



Alternative farming and collective goals: Towards a powerful relationships for future food policies



Salvatore Pinna*

Doctoral program in Environmental Science and Engineering, at the Centro Interdipartimentale di Ingegneria e Scienze Ambientali (CINSA), via S. Giorgio 12, 09123 Cagliari, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 April 2016
 Received in revised form
 11 November 2016
 Accepted 18 November 2016
 Available online 5 December 2016

Keywords:

Alternative Food Networks
 Collective insights
 Organic agriculture
 Rural landscape protection

ABSTRACT

Based on the significant amount of literature on the concept of spatial, ecological, and social embeddedness in the Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) research, this study describes the main dynamics related to the involvement of non-conventional farmers in their collective ideas and actions.

With a comparison between two European regions: Sardinia and the Community of Madrid, the paper identifies different styles of behaviour among organic producers, whether or not supervised by a control body, and highlights the differences and similarities regarding their ideas about how alternative agriculture has an impact on the environment as well as society. Eco-economies and ecopreneurship are also considered. The aim is to see if, and to what extent, these ideas have a collective character, going beyond the limits of the single farm to reach a regional scale and, thus, if there is a basis for the development of future food-related planning policies. Through the information provided by semi-structured interviews, farmers have been divided into categories according to their degree of embeddedness, described through the main themes that emerged during the interviews. Every farmer has been included in only one category according to his or her main preference, which does not imply the absence of a positive attitude towards other categories.

The study aims to contribute to the understanding of how AFN values and methods can boost the improvement of biodiversity and landscape conservation through collective actions which have the power to boost and develop rural initiative at a regional scale.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) have been developing as a different way of food provision and consumption (Murdoch et al., 2000; Goodman, 2003; Renting et al., 2003; Watts et al., 2005). AFN studies are commonly divided into three strands (Tregear, 2011): i) political economy, ii) rural sociology, and iii) modes of governance and network theory perspectives. This paper draws on the rural sociology focus and analyses the embeddedness of farmers practising organic agriculture within the Community of Madrid, together with organic and sustainable conventional farming in Sardinia, with the aim of studying if and to what extent embeddedness is constrained within personal interests or whether it is a driver for a collective environmental and socio-economic conscience.

“Sustainable conventional farming” refers to the definition of “sustainable intensification” as defined by FAO (2009): “maximization of primary production per unit area without compromising the ability of the system to sustain its productive capacity”. Thus, this study includes integrated and biodynamic agriculture and socio-economic practices typical of AFNs (direct selling, farmers' markets, educational initiative). These practices allow the comparison of the two case studies despite the variety of analysed farms, as the otherness of AFNs is based on their economic and socio-cultural ways to modify capitalist food economy (Goodman et al., 2011).

The concept of embeddedness, as developed by Polanyi (1944) and modified by Granovetter (1985) has been used as a theoretical tool in order to understand how producers perceive their relationship with the environment as well as the customers. Embeddedness is defined as the degree to which social institutions influence economic phenomena (Polanyi, 1944), and, according to many scholars, it helps to deepen the knowledge of some aspects, for example, the relationship between food and territory (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006), as one of the most important aspects of AFNs is the

* Corresponding address: Dipartimento di Ingegneria Civile, Ambientale e Architettura, University of Cagliari, Via Marengo 2, 09123 Cagliari, Italy.
 E-mail address: pinna.salvatore@unica.it

re-localisation of food (Watts et al., 2005; Venn et al., 2006; Higgins et al., 2008).

Embeddedness has been largely codified and studied within the agri-food sector; for example, Penker (2006) identifies three types of embeddedness: social, spatial, and ecological, which refer to the relationship between economic activity, and: i) the social background (i.e. relationships among people belonging to food networks, trust, and fair trade); ii) the spatial background (related to the territory of origin and short food chains); iii) natural background, which includes organic production and eco-labels.

Moreover, in their study about ecological embeddedness, Morris and Kirwan (2011a,b) describe four dimensions expressing the relationship between ecology and food, which are useful for the identification of recurring topics within the interviews:

- i Understanding dimension – how farmers relate their production methods to the ecological benefits, including instrumental and intrinsic values (Hinchcliffe et al., 2003). The former expresses a strong economic point of view meaning that people who respond to this concept consider ecology as a form of economic profit. On the contrary, for producers who believe in intrinsic values of nature, environmental benefits are a priority and economic advantages are perceived as a by-product of their work.
- ii Realising dimension – how farmers apply the previous concepts to realise environmental benefits, which are not necessarily be connected to food production, for example, particular land or water managements.
- iii Utilising dimension – the management of the information exchange about production methods and its related environmental benefits to buyers.
- iv Negotiating dimension – the importance that consumers give to the previous three dimensions in their purchasing decision.

Despite the wide literature about AFNs and the large use of embeddedness as an analytical tool, scientific research has focused heavily on the relationship between producers and consumers as well as on the contrast of the conventional and capitalist agricultural regime exerted by AFNs (Tregear, 2011), neglecting other important themes such as their environmental impact or their role on agro-biodiversity improvement (Simoncini, 2015).

Forsell and Lankoski (2015) argue that the many criticisms addressed to the AFNs, especially to their environmental and socio-economic sustainability, might curb further efforts to analyse AFNs potential in order to create more sustainable food systems. Recently, only few studies (Simoncini, 2015; Lovell et al., 2010) have addressed this field.

This paper aims to continue in this direction by using Penker's three types of the embeddedness and the four dimensions of Morris and Kirwan in order to schematise organic producers' involvement into collective actions towards the agri-food system sustainability and its role for environment and traditional landscape conservation.

Moreover, the role of third party certification bodies is considered in order to study whether it boosts or hinders these goals. Collective actions are practices that “enable small entrepreneurs to mobilize social relations to improve their economic performance and create new opportunities for growth” (Brunori and Rossi, 2000, p. 409) guaranteeing access to means and resources that are out of the control of single farms such as tourism and landscape fruition. This study highlights how and to what extent these actions can be a powerful instrument not only in taking advantage of these means but also in improving them.

The literature about eco-economies (Kitchen and Marsden, 2011; Marsden, 2010) and environmental entrepreneurs -or ecopreneurs- (Meek et al., 2009; Linnanen, 2002; Walley and Taylor, 2002) is considered in order to better contextualise how the

Table 1
Drivers of eco-business sectors (Linnanen, 2002).

	Desire to make money		
Desire to change the world	HIGH	LOW Non-profit-business	HIGH Successful idealist
	LOW	Self-employer	Opportunist

Source: author's elaboration.

multi-dimensional criteria (Linnanen, 2002) used by AFN farmers influence their insights about collective actions. Indeed, eco-economies are “cumulative and nested webs of viable businesses and economic activities that utilize the varied and differentiated forms of environmental resources of rural areas in sustainable ways” (Marsden, 2010, p. 226). The importance of eco-economies for rural development lies in the capacity of recapturing “value at the local and regional level by creating ecologically based products and services, which then create market and consumption niches” (Marsden, 2010, p. 226).

Ecopreneurs are entrepreneurs who consider environmental issues as success factors within their business. For them, profit is not the only element that should be considered in running their activities (Linnanen, 2002; Shaper, 2002). In particular, two schematisations of ecopreneurs will be considered: i) the combination of profit orientation and desire to change the world (Linnanen, 2002) (Table 1) and ii) the combination of economic vision and structural influences, (Walley and Taylor, 2002) (Table 2).

Ecopreneurship concepts are considered very useful in order to study how collective insights of AFN farmers could represent a change of the sociotechnical regime of the food market and, in particular, starting from the niche innovation level of farms (Geels and Schott, 2007; Smith, 2007).

In fact, niche innovations represent the micro-level where radical novelties develop, initially being unstable and with low performances (Geels and Schott, 2007). Under certain conditions like adequate level of growth, changes in technology and economy niche innovations can become more stable and, in turn, improve their performance and change the socio-technical regime which is a complex structure of “artefacts, institutions and agents” (Smith, 2007).

These foci will help to suggest future directions for the development of food-related planning policies. In order to describe the differences and similarities in how AFNs work, two regions – Madrid, Spain and Sardinia, Italy – are compared and then analysed to see how they can both improve and grow.

The paper is divided as follows. Firstly, the use of the embeddedness concept together with the four dimensions, proposed by Morris and Kirwan (2011a,b), for the interview design and the data collection and analysis are explained. The results follow and are presented and discussed in a comparison between the two regions, highlighting the farmers' insight fitting in the concept of collective actions. The discussion is divided into two sections: the first addresses the general results; whereas, the second section aims at emphasising possible causes for reflection on future food-related policies improvements. Finally, the contribution to the literature and further lines of research are expressed within the conclusions.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Case studies choice

In spite of the differences between the Community of Madrid and Sardinia – especially the fact that the former is a metropolitan region whereas Sardinia is classified as rural – it is interesting to compare them for many reasons. First of all, food production is very relevant within the regional economy: 567 million Euros for

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6461323>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6461323>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)