several food points of sale (supermarkets, small shops, farmers markets, etc.) on Lancaster, Northwest England.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CREATION AND EVOLUTION OF MARKETS

Some specialists on marketing theory are proposing a new way to analyse markets (Araujo *et al.,* 2010), influenced mainly by economic sociology. They conceive markets are plastic phenomena that emerge from organizing and political actions of several actors, through a dense network of mechanisms and operations that allow market actors to coordinate their actions (Callon, 1998a).

Thus, *«markets are produced and diffused through the interactions of many actors, shaped, negotiated, and contested rather than designed and implemented, providing both surprises and opportunities»* (Araujo *et al.,* 2010: 8). The several actors who participate in producing markets engage in *«diverse practices and calculative mechanisms, which are often obscure to others, opaque even upon reflection, and never wholly determining of particular organizing initiatives»* (Araujo *et al.,* 2010: 8).

Caliskan & Callon (2010) define markets as socio-technical arrangements or assemblages *(agencements*) which have 3 characteristics:

1. Markets organize the conception, production, and circulation of goods, as well as the voluntary transfer of some sorts of property rights attached to them. These transfers involve a monetary compensation which seals the goods' attachment to their new owners;

2. A market is an arrangement of heterogeneous constituents: rules and conventions; technical devices; metrological systems; logistical infrastructures; texts, discourses and narratives; technical and scientific knowledge; as well as the competencies and skills embodied in living beings;

3. Markets are a space of confrontation and power struggles. Multiple, and sometimes contradictory, definitions and valuations of goods as well as agents oppose one another in markets until the terms of the transaction are eventually determined by pricing mechanisms.

Different types of markets will differ in the specific configurations of calculative agencies mobilized and the distribution of power amongst these agencies. Calculative agencies are present on mechanisms and operations including trademarks, labels and prices, as well as advertising, merchandising, product design, retail spaces, purchasing and consumption (Callon, Meadel & Rabeharisoa, 2002; Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008; Callon & Muniesa, 2005).

One of the theoretical frameworks that helps in the study of markets is the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). For ANT networks are built from relations or associations, in which these are the links or ties between the component parts that confer agency rather than any essential (natural, social) characteristics held by a particular subject or object. ANT authors (Callon, Latour and Law) say that network activities or network outcomes can only be fully comprehended by taking into account the full range of interrelationships found therein (Murdoch *et al.,* 2000).

The «framings», in ANT, are the tacit stocks of knowledge that actors draw upon in their everyday interaction (Christensen & Skaerbaek, 2006). A frame of calculation is usually required, and these framing processes require considerable investment in both social and material arrangements. The frame establishes a boundary within which interactions take place more or less independently of their surrounding context (Callon, 1998b).

For Callon (1998b) actors' processes of framing rely on a variety of practices that construct spaces of calculability, but the making of spaces of calculability is never immune to external interferences and one form of framing is always liable to be contested and overturned by another. The framing process does not just depend on the actors themselves, but also that it is rooted in various physical and organizational devices. Markets are characterized by multiplicity and the outcome of any one framing effort is always fragile, partial and temporary (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007), as it leads to externalities, or «overflows», in ANT theory.

Overflow is Callon's sociological revision of the concept of externality to economists, where overflows comprise both the positive or negative externalities that are produced during the framing attempts. Overflows point to political disagreements with the frame that may generate various contradictive behaviours. When calculative agents are making their framing attempts, a variety of overflows are produced. On situations in which many overflows are produced, they threat the framing attempts and may lead to a new framing process (Callon, 1998b).

The evolution of markets is shaped by the interactions among different actors, knowledge, discourses and technical devices that influence the mechanisms of the transactions and leads to new arrangements on a continuous flow of information and interaction rather than on a centralized co-ordinated process of formation and evolution. To understand the process one most establish what makes economic exchanges viable, how economic agencies are configured, how dominant relationships emerge, and how natural and social elements come to be combined to qualify the goods (Murdoch *et al.,* 2000; Araujo *et al.,* 2010; Caliskan & Callon, 2010).

The concept of market device (material and discursive assemblages that intervene in the construction of markets) is central to the analysis of market evolutions (Muniesa, Millo & Callon, 2007), including a large diversity of objects, from purchase settings to merchandising tools, from analytical techniques to certification rules.

3. ALTERNATIVE AGRO-FOOD NETWORKS

Alternative Agro-Food Networks (AAFN) comprise a diverse set of new markets that operate differently from the traditional (global) dominant food market. These markets are the results of initiatives that began with non-governmental organizations, sometimes religious ones, seeking to help underdeveloped, developing or economically dependent countries of the Third World (Renard, 2003) and also small farmers of the developed world (Bingen, Sage & Siriex., 2011) and consumer claims for a new value for eating, as in the slow food movement (Pitrykowski, 2004).

Against the logic of bulk commodity production, AAFN redistribute value through the food chain, reconvene trust between producers and consumers, and articulate new forms of political association and market governance (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). AAFN can be described as a kind of political consumerism, relying on the idea that consumption is not only a «purpose of the economy», but also equally a political issue (Micheletti, 2003; Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008).

AAFNs are considered innovative precursors of a paradigm change, of a more endogenous, territorialised and ecologically-embedded successor model to the exhausted model of conventional industrial food production and distribution (Marsden, Murdoch & Morgan; 1999). Some researchers are more cautious about positing a connection between alternative food networks and the emergence of a new rural development paradigm (Niles & Roff, 2008). Winter (2003) states that whether the turn to localism represents the first step towards an alternative food and agricultural economy, is an issue open to question.

Even though AAFN comprises a diverse and heterogeneous set of practices, networks and markets, the main common aim is to reconnect food and people spatially and temporally (Harvey, 1990). Local food provides direct contact between consumers and producers. Fair trade labels makes consumers aware of the origin of a product and the conditions of the production, assuring (or ensuring) that some specific fair practices where used. Organic production, which very often closely relates to local food of fair trade, is directly related to the production process in agriculture, guaranteeing a more natural growing process, with no use of fertilizers and concerns about animal welfare.

A key characteristic of the new supply networks is their capacity to re-socialize or re-spatialize food, which comes to be defined by its locale. The image of the farm or the region is intrinsically a source of quality (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). In the fair trade model, the re-spatialization is achieved by the definition of which countries are able to source fair trade products, because of the general bad conditions found there, so it rests on the adhesion of a series of actors to a body of collective principles, a coordination by civic opinion, where values arise from «notoriety» (Renard, 2003), ensuring that they were produced and distributed fairly.

By emphasizing different notions and dimensions of quality, AAFN represent an extremely differentiated phenomenon (Goodman, 2003). Quality is a multidimensional concept, involving place of origin, traceability, fairness, freshness, aesthetic attributes, nutritious content, among others. Quality is constructed and negotiated, having meaning exclusively in its specific production-consumption context, and always in a process of co-creation with the consumer (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006; Shove & Araujo, 2010). The quality turn is operated by different mechanisms and agencies, as we will see in the next sections.

3.1. FAIR TRADE–WHEN FAIRNESS COUNTS

Fair trade is a form of alternative trade that seeks to improve the position of disempowered producers by ensuring that they are paid fair prices for their goods and that financial benefits are used to promote sustainable development in their communities (Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International, 2011). The fair trade movement can, in one sense, trace its origin back to the development of the co-operative movement in the nineteenth Century. In the form which it is recognizable today it began with the Mennonite Central Committee trading with poor communities in the south of the globe in the 1940's (Moore, 2004).

Like other forms of ethical and environmental consumption, fair trade consumption reflects the trends of globalization and individualisation, which prompt citizens to «create new arenas for responsibility-taking» (Micheletti, 2003: 5). By emphasizing the idea of «trade but not aid», fair trade is assessed as a system based on the solidarity from the North towards producers from the South. The notion of fairness or equity is the main reference for this direct relationship between producers and consumers (Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008).

In the beginning, trading practices between organisations defined fair trade, which was guaranteed by self-declaration and reputation, rather than by certification (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011). When fair trade market started to grow, labels have become the most common mechanism to create fair trade markets. In 1988, Netherlands was the first country to launch a fair trade consumer label, Max Havelaar, through the partnership between the Mexican coffee co-operative UCIRI and a Dutch development organization (Lyon, 2006).

In 1997, the umbrella certification group Fair Trade Labelling Organizations (FLO) was formed, and its certification standards were established. The term Fairtrade is protected by FLO and refers exclusively to FLO-certified goods. Therefore, Fairtrade is distinct from other goods labelled fair trade (Neyland & Simakova, 2010). Producers, traders and manufacturers must pay for FLO certifications and renewals. FLO is owned jointly by 21 national labelling initiatives covering 22 countries and producer networks representing certified producer organisations across Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean (Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International, 2011).

Fair trade contains a set of calculation mechanisms that rules the price to be paid for certified products in farmer/buyer transactions. For each product, a specific reference price is established (for example, for robusta coffee, London «Euronext Liffe» contracts plus premium quality), and price paid to the producer cannot be below Fair Trade Minimum Prices (Trade Labeling Organizations International, 2011). The Generic Fairtrade standards provide general rules to be followed by all the operators who trade in certified products.

Sales of Fairtrade certified products have been growing at an average of 40% per year over the last five years. Fairtrade has achieved very strong market share in certain markets, including 53% of bananas in Switzerland and 22% of ground coffee in the UK. There are now over 10.000 Fairtrade products sold in over 70 countries. In the U.K., the Fairtrade Foundation, U.K. –representative of FLO– reported that sales of bananas, chocolate, coffee and other products under its brand in this country had raised from £836m in 2009 to £1.17bn in 2010 (Milmo, 2011).

However, there are other Fair Trade organizations with their own aims, processes, labels, and outcomes. For example, the Fair Trade Organization (FTO) mark (run by the International Federation of Alternative Trade –IFAT–, created in 1989) relies more on self-reporting and is designed to cover an organization, not a product. Fair Trade/ Fairtrade is hence more complex than a single process with a single certifier. Thus Fair trade is not comprised by a single entity (Neyland & Simakova, 2010). Nevertheless, FLO certified sales represent 88% of all fair trade sales, and others only 12%. With the certification model, supermarkets represent 96.6% of the point of sale for fair trade products (Raynolds Murray & Wilkinson, 2007; Krier, 2008).

The main food products with Fair Trade labels are: bananas, cocoa, coffee, dried fruit, fresh fruit and vegetables, honey, juices, nuts/ oil seeds and purees, soybeans and pulses, rice herbs and spices, sugar, tea and wine. Despite its huge market growth and support by government authorities, fair trade has been criticized by several authors and institutions. Starr & Adams (2003) state that the disjuncture between consumer life politics and producer livelihoods reflects the questions raised by critics of fair trade who maintain that fair trade normalises global inequalities, re-enacts colonial trade relationships and relegate Southern participants to mono-crop export production. In this sense, fair trade would help enhance the distinguish consumers from the North from the rest.

Other problem is related to the consumers. While fair trade is frequently characterized as a consumer driven movement, market growth also depends upon the willingness of retailers to offer fair trade products. Attitude-behaviour gap is another problem that put limits to consumption of fair trade products. Fair trade labelled products are reasonably available, but the relative importance of fair trade label in the purchase decision of consumers is not clear (De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp, 2005). There are also concerns that the proliferation of private voluntary ethical certification schemes is confusing to consumers, and ultimately weakens the entire field. While private certification schemes, no matter how stringent, are only valuable if they are understood and trusted by consumers. Today's ethical coffees consumers, for example, are challenged to distinguish between organic, shade grown, mountain farmed, Rainforest Alliance or UTZ Certified, fair-traded or Fair Trade coffee, in addition to companies private schemes (Pay, 2009). In light of the influence of advocacy groups and producers, fair trade is perhaps better understood as a «consumer-dependant» movement for change rather than a consumer-led movement (Goodman, 2004: 901).

Some critics argue that consumers looking to make ethical choices may well be mistaken over how much of the additional price paid for Fairtrade goods at the checkout actually reaches Fairtrade farmers (Bowers, 2011).

In the beginning, the distribution of Fair Trade products was possible through the creation of a circuit parallel to a large mainstream distribution through networks of specialty stores (world stores) managed as cooperatives and staffed by volunteers and militants (Renard, 2003). But gradually, some big corporations are making decisions to go Fairtrade. In 2009, Cadbury Dairy Milk –one of the largests chocolate producers in Europe–, decided to going Fairtrade. Fairtrade sales in Britain have been boosted by the backing of big retailers. Sainsbury's, the world's largest Fairtrade retailer, hopes to reach £500m in sales by 2015 while the Co-operative Group is increasing the number of Fairtrade product lines as part of a three-year ethical strategy (Milmo, 2011). A lot of fair trade products can be also found on large retailers in France and other developed countries (Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008).

Some are concerned about the dilution of fair trade ideology by the market when there is an alignment with large distribution. The fact is that Fair trade operates simultaneously «inside and outside» or «in and against» the market (Renard, 2003), and one of the challenges for its growth is that becoming mainstream could eliminate the need for certification, or that its embracing by big corporations (creating their own labels) could deviate the movement of its principles.

The efforts of labelling authorities to create a frame for Fair Trade transactions are constantly being challenged by the overhead created by actors, such big corporations, that try to adapt the system to their own interests, or by producers that try to negotiate direct with large retailers for a bonus price without the participation of Fair Trade certifiers, or consumers that don't know exactly what labels stand for and make decisions based on other variables, such as price or convenience.

3.2. LOCAL FOOD–RE-LOCALIZATION THROUGH SHORT DISTRIBUTION CIRCUITS

Local and regional food systems are increasingly discussed as a solution to the issues in the globalized food system (Kremer & DeLiberty, 2011). According to 2007 Census in the USA, direct-to-consumer sales is still less than 1.0% of all agricultural sales (Martinez *et al.*, 2010), but despite this, the number of farmers' markets has grown consistently in the U.S. from 1994 to 2009, and local food is increasingly being promoted on small shops and also on large retailers.

Local food is claimed to offer an alternative to the globalised system and a number of potential benefits such a reduction in «food miles», market opportunities for producers who are struggling to remain competitive in global market place, income multiplier effects, social justice and food security, land preservation, rural development and better information flow to consumers about food origin and special production features, keeping traditional foods and food knowledge alive, and re-establishing trust between producers and consumers (Morris & Buller, 2003; Kremer & DeLiberty, 2011).

Alternative local food systems take the form of re-localized, re-embedded, re-connected or re-spatialized relationships of food production and consumption such as farmer markets, community-supported agriculture and public procurement initiatives (Kirwan & Foster, 2007; Feagan & Henderson, 2009). It is also supported in some countries by government programs, with U.S. maybe standing out as the major example (Martinez *et al.*, 2010).

Local food is preferred for several reasons, according to its advocates: because of its taste, freshness and quality, or because it is healthy, or because is considered more authentic (Anderson, 2008). It also involves notions of the contribution to environment and community building, food security, animal welfare and human rights, ethics and altruistic behaviour (Bingen, Sage & Siriex, 2011).

One of the features of local food is the so-called «flexible localism», as the definition of local changes depends on the ability to source supplies within a short distance or further away, such as within a State, or to the interests of actors, with retailers for example using 'local' in very vague terms, determined by the need to source by local suppliers (Ilbery and Maye, 2006; Morris and Buller, 2003).

The most common definition of local food derives from the distance between the point of production and the point of consumption. In the U.S. is common the idea of a 100 mile diet (Bingen *et al.*, 2011). The National Association of Farmers' Markets, in the United Kingdom, defines local food in terms of the radius of the market, with 30 miles the ideal, but 50 miles is also acceptable. The same group recognises that local food can also be defined using a county boundary or another geographic boundary such as a National Park (Jones, Comfort & Hillier, 2004). The USDA 2008 Farm Act presents a broader perspective, defining the total distance that a product can be transported and still be eligible for marketing as a «locally or regionally produced agricultural food product» as less than 400 miles from its origin, or the state in which it is produced (Martinez *et al.*, 2010; Kremer & DeLiberty, 2011).

There is also little consistency in the ways in which the concept of the region is used in relation to food. For example, the word regional is often linked to, or used interchangeably, with the concept of the local. The concept of the region, therefore, is used differently according to each context, and this can be conceptualized as an «outcome of the social, political and bio-physical issues» (Kneafsey, 2010: 179).

DuPuis & Goodman (2005) criticize the «unreflexive» and «normative» localism that impute the local scale with a particular set of norms or imaginaries about place. One argument is that even if major elements of a food system were confined to a particular region (for example, production, processing, retailing, consumption) the likelihood of creating some kind of self-sustaining, «enclosed» food system would be minimal given the complex nature of farming and food processing operations nowadays (Kneafsey, 2010). In other words, is difficult to establish general properties, as local-scale food systems can be either just or unjust, sustainable or unsustainable, secure or insecure, because they are socially constructed (Kneafsey, 2010).

Unlike the fair trade, the market for local food is not restricted to developed countries. But the characteristics of the local food movement in developed countries appear to be very different, as they claim for abstract factors, such as patriotic issues, ethical behaviour, environmental benefits, animal welfare and other altruistic dimensions in spite of the product characteristics (price, quality, freshness, health), which are still more common in the developed countries (Weatherell, C., Tregear, A. & Allinson, J., 2003); Siriex, Kledal & Sulitang, 2011).

Some market studies of locally produced foods suggest that although most of the UK consumers are interested in local foods, there is a much smaller proportion of people who actively seek to purchase them, with estimates ranging from 6.0% to 10.0%. Actual demand is weaker because these benefits are traded-off against more prosaic everyday life factors such as price, accessibility and convenience, which are still very important to many people, even in affluent societies (Weatherell *et al.*, 2003).

Some consumers who choose local foods are seeking to engage in a wholly different type of relationship with farmers and food producers, based on reciprocity, trust, and shared values (Weatherell *et al.*, 2003). But the «turn to local» usually requires important adaptations in food purchasing, preparation and eating. It also requires shifts in family budgeting and usually a greater allocation of income to food purchases (Bingen *et al.*, 2011). The consumer has also to deal with the uncertainty and seasonality (if you decide shopping on farmers markets, you will have to adapt to their working days, usually 2 days a week) (Bingen *et al.*, 2011).

Local food supply is made by distinct distribution mechanisms, as where transactions are conducted directly between farmers and consumers (direct-to-consumer) –farmers markets, farm stands/on farm sales, farm shops, box distribution schemes, community supported agriculture– or through retailers, government entities, hospitals and schools (Martinez *et al.*, 2010; Morris & Buller, 2003).

Large retailers are showing increasing interest in local food (Morris & Buller, 2003). A recent inspection of the top U.S. food retailers' websites provides some insight into mainstream retailer ventures into local food marketing and prominence attained by the local food movement (Martinez *et al.*, 2010). Major retailers in the UK now report a growing enthusiasm for sourcing local/regional food (Ilbery & Maye, 2006).

Local food systems cannot be conceived merely as a delineated geography or a flow of consumer goods from production to consumption; they are natural and social networks formed through common knowledge and understanding of particular places, embedded in their localities (Kremer & DeLiberty, 2011), and its operation is therefore extremely dependent on the arrangements established locally. The construction of local is both socially and culturally specific (Seyfang, 2006).

Thus, it does not make sense to define a single model of market development for local food as the processes are variable. We will try to define some basic features to better understand the basic mechanisms on the creation of these markets, identifying some of the multiple and local ways of accomplishing the «quality» of products and the nature of trade (Callon *et al.*, 2002).

3.3 ORGANIC FOOD–A WAY TO RECONCILIATE FOOD PRODUCTION AND ENVIRONMENT

Organic agriculture is defined as *«a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved»* (IFOAM, 2011: 2).

Organic production refers to agriculture which does not use artificial chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and animals reared in more natural conditions, without the routine use of drugs, antibiotics and wormers that are usually common in intensive livestock farming (Seyfang, 2006). In this sense, «organic» is merely a production technique, but inserted on a ideological frame of sustainable consumption rationale, for which organic food is the result of a production method more in harmony with the environment and local ecosystems.

Organic food has until the 1990s been a niche environmental interest, expressing a desire to bypass intensive agriculture and return to small-scale production (Seyfang, 2006). At the early stages, organic agriculture relied on a set of shared values and informal norms rather than on official criteria (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011). Product differentiation, trust and transparency were organised through specific marketing channels: peasant markets, specific brands, contract farming, local-producer-consumer associations and specialised health stores (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011).

But the organic system is now practiced in a significant portion of countries around the world, with a rapid expansion, especially in Europe, USA, Japan, Australia and South America. This expansion is associated in large part to the increased costs of conventional agriculture, environmental degradation and growing consumer demand for «clean» products free of chemicals and / or genetically modified. Thus, several farmers diversified to organic production as a means of securing more sustainable livelihoods in the face of declining incomes within the conventional sector.

Consumer demand for organic products is concentrated in North America and Europe, and these two regions constitute 97% of global revenue (Willer & Kilcher, 2009).

However, there are some challenges for organic growth. The amount of land being converted to organic cultivation across the UK has dropped by two-thirds since 2007, according to statistics released by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as falling sales of organic products mean fewer farmers are seeing a reason to change. The fact is that when price of conventional agriculture products are competitive, farmers tend to allow more land for conventional than to organic production. Sales of organic products fell by 5.9% in the UK in 2010 (Harvey, 2011).

Consumers purchase organic food for health reasons, better taste, food safety, ethical and moral reasons (Makatoumi, 2002; Seyfang, 2006). Organic products are usually sold with a price premium, and that is why most of consumers belong to higher classes on the developed world. Organic products are distributed in short local circuits but also on long circuits from South to North on the globe.

Supermarkets adopted organic food, and supermarket-driven supply chain usually buys organic food overseas (65% of organic produce eaten in the U.K. is imported and 82% is sold through supermarkets) (Seyfang, 2006). The creation of large scale retailing specialized on organic food, as Whole Foods, with more than 310 stores in North America and the United Kingdom, is another important market feature.

In the 1990s producers were attracted to organic farming as en economic proposition rather than an ideal form of farming, which according to some in the organic movement signalled a process of conventionalisation in which ideals were given up in favour of profits, thereby circumscribing the potential of the organic movement to radically change how farming is done (Van der Kamp, 2011). Increasing demand for organic produce and healthy food is matched by industry and large retailing attempts to meet this demand, but through a productive logic that seems antagonistic to the historical agro-ecological ideals of organic production (Niles & Roff, 2008).

A crucial question when it comes to marketing of organic products is certification. In UK, The Soil Association –founded in 1946– introduced the first voluntary product standards for organic produce in the 1960s, with the aim of promoting more sustainable forms of production and consumption (Van der Kamp, 2011). In 1972, Nature & Progres, British Soil Association, the Danish Biodynamic Association and the U.S. Roadale Press set up the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), an influential organ for promoting organic standards. The creation of national standards of organic regulations introduced the mandatory use of third-party certification (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011). IFOAM is still active, and set up the IFOAM accreditation programme in 1992 to provide an international service that would allow «one inspection, one certification, one accreditation».

The EU was the first to work with the standards for organic agriculture. In 1991 was created and approved the Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91, a uniform standard for organic farming, labelling and certification (version 834/2007), with a new revised version in 2009.

4. ALTERNATIVE FOOD MARKETS, THEIR EVOLUTION, INTERRELATIONS AND MARKET DEVICES: THREE DISTINCT MARKETS, OR VERSIONS OF THE SAME?

On this section we will discuss how alternative food markets are being created and modified by the actions of several actors, and how these agency mechanisms lead to convergences and divergences that can strengthen or weaken these alternative chains, as well as their perspectives for growth or stabilization.

One common feature regarding the evolution of alternative markets for food is the last few years, come from the introducing of new product qualities which are not related to the product features (such as taste, convenience, composition or price) but from the features of its mode of production: an environmentally friendly farming process (as in the case of organic food), a re-connection with local farming by short supply chains (local food) or a fair trade relationship in the supply chain (fair trade products). Another way of viewing this is considering that «instead of launching a product in the world, fair traders attempt to launch a world into their products» (Neyland & Simakova, 2010). The same can be said of local food claims: the ideal local food, made of small organic producers, respecting the environment and selling high quality products, is incorporated to local food meanings.

These features are now valuable on market, and may be identified as quality in exchange processes. Social movement organizations have been acting as real market actors, and succeeded in introducing and stabilizing new consumers' preferences that firms decided to take into consideration in order to capture new market shares. Several market devices were introduced, such as independent stores, standards and brands, advertising and educational devices. These markets are political fields where value is constituted by the efforts of both market actors and non-market actors, as NGO's and the State to define practices and norms of valuation (Dubuisson-Quellier, Lamine & Le Velly, 2011).

The government is an important player in this market. There is a whole set of political initiatives from Lancaster City Council and Lancashire County Council aiming to promote fair trade and local food. On 2004 Lancaster district was awarded the title of 'Fairtrade District' by the Fairtrade Foundation. This certification acknowledges the number of outlets supplying Fairtrade products in the district as well as the many organisations which support Fairtrade. There are groups supported by the city council working together to champion Fairtrade in the community, with a directory of places where Fairtrade products can be found and claims for action trying to convince schools and workplaces to go Fairtrade.

How to influence consumers is one major challenge for actors involved with AAFN. Using ANT framework, Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine (2008) assess the way different fair trade organizations try to enrol consumers in what they define as a fair relationship with producers. Two processes of consumer involvement were identified: delegation, based on market mechanisms such as trademarks and labels, which allow consumers to make their choice in the market. The other mechanism is empowerment, and it is based on contractual mechanisms between consumers and producers and on the construction of collective choices. The main fair trade organizations rely on delegation, where as several new entrants on this markets as well as local food networks emphasize the notion of empowerment. On a convention theory analogy, delegation regime is similar to the civic world, while empowerment regime would correspond to domestic world.

The delegation regime, in which consumers delegate to the standard-making organization or the labelling scheme the operations of selection and control, is in the core of organic and fair trade labels, while in the empowerment model, as in some specific cases in CSA schemes, consumers are actively involved in the construction of the production and marketing system (Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008).

The delegation model depends on the presence of credence attributes (Nelson, 1970), which cannot be discovered even after production consumption, which means that a strong information asymmetry between consumer and producer is present.

Both models depend on two main market devices that operate on alternative food markets: communication tools and standard devices.

4.1. COMMUNICATION TOOLS AS MARKET DEVICES

In this section, we will focus on communication discourses as market devices that have an important role in shaping AAFN transactions, especially because most of the qualification techniques on these markets are based on non-material features, such as ethical and environmental characteristics on production and distribution that are not visible to consumers.

One important characteristic of communication devices in AAFN is that the arguments used by local food, fair trade and organic discourses are quite similar, and that common terms are used. For example, local food is advertised as fair (Booths, a Lancashire local retail chain slogan for vegetable locally sourced is: *«We believe that food should taste good, be sustainably produced, with growers* *fairly treated and compensated*»). Booths has also a special program to preserve «British forgotten foods», one example being the shrimps from local Morecambe bay. Mixed claims of fairness, sustainability and locality can be found.

Abel and Cole, one of the largest distributors of box schemes in U.K. promote local food, organic food and fair trade products simultaneously. Trying to create a relationship consumer-producer, they present photos and stories of some of their producers in U.K. «*Good food, the right way. Welcome to Abel & Cole-Organic vegetable boxes, fruit, meat & more. The best organic food delivered to your door*». They match health and ethical claim with an attribute that is usually absent from alternative food markets: convenience. Consumers are stimulated to delegate what will be on the boxes to producers, and the seasonality, that on conventional models appear as problem, is used as a marketing claim. In Booths, the «products of the season» claim is also used.

Moreover, fairness is one of the 4 organic principles (IFOAM, 2011): «*Principle of fairness: organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities*». Soil Association created an Ethical Trade Standard, justifying that «*While we believe many organic businesses are already trading ethically, until now the Soil Association organic standards haven't directly assessed this*». In the website they make clear the difference between ethical trade and fair trade labels: «*Initially we worked closely with the Fairtrade Foundation to try and develop a joint standard. However, whilst we shared important similarities in our aims and objectives, there were a number of key differences: a) All Ethical Trade products must be organic; b) Ethical Trade isn't limited to specific products, like sugar or bananas. It applies to anything that can also be certified organic; c) Products from both developed and developing countries can be certified to Ethical Trade*» (Soil Association, 2011). They state that trade injustice does not affect only developing countries, and that in UK farmers are not being paid a fair price for their produce, clearly trying to encompass local as an quality attribute.

The mixed claims are also used by large producers: Cadbury, for instance, use this on their «Cadbury Dairy Milk» chocolate package: «*We love Ghana and we love farmers. Which is why we love farmers from Ghana. In fact, we've been working with them for 100 years. So we're very excited this chocolate is Fairtrade certified. Whoopee! Now you get the same delicious-tasting Cadbury Dairy milk with not just a glass and a half of fresh milk from the British Isles, but with Fairtrade Ghanaian cocoa beans too...*» This communication device clearly tries to take the best of fair trade and local food (following flexible localism, here the local is «British») appeals on the same product.

Some organisations claim a broader definition of fair trade that would include local exchange, which they present as North-North fair trade (Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008). However, linking fair trade to local foods may disadvantage the Southern producers for whom the model was originally developed. The conflation of local with fair threatens to reproduce a defensive localism that will reinforce problematic North/South and internal cleavages (Niles & Roff, 2008). The truth is that most of fair trade products are not produced, for several reasons, on countries from the North, so Fair trade products do not compete with local products on these markets. And the Ethical Trade created by Soil Association is doing exactly the opposite, bringing fairness to organic certification, and allowing North-North transactions to benefit from fairness certification.

This similarity of discourses arises one question: Is it possible to create one single model of alternative food chain, encompassing local, fair and organic attributes? A unified discourse that would encompass organic, fair trade and local food qualifications could be adopted, as they share similar arguments for quality construction, as local development, environmental friendly production, fair relationships and prices, etc. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely to happen at a global level as there are too many actors involved, with different interests.

The arena in which actors operate and try to politically influence markets seems to be narrower for local food in comparison to fair trade or organic food. The links to local foods are more uncertain, as «local food» is not such a precisely defined term as «organic» or «fair trade», nor does a comparable system of regulation and certification exist affecting consumers' decisions (Weatherell *et al.*, 2003).

Other important actor is the consumer. Consumers are articulated as an evasive but powerful constituent performing fair trade in an unpredictable manner against attempts to shape markets according to particular templates, leading to a deep uncertainty over the prospects for alternative markets (Neyland & Symankova, 2010). Consumers may not be aware that they are buying fair trade, organic or local food. They may choose farmer markets because of freshness or price, and not because products are local, or by a civic motive. For some products, like bananas or coffee in U.K., fair trade has become the mainstream, and if you don't want to buy a fair trade product you will have to engage on searching for this product. The dependence of alternative markets discourses on notions of the consumer can thus be seen as practical means to manage the tension between more or less straightforward normative ways of achieving fairness and the contingencies of assessing and representing the efforts to accomplish fairness, through audit and certification or in communication strategies (Neyland & Symankova, 2010).

4.2. STANDARDS AS MARKET DEVICES

Standards are the values against which people, practices and things are measured, while standardization is the process of making things standard. Standardize are highly political attempts to remove politics from the exchange process, to make it a market economy rather than a moral economy (Loconto & Busch, 2010).

The growth of alternative food markets will probably depend on large-scale formatting of exchange (Araujo *et al.,* 2010), transporting an action into a formal, calculative space, which on these markets is being attempted by the establishment of normalize practices (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007). The intervention of third parts, as certifiers or retailers, to format market agencies, seems to be the only alternative to allow this growth, and it is becoming increasingly prominent throughout the world, particularly in global agro-food value chains (Gibbon, Bair & Ponte, 2008; Loconto & Busch, 2010).

In its current form, the sustainability of standards for fair trade or organic is made through multi-stakeholders interest to guarantee substitutability at the world level between suppliers (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011) using a multiple tiers of audits and oversights. At the same time standardization leads to differentiation, that involves using standardized practices or products to differentiate between products, and similarity, because within the standard product they must have the same standardized «qualities» (Loconto & Busch, 2010). In other words, this qualified markets (within fair trade or organic labels) become compatible –and they can circulate in common space defined by the standards– (Van der Kamp, 2011).

But the overflows generated by those who do not agree with the certification model can lead this to a whole different direction, as removing politics from exchanges on «moral economy» markets is unacceptable for some actors. Daviron & Vagneron (2011) say that the process of sustainability standardization is still both incomplete and fragile and is threatened by the space for contestation opened up by the watering down of the original principles supported by fair trade and organic initiatives.

The conflict between certification bodies and representative association for organic and fair trade production seems to be the most important barrier to a unified certification model for sustainable food production, encompassing ethical and sustainable norms.

Other dilemma involving certification of organic and fair trade products is the fact that the more restrictive the rules, the more difficult to find farmers who can accomplish it, and the market is self-limited by the norms. On the other hand, loose and more inclusive rules could lead to overproduction and discredit on the part of consumers. The standards can be considered a process of singularisation (Van der Kamp, 2011), making something recognizable for other actors. This guarantees that conventional products are excluded from the «qualified market», but also can exclude potential actors.

Another fundamental conflict relates to the justification for long circuit food distribution. Ecological citizenship which calls for cutting material consumption and hence a reduction in globally transported foodstuffs, is in conflict with a particular type of global citizenship (on the core of fair trade principles) that holds that participation in international trade is the most effective route to sustainable development for poor countries (Seyfang, 2006). Furthermore, much transportation of food around the globe is only economically rational due to environmental and social externalities being excluded from fuel pricing.

To better understand the sustainable standards, we opted to analyse two important ethical standards on the U.K. market. In general, the Specifications for Fairtrade (FLO) label and Ethical Trade (Soil Association) labels are similar. Both impose conditions on hired labour, based on International Labour Organization rules, as the incentive to unions, no prejudice, and salaries above minimum or regional average. Information is another major issue, as specified on the need for clear contracts to run the transactions, and also on the full knowledge of fair trade principles by the farmers.

However, Fairtrade label carries important elements for framing transactions instead of only production. One of this refers on traceability of products, which must be clearly visible by means of documents, trying to avoid that secondary products labelled fair trade could use non-Fairtrade sourced inputs.

Other important mechanisms regarding pricing are established but they apply directly only in transactions between farmers and buyers of primary production. Pre-finance of production is compulsory for Fairtrade relationships, and price is based on calculation mechanisms established by FLO and specific for each product, as we can see on Table 1.

Fairtrade minimum price is the lowest possible price that may be paid by buyers to producers for a product to become certified against the Fairtrade standards. **Fairtrade premium** is an amount paid to producers in addition to the payment for their products. The Fairtrade premium is intended for investment in the producers' business and community (for a small farmers' organization or contract production set-up) or for the socioeconomic development of the workers and their community (for a hired labour situation). **Fairtrade price** means the total price paid to producers and includes the Fairtrade minimum price (or relevant market price where

Table 1

Calculation devices established for prices on some Fairtrade labelled products

Product	Product variety	Price applies to	Currency/ quantity x unit	Price level	Fairtrade minimum price	Fairtrade premium	Valid from
Coffee Robusta	Conventional washed	worldwide (SPO)	USD / 1 pound	FOB	1,05	0.20 (of which at least 0.05 for productivity and/or quality)	Apr. 1st 2011
Coffee Robusta	Organic washed	worldwide (SPO)	USD / 1 pound	FOB	Organic differential: +0.30	see convention al coffee	Apr. 1st 2011
Cocoa	Organic, powder	worldwide (SPO)	USD / 1 MT	FOB	refer to formula in product	470	Jan. 1st 2012
Cocoa	Convention al powder	worldwide (SPO)	USD / 1 MT	FOB	refer to formula in product	470	Jan. 1st 2013

Source: FLO (2011)

applicable) and the Fairtrade premium (FLO, 2011).

It's interesting that Fairtrade label establishes an additional minimum price for organic products, trying to encompass another dimension on their framing device. This sophisticated mechanism for pricing Fairtrade products is one of the most important market devices[10] operating in agro-food chains. When fairtrade price is lower than current market prices, then the fairtrade price must be at least the market price. This is a cause of problems when market prices are high, and fairtrade doesn't seem to be so attractive for producers.

This well-defined mechanism of calculation in Fairtrade transactions between farmers and buyers differs from the fairtrade transactions downstream, and also the organic and local chain transactions that rely more on a free and open mechanism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of alternative food markets focusing on their evolution shows that the complex process of development involve a multiplicity of actors, making use of a set of market devices to format transactions and qualify the goods.

Two special set of actors stands out as the most powerful ones, at least for fair trade and organic markets: certification bodies and retailers. Through two fundamental market devices, standardization and discourse, they aim to qualify food products mainly because of their credence attributes, especially the ethical trade and sustainable production (green) dimensions.

Local food markets, on the other hand, constitute a much unstable market construction, locally variable and with no clear leading actor, even though the power of retailers is growing in the last years.

Two main questions were raised in this paper: The first one regarding the possibility of convergence between this multiple alternative markets, leading to one single alternative market encompassing fairness, environmental and local dimensions. The convergence in the discourse seems to be a supporting factor, but the dispute between several actors not to lose their hegemonic position certainly points out to a very difficult reconciliation. The other is the clear opposition of local short distribution and the long distribution circuits South-North. Moreover, it seems to be a clear division inside the sustainable markets, between those who defend social constructed product valuation and those that support standardization.

The interdependence of different players, as well as a range of possible interaction between conventional and alternative pathways (Whatmore & Thorne, 1997) with the presence of actors that are engaged in both (as for example farmers and retailers), also makes it difficult to establish clear market boundaries.

There is a multiplicity of actors trying to politically influence AAFN: i) consumers, mainly through individualized collective action (Micheletti, 2003) where citizens can express individual goals within collective and political perspectives, but without committing themselves to collective action (Dubuisson-Quellier *et al.,* 2011); ii) certifiers, specially on organic and fair trade, try to establish standards and control the size of the markets; iii) government, either on local or national levels, support alternative markets trying to influence school food supply and even a guide to where this type of food can be found; iv) farmers, which adapt their production processes to achieve organic of fair trade standards, engage on direct relationships with consumers through CSAs, farm sales or farmers markets; and, v) large retailers, which adopt products from alternative chains, create their own policy and try to associate their brands to this.

The actors are somehow involved in what Callon (1998b) calls the hybrid forum, or networks of socio-material *actants*, where several discursive practices materialized on labels, packaging, goods and advertising offers particular versions, and a multiplicity of ways of calculating and strategizing on a constant framing and overflowing that constitute the market making (Neyland & Simakova, 2010). In this process market evolves on a fairly unpredictable manner. And in this sense, it doesn't seem feasible a unified strategic approach for the several alternative food chains, even though it might happen eventually if strong convergences emerges on the hybrid forum.

The second question involves the efficiency of standard mechanisms for the growth. It seems clear that the adoption of certification allowed the growth of fair trade and organic in the last 20 years, and even though we do not have an unified exchange format neither in organic nor in fair trade, basic dimensions were established, clearly reducing the diversity of calculation mechanisms on the transactions. But a crucial question involves the social results of this large scale formatting, with claims that inequality levels on alternative food chains could be at least similar to traditional chains (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011), especially with the growing retailer power, non-monitoring of the downstream actors margins' (*e.g.,* there are no Fairtrade Minimum Prices defined for secondary products and their derivatives) and exclusion of small producers by means of high demanding technical requirements established in the certification rules.

In this sense, local food appears to be the one single alternative model still loosely formatted that allows multiple negotiation and calculation mechanisms. IFOAM (2011) recognizes this on its website: *«However, besides third party certification and formal standards, there are other methods of organic quality assurance for certain situations and markets. These can be in the form of self-declaration, or participatory guarantee systems, which are seen by IFOAM as suitable for local markets that are not so anonymous as the standard trade».* This alternative presents strengths, as a fairer market structure, that allows consumers and producers to be actively engaged on the quality construction, and weaknesses, as the lack of recognizable dimensions for qualifying goods which impose limits for the growth, as the pursuit of multiple, non-aligned, or radically different values in a market renders the upscaling of techniques to format exchange both difficult and contestable (Araujo *et al.,* 2010). Furthermore, the emergent dominance of large retailers on the distribution of local products may lead to a «conventional-like» model being established, and eventually differences between conventional and alternative model can be minimum.

The evolution of alternative food markets as an alternative paradigm seems to be restricted to the marginal empowerment initiatives in which social/domestic mechanisms of qualification can be implemented. Dubuisson-Quellier *et al.* (2011) made an important study on how this alternative is operated in France through case studies on food activist groups. On the other hand, the re-commoditization of food chains through the incorporation of sustainability standards allows the growth of alternative valuation mechanisms, but incorporating the same logic used by the conventional model. The asymmetrical relationship established with the consumer on this situation, as customer's calculability capacity is limited on information provided by standards, is another important feature of this market.

As a research agenda, we propose that a more detailed study on the relationships on the distribution chains could highlight the agency mechanisms that are established downstream on the chain. Other important research project could focus on the «old fashion» small stores, as the world shops, that still carry fair, sustainable and sometimes local dimensions on a more socially negotiated basis, and also on the highly empowered relationships found on Commodity Supported Agriculture models and similar arrangements.

The use of ANT concepts to understand market mechanisms allows new ways for investigation of market practices that can help marketing academy on dealing with issues largely neglected on the field.

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