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Social innovation in alternative food networks. The role of co-producers in Campi Aperti

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ABSTRACT In recent years, alternative food networks are emerging as alternative solutions to the mainstream food industry. These innovative ways of producing, delivering and consuming food can lead to new opportunities but also challenges for social analysis. On the one hand, they reveal new reflexive and resilience capacities that show social actors' creativity in re-organising their activities as a response to the recent socioeconomic transformations. On the other hand, the relations between producers and consumers are being reshaped through practices, narratives and actions from both the field of production and of consumption. Considering the prosumer as an emblematic figure of the current social economic configuration, which is strongly characterized by hybridization, our paper explores the relation between contemporary social movements, social innovation and alternative food networks. Drawing upon the concept of social innovation conceived through a territorial approach, we will examine the locally embedded creative capacity of social groups in the field of organic food production, distribution and consumption. Empirical data from an Italian case study, Campi Aperti, will allow us to show how the issue of food sovereignty is addressed by small-scale local actors. In this paper, we use the case study to critically reflect on the rearrangement and networking of the producer-consumer relation and inter-action, as well as the constraints these actors experience. We conclude by illustrating how such local initiatives may contribute to the promotion of political activism able to transform collective voice into alternative social practices, hence creating new meanings and narratives.

1. Prosumerism and agriculture: a short introduction

The theoretical framework we adopted to reconsider the reconfiguration of the relations between producers and consumers is constituted by reflections on: the coexistence of different forms of economic integration (Polanyi, 2001[1944]); the complex relation between economic and social dimensions; the influence of socially innovative processes. As Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010, pp. 14-15) suggest, "production predominated for almost two centuries, but a rather dramatic shift began to take place, especially beginning in the USA, with the close of the Second World War. (...) This process fed on itself as the success of the post-war economy in terms of the mass-production of consumer goods led to ever-increasing consumer interest and demand (...). Production was still seen as pre-eminent, but the pendulum was swinging in the direction of the centrality of consumption (...)". In his book "The Consumer Society", Baudrillard (1998 [1970]), for example, describes a society where consumption, more than production, influences social norms and values, as well as people's behaviours and attitudes. The symbol of this social, economic, but also cultural change is the "cathedral of consumption" (Ritzer, 2005), above all shopping malls - but also amusement parks, fast food restaurants and outlet stores. These are all physical and symbolic spaces expressly dedicated to mass consumption, where products are always available in huge quantities. Similar ideas are included in the concept of "consumer culture" (Featherstone, 1991; Goodman, Cohen, 2004).

In recent decades, however, boundaries between consumption and production are becoming less rigid. The reasons for this ontological mutation are diverse: technological innovation, the gradual change of the role of consumers, and the possibility to participate, through consumption, to public life and to the transformation of cultural values are only some of them. In this changing context, a

new figure is emerging, that of “prosumer”, assuming an in-between role in contemporary economic system.

The concept of prosumer has been introduced by Toffler (1980) over three decades ago to underline this change. Despite some scholars even claim that consumption and production have never been completely separated (Ritzer, Jungerson, 2010), Toffler sustains we are moving towards a phase where the distinction between these two spheres are becoming less clear. Toffler defines this as the “third wave”. The focus here is centred not only on the dynamics of mutual influence, but also on epistemological and ethical issues linked to the new investigated figure of prosumer (e.g.: motivations, social hierarchies, action spaces, empowerment and voice, etc.). A particularly investigated topic in the last years concerns, for example, the role of prosumers in relation to the digital revolution, the global diffusion of Internet and the shift from the Web into Web 2.0 systems (Beer, Burrows, 2007; Ritzer, 2015).¹

Recent studies will either focus on how the prosumer moves between this new complex digital environment and the analogic world, or concentrate on the role of the prosumer in other social spheres, such as tourism, culture and creativity, and to some extent agriculture (Costa, 2005; Paltrinieri, Esposti, 2013). However, since prosumerism represents a growing phenomenon, it would need further investigation by scholars, practitioners and experts. In fact, several experiences combining production and consumption in agriculture are establishing in different parts of the world, also as a consequence of the emergence of “short food supply chain” (Marsden, Banks, Bristow, 2000). Either linked to forms of political participation, or connected to the research of sustainable lifestyles, these practices deserve to be analysed. Indeed, they often combine forms of hybridisation between the economy and political activism, or they promote alternative lifestyles and processes of community engagement. Just to cite a few examples, some practices refer to the combination of technological innovations with architectural design for the satisfaction of basic needs, encouraging individuals to turn to prosumerism (Prakasha *et al.*, 2015) and sustaining environmentally friendly lifestyles - e.g.: self-sufficient smart homes with systems of i-energy, aquaponics and vertical farming. Prosumerism also plays a fundamental role in ethical purchasing groups (Brunori, Rossi, Guidi, 2012) as well as in organic food consumption (Paltrinieri, Spillare, 2018). Here, the emergence of new formal and informal groups recognising the importance of buying fresh organic products, the need for healthier lifestyles, the inclusion of consumers’ voices in agricultural production and the diffusion of innovative supermarkets self-managed by consumers, create new spaces for social research. Intervening in both production and consumption, consumers are no more “silent producers” (de Certau, 1980) but they represent active subjects who accept, refuse or transform what the system offers (Eckhardt, Mahi, 2004), intervening directly, in accordance to their beliefs and values, in the production processes. In these spaces, consumers can even become more critical and active. Therefore, we can speak nowadays of citizen-consumers, able to act individually and collectively to influence policy makers and business strategies (Arcidiacono, 2013).

Thus, such examples not only represent innovative forms of agriculture – with a less clear or missing differentiation between producers and consumers. These are also spaces of alternative political participation and collective reflection (Brunori, Rossi, Favilli, 2012). It is in this context that agriculture may also play a central role within local development and community engagement processes.

At the same time, when dealing with the concept of prosumer, we should also consider some negative consequences that a neoliberal interpretation of this concept may bring. In fact, promoting the consumer to the role of prosumer also hides some forms of disengagement of the market and capital, influencing the accountability of consumers.

¹ Particularly interesting is the perspective that considers the “paradox of the prosumer”: on the one hand, Web2.0 and social media have given new possibilities to social subjects to share their opinion and to produce their contents (Degli Esposti, 2015; Lacy, 2008); on the other hand, the prosumers’ free labour is exploited by capitalist corporations to generate profit (Coté, Pybus, 2007; Mezzadra, Borghi, 2011; Fuchs, 2011).

To reflect on the role of prosumers in organic agriculture, we will present the case of Campi Aperti, an association of producers and citizens located in the city of Bologna (Northeast of Italy) supporting, as its mission, organic farming and the right of communities to decide the production of their food, nutrition and land management. Considering the case study of Campi Aperti as an example of social innovation in the agricultural field, the aim of our research was to investigate the relationship between contemporary alternative food networks and social innovation in a local context – in this specific case the city of Bologna and its surrounding area.

The other focus of our analysis is the specific relation between consumers and producers. Since in Campi Aperti, consumers are referred to as “co-producers”, we tried to investigate this relation in order to better understand to what extent it really constitutes a form of prosumerism. Are co-producers involved in the production process? Which are the dynamics generated by the consumer-producer relation? Can co-producers be considered prosumers, or do they represent an independent and new typology of consumers?

Finally, the relationship between producers and consumers is strongly connected to the important issue of hybridisation. As we will show in our theoretical framework, as well as in the analysis of the case study, Campi Aperti represents a hybridisation between economic and social elements. Specifically, this innovative network influences three main forms of economic integration (exchange, redistribution, and reciprocity), which come across within the same context. In particular, we will display how this alternative food network represents a form hybridisation between the social (personal relations) and the economic dimension (the market), as well as political participation through agricultural production – sometimes in a contrasted relationship with public institutions. As far as hybridisation is concerned, the main questions driving our research are the following: what is the (re)configuration of economic, social and political elements in Campi Aperti? Are these dimensions interrelated? To what extent can this practice be considered social innovation?

2. Theoretical framework

In his book, *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi (2001[1944]) distinguishes two types of definitions of the ‘economy’, one formal and the other substantive. Formal economy fits into the classic view of economy, which looks at the market as the most suitable institution to ensure an efficient redistribution of goods and services (Caillé, 2003). Polanyi defines the second approach of the economy, which is more “social” in its nature, as substantive economy: “The economy is an institutionalized process of interactions between man and nature that allows for a regular supply of material means in order to satisfy needs (Caillé, 2003, p. 221, our translation)”. This approach emphasises the relationships between individuals who are not purely rational actors (Laville, 2008). Castel (2006) points out that this conception of the economy is more focused on promoting solidarity than individual interests. Consequently, the greater good, or the collective good, seems to be, at least in principle, a central priority.

In the dominant economic system (e.g., the market system), we can find experiences in which social elements are strongly represented. They may include examples of cooperation or of social economy working in a predominantly market oriented economy. However, the presence of social elements in the economy is not always the same. It can change over time and it also depends on specific conjunctures (economic, political, etc.).

Polanyi refers to two trends in modern societies: the disembeddedness of the economy from the social and political spheres and, inversely, its re-embeddedness. The first shift refers to the idea that the self-regulating market tends to disembed the economy from the social and political spheres. This is because the economic system, based on a self-regulating market, considers man and nature as marketable resources (Polanyi, 2001[1944]). The second shift is in a way a response to the first one. That is, because of the disruptions caused by the market system, society responds by embedding the economy through forms of redistribution and reciprocity (Laville, 2008).

For Polanyi, “embeddedness refers to the incorporation of the economy in social, cultural and political rules that govern certain forms of production and the circulation of goods and services” (Laville, 2008, p. 2, our translation). These different rules are, in part, created through exchange, redistribution and reciprocity, which in our contemporary societies are embodied respectively in the market, the State and the community. The State being responsible for redistribution embeds the economy in politics since the rules regarding the offer of certain goods and services are established by the State and are therefore “subject to democratic control” (Laville, 2008, pp. 5-6). Moreover, reciprocity remains in relationships between individuals, whether at a personal or professional level. Reciprocity makes it possible to re-embed the economy in the social sphere.

These three forms of integration are all included in a given society at the same time, but one will be more dominant than the other two (Servet, 2007). In a society, the dominant form will influence social relations by dictating behaviours and ways of being, among other things (Kolm, 1984). On the other hand, the different forms of integration have no clearly defined boundaries, so they can blend with each other and thus find themselves in a state of hybridisation (Polanyi, 2001[1944]). An exchange can, for example, be redistributive and reciprocal at the same time. It is therefore a hybridisation of different forms of economic integration. This notion of hybridisation avoids a binary conception that would oppose on the one hand the market pole and on the other hand the non-market pole. For example, studies on the social and solidarity-based economy have showed, in Canada and in Europe (Anonymus, 2013; Lévesque, Mendell, 2005), that such organisations, just like other initiatives, represent an alternative. An alternative where its “market pole” would essentially respond to the market and its “non-market pole” refers more to forms of reciprocity. The concept of social enterprise “exemplifies how social innovation often involves taking economic risks and how entrepreneurship, so important in promoting regions going through a process of revitalization, can be expressed in multiple forms” (Defourny 2005, p. 21, our translation).

This hybridisation becomes an essential step in the ongoing processes of social transformation and of adaptation of societies to these transformations, such as the development of initiatives with high potential for social innovation. Social innovation can take shape within these processes of embedding and disembedding, where social movements for emancipation and collective actions also take place (Anonymus, 2016). This phenomenon is even more visible and central in the current context characterised by the erosion of the Fordist system and of the balance between market, State and family, which had long fuelled that system. These macro-social transformations have resulted in various types of social de-structuring (individualisation, de-standardisation of life courses, etc.) of individual, social and socio-political trajectories of several groups at different territorial levels. This raises the issues of social inclusion and recognition at the individual and group level on the one hand and at the community level on the other hand. Indeed, spatial divides occur and have effects on the position of certain territories in the development process. These fractures perpetuate problems of inequality in the distribution of wealth and accentuate sub-national disparities (e.g. demographic and socio-economic). The mobilisation of local territories through cooperation, social economy, community actions or other participatory approaches can provide a framework for rebuilding social ties and creating social innovation (Courlet, Pecqueur, 2013).

This then raises the question of a community’s ability to influence the orientations and decisions regarding its future, as well as the way in which innovative initiatives will be managed and governed. From a theoretical point of view, it is also necessary to conceptualise the role of the territory in social phenomena (trajectories, experiences, etc.), and in particular in the creation and dissemination of social innovations, by recognising its structuring effect, which is not limited to the context in which social innovation first takes place. The concept of territory now holds a central position in social sciences (Anonymous, 2016). It has been widely conceptualised in the research field of territorial development, which is not limited to the dynamics and actors of production, but increasingly takes into account a variety of actors, such as: “local government, decentralized State services, chambers of commerce, local governance mechanisms and associations” (Torre, 2015, p. 279, our translation). Territorial development and the potential for social innovation depend on the ability of local actors

to mobilise human and material resources and to join forces and synergise strengths for the benefit of a global change and innovation process. The history and trajectory of each territory can play a role by highlighting past experiences (positive or negative) in a path dependency approach (Julien, 1996). In our case study we will tackle, for example, the history and trajectory of the city and region of Bologna in which the initiative studied was developed.

3. Campi Aperti: agriculture and beyond²

3.1 Campi Aperti as social innovation?

Campi Aperti is a collaborative project including a network of producers of organic products and consumers - defined and self-defined as “co-producers”. The latter can buy products in eight markets in the city of Bologna³: “In Campi Aperti, food sovereignty is expressed through the creation of a direct relationship between those who produce and those who consume, and through the organisation of self-managed markets. Self-management is considered the starting point for the construction of an alternative production system, challenging unsustainable agricultural production through non-industrial peasant agriculture and the creation of the maximum value of human labour - achieved thanks to a decent income for producers. This innovative practice sustains the production of organic and local food - linked to the territoriality and the seasonal nature of the product - as the only production technique capable of preserving the environment. For this reason, health, the quality of the environment and the dignity of the workforce are objectives that we pursue through a relational economy that tries to foster mutual solidarity between consumers and producers” (Campi Aperti website, our translation). The core activities of Campi Aperti are the markets, where producers and coproducers (intended as consumers who buy their products at the market) meet and know each other. Other similar occasions are the regular meetings of the association that we will discuss later in this paper. As we will show, these aspects characterise Campi Aperti within the typology of face-to-face Short Food Supply Chain practice.⁴

Direct selling is a fundamental practice for the support of peasant agriculture and an activity that has attracted consumers’ interest in recent years. Through direct sales, co-producers are able to know who produces the goods they buy and eat, as they can ask the producer about the ways of production and the characteristics of the products. Another strong principle within this network is the short chain approach⁵. By selling “strictly organic” products that are “as local as possible” – generally within a distance of 70 km –, Campi Aperti tries to challenge mainstream production processes, where food comes from thousands of kilometers away, kept in cold storage for days, with very high costs in terms of resources and environmental pollution (Falguieres *et al.*, 2015).

² The information reported here were found on the website <http://www.campiaperti.org/> (last access on 12/02/2019) and on different documents collected during the field research.

³ These markets are organised every week in different part of the city of Bologna, in the centre (e.g.: the Monday market organised in the university area, precisely in Piazza Verdi), as well as in peripheral areas (e.g.: markets organised in Bolognina, an area behind the central railway station or Croce del Biacco, a neighbourhood located in the external periphery of the city, characterised by public housing projects and the Hub, which is the biggest reception centre for asylum seekers in the region Emilia-Romagna). For further information about the locations of the markets, please visit: <https://www.campiaperti.org/>, last access on 16/03/2019.

⁴ Referring to Short Food Supply Chain practices, Marsden, Banks and Bristow (2000, pp. 425-426) propose this categorisation: “Face-to-face: consumer purchases a product direct from the producer/processor on a face-to-face basis (...); Spatial proximity: products are produced and retailed in the specific region of production, and consumers are made aware of the ‘local’ nature of the product at the point of retail; Spatially extended: where value and meaning laden information about the place of production and those producing the food is translated to consumers who are outside of the region of production itself and who may have no personal experience of that region”.

⁵ According to Chaffotte and Chiffolleau (2007), short chain refers to the modes of production and distribution of food that limit the number of intermediaries between producers and consumers and/or the geographical distance between them.

Furthermore, by skipping various steps that goods have to bear in order to get to the big and small distribution (and thus eliminating additional costs that influence the price) direct selling allows, on the one hand, producers to get a fairer pay for their work and; on the other hand, consumers to have access to fresh and organic products at more affordable prices.

All these aspects will be integrated in the results of the following analysis, framing Campi Aperti as a socially innovative initiative, as it tries to answer an emerging need and aspiration, modifying social relations and power structures.⁶ Moreover, as for other social innovations, Campi Aperti is linked to the local context in terms of path-dependency and path-building (Fontan *et al.*, 2008; Anonymous, 2018). In other terms, Campi Aperti is strictly influenced by the local context and its related social, cultural, economic, historical and environmental resources.

Therefore, even if this paper will not directly investigate the territorial dimension, the link with the local context represents a starting point of analysis to better understand how these experiences led to the creation of eight markets – from Monday to Sunday – organised in different parts of the city. In this sense, our approach considers social innovation as a territorially embedded process. According to this perspective, the configurations of social relations, the institutional patterns, the economic asset, as well as the positioning of the area in comparison to a wider context and other social, economic, cultural, political, environmental specificities, influence the emergence and duration of social innovations. For this reason, it is important to recognise that some of the characteristics of the metropolitan area of Bologna might have influenced the development of Campi Aperti markets.

In fact, the local area of Bologna represents itself as an innovative context. In particular, after World War II, Bologna experienced the presence of a strong cooperative movement, bonds of trust linked to industrial districts and a sort of “natural” tendency towards cooperation and participation (e.g.: in urban regeneration plans) (Maccaferri, Pomebeni, 2013; Tarozzi, 2013; Varni, 2013). Moreover, since the ‘80s, alternative radical leftist movements gained in importance and spatial relevance (squats and occupied social centres). Nowadays, “the red Bologna and its region” is different from the past. Nevertheless, this territory is still characterised by a high level of social and relational capital, creative capacity and networking skills (Anonymus, 2016). These considerations are a useful starting point, in order to better understand the emergence of a collective initiative such as Campi Aperti.

3.2 The emergence of the initiative

The story of Campi Aperti is quite particular and merits deeper reflection. At the end of the ‘90s, the encounter between a group of farmers practicing organic farming and some responsible consumers gave life to the “Coordination for Food Sovereignty”. The Coordination group, through the “Food Self-Defense Gym” (in Italian: “Palestra di Autodifesa Alimentare”) was created to discuss and give concrete answers to the need for new modalities of doing agriculture, rediscovering the importance of being farmers and not just agricultural entrepreneurs. This group of producers and consumers promoted the development of markets and the direct sale of products in the city of Bologna, with the declared aim of challenging the logics of economic exchange within the neoliberal context, building an alternative to the “non-place” hypermarket, where “the more you spend, the more you count” (Campi Aperti website, our translation). The relationship with the occupied place XM24, located in Bologna, was fundamental for the development of the coordination activities and for the birth of the direct sales market. It was in this place where the first weekly market started. This market grew a couple of years later (2001-2003) as a result of the sensitivity that arose towards healthy and organic

⁶ The definition of social innovation adopted in this article is the following: “Social innovation can refer to new social, organisational or institutional arrangements, new products or services which have a social explicit aim. This aim – whether voluntary or not – results from an action initiated by an individual or a group of individuals to respond to an aspiration, to meet a need, to solve a problem or to take advantage of an opportunity for action in order to modify social relations, to transform a framework for action or to propose new cultural orientations. In some cases, social innovations thus initiated can lead to social transformations”, <https://crises.uqam.ca/a-propos/presentation/>, last access on 06/09/2019 (translated by the authors).

products - in particular following what they called the “food disasters” generated by an agricultural model being totally focused on profit and without any respect for natural rules and cycles.⁷ From this moment, the “Thursday markets in Fioravanti street” – where XM24 is located - created interest and the abundant participation of people stimulated the creation of new markets and projects around the city of Bologna. In 2006, for example, the Tuesday market was introduced in the Cyrenaica area – a working class area now characterised by an increasing migrant population - with the support of another occupied social centre, VAG61. Both these first two markets are organised not only in places of solidarity and political engagement⁸, but also in peripheral areas, and neighborhoods characterised by cultural, social and economic complexity. A year later, in 2007, another market was introduced – the Savena market – thanks to the collaboration with the School of Peace, an intercultural center located in the southeastern periphery of Bologna.

In the same period, the informal group “Coordination for Food Sovereignty” created an association entitled “Campi Aperti” (in English: “Open Fields”). The association organises initiatives and awareness campaigns, collaborates with other associations, groups and institutions in order to promote dialogue between producers and responsible consumers and disseminates the use and practice of organic farming, eco-compatible productions and sustainable natural resources. Finally, in 2009, the “Genuino Clandestino” campaign (in English: “Genuine Clandestine”) was created for the free processing of peasant products. This campaign supports the right of farmers to the self-transformation of products from their raw materials. Much interest has arisen around this campaign, spontaneously putting in contact producers and co-producers, and developing a national network that is still active today.⁹

3.3 A growing institutional recognition

In autumn 2011, Campi Aperti joined the CRESER (Regional Coordination for the Emilia Romagna Solidarity Economy), which brings together ethical purchasing groups, social economy districts and active associations on the theme of ecology, sustainability and common goods. Based on the CRESER experience, the regional law n.19 of 2014, entitled “Norms for the promotion and support of the solidarity economy” was approved. In 2012, a new market opened in the social centre Labas which, after a year of negotiations with the municipality after being evicted from the original building, found in 2017 a new headquarters in the city centre of Bologna. In spring 2015, the commitment of the Campi Aperti association in promoting peasant and organic agriculture was recognised by the municipality which, instead of renewing previous modalities for the allocation of market areas, decided to establish a “Collaboration Pact”¹⁰ with the association. This represents a turning point for the association. For the first time it is recognised, also at the institutional level, that Campi Aperti is not only concerned with peasant agriculture but also with spaces of sociality and cultural activities, as well as with the transformation of urban areas and the fight against food waste.¹¹ During the years, other markets have opened (e.g.: on Monday in Piazza Verdi, in the university area, or on Saturday in via del Pratello, in a neighborhood located in a central area, mostly inhabited by students and young professionals).

⁷An example is the “mad cow” phenomenon which killed many people in Italy. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/07/world/mad-cow-disease-kills-first-human-in-italy.html>, last access on 10/10/2018.

⁸In both cases, in fact, the markets are organised in occupied social centres. These kinds of spaces were introduced in the Italian context by extra-parliamentarian groups since the Seventies and are still part of the social, cultural and political life of Italy’s main cities. Among their main activities: debate on housing conditions in urban contexts, collective dinners, free legal assistance for marginalised individuals, community gardens, concerts and book presentations, etc.

⁹For further information visit: genuinoclandestino.it, last access on 13/04/2019.

¹⁰The “Collaboration Pacts” (“Patti di Collaborazione”) are tools of co-management of urban public goods promoted by the “Regulation of the Commons”, adopted by Bologna - the first city in Italy - in May 2014. For further information, refer to the website: <http://comunita.comune.bologna.it/beni-comuni>, last access on 12/11/2018.

¹¹The relation between Campi Aperti and the urban context where the markets are organised is particularly interesting and should concern a special focus of observation and analysis. However, some of the producers interviewed during the research underlined the role of the markets in representing not only a place of economic exchange, but also spaces of urban conviviality, engaging different kinds of people (in terms of age, religion, home country, gender, etc.).

Another interesting project promoted by Campi Aperti is the “Seed project”, developed in collaboration with the University of Bologna. The main aim of the project is to restore seed control in the hands of farmers in order to achieve greater autonomy from the seed market, select seeds capable of better responding to organic farming techniques, seek greater quality of products, safeguarding biodiversity and developing a greater ability to adapt to climate change over the long term¹².

This gradual but still growing institutional acknowledgment does not only bring new opportunities to this network. It also implies a new role and responsibilities and brings important challenges, such as the recognition of the markets as places of solidarity and urban social life or their role in reducing food waste and promoting sustainable lifestyles, as well as influencing the regeneration of shrinking urban areas.

4. An ethnographic research on (en)counters: further methodological aspects

Our research is based on a qualitative case study of the Campi Aperti network. In particular, we conducted in-depth interviews with ten producers (on a total population of about 30 members) and integrated this material with three observation periods conducted during market days. We selected participants through a multiple case sampling of micro-social units¹³. This form of sampling is mainly used in two types of research: those concerned with values and opinions, and those that, as in our case, are concerned with life experiences, institutions, and social practices in general. The purpose is “grasping the point of view [of the participant] on a fact or process, the functioning of an institution or understanding it through their own experience, making sense of feelings or perceptions on specific experiences, having access to the values of a group or historical period that the person interviewed knows well” (Pirès, 1997, p. 62, our translation).

During our fieldwork, we also considered factors of differentiation and saturation (Pirès, 1997). Differentiation refers to internal or inside group differentiation. Our objective was indeed to give a portrait of a small and relatively homogenous group of individuals.

As far as the content analysis methodology was concerned, we applied more specifically a thematic analysis (Moscarola, 2002). Unlike a lexical or discourse analysis, our qualitative approach aimed at studying the content and the sense that the actors themselves gave to their speech. Prior to this, we transcribed the entirety of the interviews. Due to the limited number of interviews, we chose a classical manual analysis. We read all our material identifying and organising all the themes that emerged. Following Krief and Zardet (2013) we followed three consequential steps. The first one consisted in a preliminary analysis and organisation of the empirical data. The second step consisted in a coding procedure useful to deconstruct the discourse/text into several analysis units (words, sentences and themes) and put this material in different categories - based on the research object. The last step was about interpreting, synthetising and making inferences and conclusions from this material. More specifically, we analysed the data collected in order to understand the rearrangement of producer-consumer relations and inter-action, as well as their space of action and the constraints they experience, by looking at how local food networks structure and mobilise human and financial resources to give form, through social innovation, to territorial development processes.

We also included in our analysis written documents (e.g.: flyers, manifesto, reports, etc.) collected during the explorative phase of the research and during ethnographic field observations conducted at different times in some markets located in different areas of the city. Specifically, the ethnographic observations took place in three markets. The first one was the XM24 market – the first market created

¹² <http://www.campiaperti.org/category/progetto-semi/> last access on 12/11/2018.

¹³ The structure of the interview was based on different main topics: role in the association; level of participation in the association; description of the structure and the governance of the association; role of consumers and relational dynamics between producers and consumers; perspectives on the concept of food sovereignty and sustainability; institutional relation; insights about future development of the association.

by Campi Aperti. This market is located in the Bolognina area, which is going through a strong gentrification process. The second was the VAG61 market – located in the Cirenaica neighbourhood, another area more recently going through urban regeneration processes, but still considered symbolically as a peripheral neighbourhood –, while the third was the market located in “Piazza dei Colori”, a marginalised area characterised by high levels of social conflicts due in part to the presence of the regional asylum seekers reception centre.¹⁴

As far as the observations are concerned, we started with a very general grid that we tried to progressively define. Our first question for these observations dealt with the social relations taking place at the market. We wanted to see if, and with which conditions, the market was not only a place of commerce but could contribute to the structuring of significant social relations. After every observation we made an evaluation in order to summarise the main issues and questions, in order to specify our perspective. We decided thus to focus on the relational dynamic between the producer and the consumer. This methodological choice helped us to partially overcome the limit of not having collected the voices of the consumers/prosumers.

Fig.1: List of the farmers interviewed*

| CODE | AGE GROUP | EDUCATIONAL LEVEL | SIZE ENTERPRISE |
|------|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| A | 25-36 | Tertiary education | n/a |
| B | 50+ | Tertiary education | medium |
| C | 50+ | Tertiary education | medium |
| D | 50+ | Secondary education | small |
| E | 37-49 | Secondary education | small |
| F | 37-49 | Tertiary education | medium |
| G | 25-36 | Tertiary education | small |
| H | 37-49 | Secondary education | medium |
| I | 50+ | Secondary education | small |
| L | 37-49 | Tertiary education | medium |

* Age groups are the following: 25-36; 37-49; 50 and over. N/A refers to a coordinator, who is not a firm’s owner.

5. A matter of governance: the “Participatory Guarantee System”

The Campi Aperti’s operations are based on a “Participatory Guarantee System” (in Italian: “Sistema di Garanzia Partecipata”). Indeed, the search for tools able to assess the products’ quality over the years has led to the development of a self-certification system based on mutual control of production methods. This system works with the sharing of experiences and techniques and the willingness of producers to constantly submit their production to verifications, as well as the direct dialogue between producers and consumers. As we will observe in the following section, this producers-consumers dialogue aims (at least in the intention of Campi Aperti) to be perpetuated until a level of hybridisation where the borders between producers and consumers are reduced.

The Participatory Guarantee System is a collective and shared practice of controlling the products traded in the markets organised by the association. Challenging the official certification of organic products, which is mainly based on the control of specific documents, the system is defined as a

¹⁴ Precisely, the market at XM24 takes place between 5.30 and 9.30 p.m., the market at Vag61 between 5.30 and 10.30 p.m. and the market in Piazza dei Colori between 4.00 and 8.30 p.m. The observations were conducted in order to better investigate Campi Aperti in relation to its context, the relation between producers and consumers over the counters and the relational forms of participation in the activities of the association. Therefore, the observations had the fundamental role of integrating the information given by producers’ perspectives with their behaviour on the field, investigating especially their relation with co-producers.

“multi-sensory control modality”: all the people who take part in the association, producers and co-producers, are invited to take responsibility for the reliability of the products sold within Campi Aperti.

The process is quite simple. The producers who want to join Campi Aperti markets are visited and monitored by some of the people involved in the association, and in particular by farmers who produce similar products. In this first phase, the members carefully evaluate the competence and reliability of the candidates:

“When someone wants to be part of the Campi Aperti association, we go to their farm, we look at how they work. They read our statute and say if they share its values, support it, in order to avoid any misunderstanding. Then you also look at the ethics of this person’s work: it’s not just producing good organic and untreated vegetables, but it is also about treating well their workers, as well as sharing our values... otherwise it would make no sense. This is what we call the Shared Guarantee System. The visits are open to those interested, not necessarily only to producers. Everything is then evaluated during the general assembly based on the results of the preliminary visit. We discuss together, and when you are accepted you go on a waiting list, there is not always a free space in the markets. As soon as the places are available, an attempt is made to insert those who have been accepted” (G.).¹⁵

In most cases, consumers do not take part in these visits, although in theory they could. This fact limits in our opinion the role of the consumers in the Participatory Guarantee System and their role as prosumers. However, this assessment continues at the market: the farmer is under the watchful eye of all the members (producers and consumers), who check if the products offered for sale match the company’s characteristics and the techniques of organic production. For this reason, the producers interviewed agreed on the importance of having the Campi Aperti manifesto always displayed on their counters.

Though, the most important aspect of the Participatory Guarantee System is – in the words of our interviewees - the “human dimension” of assessing farmers’ reliability. Trust is therefore created through the daily relationship, in the continuous work of building a collective dimension that occur not only during the markets but also during the assemblies. This system based on mutual trust is created starting from a shared critical reflection on the unreliability of the conventional system to assess agricultural production, as this farmer suggests:

“Trust is the first thing, precisely because we do not want to reproduce products as if they are stamps, standardisation does not exist in agriculture...in nature it cannot exist. At the same time, standardisation of human relationships cannot exist neither. (...) And then there must be trust, which consists in the human relationship. And that is why in the Campi Aperti’s “Charter of principles” we state that only and exclusively producers of raw materials can sell and participate in the market” (A.)

Trust is therefore a basic condition of this system. As the producers admitted, social relations and participation are essential elements nourishing this trust, while meetings, assemblies (sometimes lasting about eight or nine hours) and, of course, the markets, are opportunities to stimulate and maintain these relational dynamics.

In Campi Aperti, trust becomes a social value, an implicit and explicit norm replacing the traditional market assessment systems to evaluate if a product is organic or not, if it is produced in the local area and through the short supply chain. This sense of trust derives from the face-to-face relation that creates the possibility to “get to know someone in person, so you can have information

¹⁵ The interviews were conducted in Italian and translated by the authors from Italian into English. Some of the translation choices, therefore, have been adopted in order to be loyal to the oral source text.

but also feelings” (A.). In this case “authenticity and trust are mediated through personal interaction” (Marsden, Banks, Bristow, 2000, p. 425).

Moreover, as Campi Aperti refused to adopt a standardised control system of agricultural products, trust becomes its main foundation. As stated by Putnam (2004, p. 18): “Confidence is a lubricant of social life. Frequent interactions between various groups of people tend to produce a generalized reciprocity rule. Civic engagement and social capital imply mutual obligations and responsibility for action. (...) social networks and rules of reciprocity can facilitate cooperation for the common good”. Community trust is therefore considered a fundamental element for all the farmers interviewed during the research: without concealing the benefits deriving from the economic point of view, trust and the willingness to propose alternative answers to emerging problems (e.g.: unsustainability of agricultural production, pollution, food waste, etc.) are the two cornerstones on which Campi Aperti are based, promoting at the same time a sense of involvement in a community of action.

Grounded on trust, the participatory method of Campi Aperti can represent a way to re-embed the market inside social relations. This creates a common sense of responsibility between members (producers and co-producers). Beside tangible criteria to be met (product characteristics, way of cultivating, etc.), trust and reciprocity become decisive non-market criteria. However, in a perspective of hybridisation, it is interesting to observe how these non-market criteria are “constructed” among consumers (or co-producers, as we will explain below). Co-producers are members who consume products and bring financial resources to Campi Aperti, allowing the survival of its activity, while creating social value for the association itself and the territory (through their participation at markets in the city, but also indirectly for the countryside where producers live and work keeping these areas socially and economically alive). The social relationships and trust embedded in the products become decisive assets for the economic activity of Campi Aperti.

A final aspect underlined by most of the producers concerns the modalities through which deviant behaviours are treated. If the system is based on trust and the control does not come from a top-down and objective procedure, it would be possible that the number of “cheaters” could be higher than in traditional control markets. However, the experience reported by our participants tells a different story, since “it happened only twice in ten years” (A.) or “three, four times in fifteen years” (D.). When it happens that an associate member commits an infraction (for example selling non-organic products) it is not reported to the police, in accordance with the important role of trust and social relations in this system. In this case, Campi Aperti would simply exclude this person from the association:

“When it turns out that something is wrong, we have the tools to solve the problem. One last case was a producer who was also one of the first who had joined Campi Aperti, who probably took too many shortcuts that guaranteed him to remain in production even if it was a difficult period. Then we organised a visit at his farm, and he was expelled as a member. We also found yoghurt with mold inside... We understood that he had a slightly too superficial behaviour and we told him to go away” (H).

If the number of “cheaters” has been so low in the past years (as told by this participant), a possible explanation could be linked to two main factors. On the one hand, the strong intolerance of producers towards unfair competitors and those who risk compromising the credibility of the markets: “The bad thing is that these people who cheat at the end ruin the credibility of all those who participate in the market. It is not a police regime, but there’s someone who takes care of the participated guarantee in the markets. If there are rumours, we go to these people to report the doubts and they have to discuss it with us and try to clarify” (G.). On the other hand, in a system based on participatory governance, where responsibilities are shared among all the participants, the traditional forms of control (Foucault, 2012 [1975]) take on a new shape. Here, the (small) communitarian dimension clearly becomes the functional auto-regulating device for a system based on trust (Granovetter, 1973, 1985), as explained above.

6. What role for “co-producers”?

As described in the introduction, Campi Aperti project derived from the objective of a group of citizens (some of them professionally involved in the field of agriculture and engaged in political activism in the alternative left-wing movement) to challenge the traditional modes of production, distribution and consumption related to industrial agricultural products, mainly based on the model of big corporations (Marsden, Flynn, Harrison, 2000). Since the very beginning of this experience, the need to develop a new model based on face-to-face relations, on reliability and mutual trust was fundamental. Here, the role of the consumer was crucial for the creation and the development of the markets and the association, as different producers that we interviewed suggested:

“There was the agrarian collective, another mixed group of student-workers of various faculties rather than other humanity faculties, who saw on the internet these meetings that we did in Valsamoggia on the Common Agricultural Policy and local markets and they came there with the idea to create a purchasing group composed of students. Then, as you know, students are not regular consumers like families, who have lunches and dinners. So, working together, we said ‘let’s try to make a market, we come to the city with what we have, give an appointment to all those who want to come and see what happens’. It was just a path constructed together: we had some needs, they had others, and we had an answer, we wanted to live off this thing, they wanted to eat well” (E.).

With the development of the markets, the consumers – or the co-producers as they are called within Campi Aperti – continued to be included in this network of producers during the assemblies organised by the association. Through what we can define as a process of “maximalist participation” (Carpentier, 2017), co-producers are invited to participate in the life of the association.¹⁶ In fact, as Campi Aperti wants to remain a participatory practice, the producers and the consumers are invited to contribute in the monthly assemblies where general issues concerning the association as well as other aspects are discussed (e.g.: the price of the products, the Participatory Guarantee System, problems encountered, food sovereignty, etc.):

“So, first of all, Campi Aperti is not an association in which you join as a farmer, but you join because you want to participate. Both general and market assemblies are open to everyone and with the same space, there is not a higher role for farmers than citizens. The choices are not only agricultural choices, but they also concern, for example, how to organise a market. It is not only of interest for the producers, it is of everyone’s interest - both for those who sell and those who go to buy in that market. So, it is only fair that these decisions are taken in an assembly made up of and for everyone. This is our principle: participation is guaranteed by the fact that everything we do is managed by all the members” (C.).

But if the assemblies are open to all the members, and if Campi Aperti tries to create a better balance between producers and co-producers, the direct and active participation of consumers to the assemblies and to the other activities of the association encounters some limitations¹⁷:

¹⁶ Carpentier (2017) outlines the distinctions between the ‘minimalist’ models of participation – wherein the political role of citizenry remains restricted to participation in the election of representatives – and the ‘maximalist’ ones – where participation is understood as ‘multi-sited’, acting on more decentralized societal decision-making, and ‘multi-directional’, aiming to impact on several objectives and targets.

¹⁷ As a farmer replied: “We are 120 producers, but there are more or less 4-5 farmers who want to enter each month. Co-producers are less. Those who are ‘faithful’, those who participate are a dozen of people...we could say that it is very asymmetrical as a number” (F.).

“The levels of participation, of course, are different. Consumers are not always there and not many of them participate in the assemblies. But there are activists who founded the association that are not producers, who are a huge support. Obviously, producers are now a bigger group. At the beginning it was the opposite, we did the assembly and there were ten producers and twenty people from the collectives” (D.).

As the producers who have been interviewed underline, in fact only a limited number of co-producers “became producers” (E.) or “took part in some self-management activities” (G.).¹⁸

Therefore, if the participation to the decision-making process – leading, for instance, to the inclusion of new farmers or the fixation of the annual price of products – and to some activities organised within the network is sustained, the role of co-producers is rarely linked to their direct participation in the production of the food traded in the markets. Hence, if the farmers recognise the crucial role of co-producers, their role only partially overlaps with the definition of prosumer reported in the theoretical framework above.

Though, the face-to-face relation between producers and consumers creates a better balance of power between these two spheres of action. The possibility to ask the producer about the origin of the product, to participate in the assemblies of the association and to the Participatory Guarantee System gives voice (Friedmann, 1992) back to co-producers, reducing their alienation in a society often lead by market-oriented choices:

“All this is very important because there is the possibility of knowing each other, of letting people know how we work, looking at each other, explaining all the curiosity and information. The interest is very high for those who come to shop in these markets, because they are demanding people, who have understood how good food should be, so they ask many questions. They really collaborate with us because together we try to create something of quality. This confrontation with co-producers also pushes us to give directly information about the products. Then there is free access, anyone who wants to come and visit companies can come and do so: there is an open dialogue. If our products were brought in a big retail store, in a supermarket or if there were any intermediary, this could not be done, this communication would not be established. In the end it is also a political discourse, because in this way it is not that you only go to sell: in the meantime, you can explain many things, what you do and why you do it” (G.).

In this perspective also the choice of the term ‘co-producer’ assumes a political role:

“We chose to call them like this a few years ago. It is a bit unpleasant as a word, but it makes sense. We did not like the term ‘consumer’: it was simplistic, and it underlined the passive role of those who had to do the shopping and that’s it. They produce in the sense that in the meantime they help us to produce, if they were not there, we would not produce. I could not produce in this way if I did not know to whom I am selling food to. They are absolutely active in supporting the economic life of these hundred or so farms (D.).

7. Campi Aperti as hybridisation

¹⁸ However, as farmers said: “From time to time we organise routes and visits. Now it’s a bit that we do not do what are called ‘The ways of the fields’. With the spring, people who usually frequent the markets often come to our farms. But they also participate in our market assemblies and at the general assemblies. There are many people who do not actually do the markets but who are supporters of what we do, and they care about how we do it, so they participate freely in our self-management activities” (G.), or “some people of the purchasing groups who gave me a loan to buy a greenhouse” (D.).

In Campi Aperti the social and the economic dimensions are strictly interrelated. The research showed how, in this experience, the integrative economic forms take innovative configurations that consider both the quality of life conditions – here meant not only from an economic point of view but mainly in the sense of political and cultural values – of producers and the experience of the consumer. A farmer explains how through Campi Aperti the needs of producers and consumers have been able to fit together: “The story of Campi Aperti is this: that at some point some producers who were trying to find a way to support themselves economically with their work met people in Bologna who were willing to buy products having a certain connotation. We were aware of the issue and the importance of food sovereignty and we wanted to sustain it. We were looking for a way to build alternatives...” (H.).

Alternatively, if co-producers are not real prosumers in Campi Aperti, the relation between production and consumption is developed through the active engagement and participation of all the actors included in the network.

In Campi Aperti the economic relation does not only concern the monetary exchange. Here, the forms of reciprocity assume if not a predominant role, at least an important focus on the general experience. As observed in our theoretical framework, reciprocity is extremely useful to analyse practices aiming at tackling food sovereignty in contemporary societies. Polanyi (2001[1944]) sees reciprocity as a real form of economic organisation in addition to the market and redistribution (organised by the State).¹⁹ The concept of reciprocity calls into question another central element of our analysis: the gift, which is described as a facilitator of social relations, capable of creating a “bonding value” that exceeds the value of the good through regular exchange (Mauss, 2011[1924]; Caillé, 1992; Godbout, 1998): “This winter the wind pulled down many of our greenhouses. Then, we spent many days trying to put them up again. A guy who usually buys vegetables from us offered to help us. He is not someone who comes to all our meetings, but he liked the idea of getting involved that way, this is also a form of contribution” (F.).

In this regard, there are two types of reciprocity: specific (with mutual obligations) and generalised (where the obligation is not explicit, but people expect that, sooner or later, someone else will do the same). It is specifically this type of reciprocity that can be considered a fundamental element in Campi Aperti, as it is based on the sense of sharing that is generated through belonging to a particular social group, a collective movement or adherence to specific life styles and values (Inglheart, 1971).

In Campi Aperti, the enabling social, cultural and economic capital originates from the act of buying the product. This relational process creates also the basis for the development of a community of action (Kaufmann, 2004) where the producers engage themselves in the selling of organic local product, certified by a bottom-up dynamic, while the consumer, buying these products, adheres to a specific vision of the world, which, as shown above, is also politically defined. The importance of reciprocity is also clear when a farmer explains how in Campi Aperti relations among producers do not follow the free market rules of competition, but are on the contrary based on mutual aid:

“We also have a table of mutual aid. This is something that we are exploring: this idea of mutuality and mutual aid: how can we help each other in case of natural damage, in case of even ordinary things that we cannot deal with alone? Until now, in modernity, you do not have an extended family that supports you when you have to harvest, when you have these moments of intense work that, in the past were very communal. Many times you are alone. For these reasons, we want to experiment ways of reaching more mutuality amongst ourselves as peasants linked in a community of farmers. The other reason for mutuality and mutual aid is related to funding, and maybe a little bit ‘ethical’

¹⁹ In particular, Polanyi argues that reciprocity is a “general principle of behavior” linked to specific economic systems and social structure (Block, 2008). Adopting this perspective, our article refers to Campi Aperti as the social structure where reciprocity is defined. As anticipated, the behavioral and societal effects of reciprocity depend on the presence of definite institutional conditions (Polanyi 1957, p.250).

as well: we are very small producers, we have to find other forms of funding because we cannot offer the usual financial guarantees” (G.).

Moreover, the modalities through which the whole experience of Campi Aperti was developed show how - for many farmers among those interviewed in this research - it is possible to challenge the traditional system of food production through the economy and to offer an alternative vision to the traditional asset of the agri-food industrial system. So far, the economic dimension - here intended as an integration between reciprocity and the exchange market – becomes also a tool for political participation:

“In our opinion, beyond agriculture itself, a whole other set of experiences are important. For us it is fundamental to give people the possibility to live experiences that are proposed as alternative experiences: alternative from the point of view of self-management, of the environment, and of questioning hierarchies. In short, alternative from many points of view, but if all of this is done only in a non-economic context it does not affect, or affects very marginally, as the economic sphere is so important in the end, that it becomes also political. The spaces where the economy does not enter are very few, because even if we talk about social movements for social justice and the environment: how do you make a proposal about the environment without asking the question of what economy can bring forward considering the sustainability of the environment?” (C.)²⁰

Despite this, according to the majority of the farmers, the necessity to challenge the actual setting of capitalist society passes through the economy; this research showed that in some cases the coexistence of the social and the economic spheres in Campi Aperti led to some tensions and conflicts within the network, as this farmer stated:

“It is an interesting hybrid. For sure, the fact that there is an economic aspect for us means that what we do is not what we do in our free time: how could it be our political commitment before Campi Aperti if everyone had another job? But, on the contrary, it means that in your work there is a social aspect and there is a political aspect that is, at the same time, the source of your income. This aspect sometimes creates a series of problems to deal with. Problems could arise with those who, for example, enter Campi Aperti with their own agricultural project and simply want to sell to the market and sell as much as possible (...), you must always keep it under control”. (C.)

This hybridisation is not acquired and also brings some consequences. These consequences may touch both those who share and those who do not share Campi Aperti’s values. As shown in this citation, once opened to the “market” it is difficult to limit or also shape it. The boundaries might be dangerously flexible and a space for interpretation is also an evidence. That is why a strict code of conduct and governance is required, as showed above in the case of the Participatory Guarantee System.

Criticism may also arise inside a homogenous social group and with people normally sharing the same values and political ideas.

“When we started our first market within a squat, at the beginning we were also a bit criticised, because we were going to trade in a space where people only volunteered. (...) The economic choices are different in these spaces, where there is only volunteering. But we went there, and we were not volunteering, we were working. We have faced this by talking about it, explaining what the project was, what it meant. According to us, the experiences that do not provide an economic aspect have a

²⁰ To reach this objective, the association is collaborating with MAG6, located in Reggio Emilia (a few kilometers from Bologna), a “mutuality association” that offers different services, such as providing free courses and loans on the basis of community guarantees.

big limit. In the sense that we would like to start talking more about this, for us the creation of alternative economies is fundamentally political and social.” (C.)²¹

8. Campi Aperti and political activism: last reflections from “the fields”

Following our research results Campi Aperti can be considered as a social innovation as it represents “a process resulting from cooperation between a variety of actors that can be seen as a process of collective learning and knowledge creation which requires the participation of users” (Cloutier, 2003, p.42, our translation). Campi Aperti intervenes, specifically, both at the level of social practices and at the level of social relations - mainly consumer-producer relations, as well as at the micro level in power dynamics (e.g.: counter movement opposing the big food organic industry).

In this case, similarly to relations of proximity practices, alternative food networks are social phenomena where consumers “join their buying power to facilitate the extension of Short Food Supply Chains” (Renting, Marsden, Banks, 2003, p.400).

Through these processes, Campi Aperti is a social innovation able to “unfold from the dyadic relationship between actor and structure” (Cajaiba-Santana, 2013, p. 8). Conceptualised as a social innovation, Campi Aperti promotes social change at micro and meso levels, something that Zapf (2003, p.427) described as a “process of change in the social structure of a society in its constitutive institutions, cultural patterns, associated social actions and conscious awareness”.

The hybridisation between economic, social and political dimensions of this socially innovative initiative clearly shows that Campi Aperti represents much more than a face-to-face alternative food network, becoming also a form of political activism.

A shift occurs in Campi Aperti from the “exchange value” to the “value of sharing” (Rifkin, 2014), in which not only market capital, but also socio-cultural capital assumes an increasingly significant role within the structural organisation of the association. Challenging rationally organised industrial chains (Marsden, Flynn, Harrison, 2000; Mundler, Laughrea, 2016), in fact, alternative food networks promote reciprocity as the basis for creating alternative forms of capital beyond the market exchange and through the principle of hybridisation. The development of these differentiated forms of capital inside a territory can facilitate cooperation in view of the common good and enhances the possibility to reduce phenomena such poverty and inequalities. Societies characterized by reciprocity are indeed more efficient than those where mistrust and competition predominate (Putnam, 1993, 2000).

Moreover, our research showed that rather than involving consumers within production, the participation of co-producers is mainly linked to the reconfiguration of the relations between producers and consumers, emblematically expressed in spatial terms (e.g.: face-to-face relation).

The participant observations and interviews with the farmers have also revealed that the Campi Aperti markets become spaces where to build new relationships and developing different ways of practicing sociality, solidarity and inclusion. As Marsden, Banks and Bristow (2000, p.425) suggest, in fact, “a key characteristic of short supply chains is their capacity to re-socialise or respatialise food, thereby allowing the consumer to make value-judgements about the relative desirability of foods on the basis of their own knowledge, experience, or perceived imagery”.

Even if in rare cases co-producers directly intervene in production, these kinds of dynamics try to challenge the dominant paradigm of impersonal production and consumption occurring in conventional places of food distribution like supermarkets or shopping malls (Renting *et al.*, 2003). The role of consumers is reshaped also in terms of support to the alternative food network. As Aubry and Chiffolleau (2009, p.54, our translation) claim, in fact, “consumers have played and are

²¹ This double role of the Campi Aperti as a form of “economy beyond the economy” or as a form of “socially embedded economy” is particularly interesting in the case of the introduction of the “Moneta Sociale” project, an experiment of open and inclusive popular self-organisation aimed at creating an instrument of social monetary policy that comes from realities based on self-management and solidarity economy networks. This project is based on participation and mutual trust in order to make and to share the agricultural and relational resources in alternative ways.

increasingly playing a leading role in supporting and even creating links via short channels with local agriculture”.

In other words, Campi Aperti has shown how in alternative food networks, the lack of intermediaries between producers and consumers allows farmers to have a more adequate income for their business and consumers to be able to buy healthy and quality products at more affordable prices. These aspects should be further investigated through integrative interviews to consumers, in order to better understand their role in Campi Aperti and their perceptions in these innovative dynamics.

It is extremely important to keep in mind that Campi Aperti remains a niche form of production and consumption. At the level of production, in fact, the big corporation model remains the main source of production of agricultural goods at a regional, national and international scale. On the other hand, as far as consumption is concerned, although the participant observations showed the heterogeneity of consumers buying products from Campi Aperti, this practice engages a limited group of people, and especially “homogenous” individuals sharing the cultural and political values of the association. Moreover, as shown by our empirical data, the role of co-producers in the activities of Campi Aperti is still limited and, according to the farmers, other occasions of direct engagement should be promoted (e.g.: direct involvement in the production, constant participation to the “Participatory Guarantee System”, etc.).²²

Finally, Campi Aperti opens new possibilities of analysis in terms of social research. An interesting aspect for social and spatial analysis would be, for example, the study of the dynamics created by alternative food networks in urban and rural areas and among them (Aubry, Chiffolleau, 2009) (e.g.: exchange of resources and dependency patterns, sustainable rural development, access to resources, local policies, etc.). Another element to further investigate concerns the institutional role of alternative food networks as political agents for development at a local scale, which brings however a potential risk of disengagement by the public actor.

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²² In this direction, Campi Aperti has collaborated with Alchemilla GAS for the development of Camilla (2018), a cooperative-supermarket where the consumers are also the owners and the workers, benefitting from better prices of healthier and organic products, which usually comes from the short chain: <https://camilla.coop/>, last access on 13/11/2018.

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