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Shared and relational activities in rural commonality: Towards a non-individualistic conception of well-being

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Abstract – The quality of relationships among people is increasingly perceived as a crucial determinant of well-being. Despite this relevant shift, economic analysis is still deeply tied to an individualistic conception of people acting and living together. In this paper we will argue that to better understand the subjective and inter-subjective multiple dimensions of well-being, it is necessary to further deepen its conceptual framework to deal with its genuine relational essence. The forms of civic agriculture and short food supply chains that have emerged in the last decades provide an interesting case to highlight the limits of an individualistic conception of well-being. Within civic forms of agriculture, people follow pathways of personal change that affect the relational dimension of their lives, according to how they use money and spare time. At the same time, these personal pathways contribute to the emergence of rural economies and cultures as participatory or shared goods.

Keywords – relational goods, shared goods, well-being, civic agriculture, commonality.

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1. For a non-individualistic conception of well-being

"Over the last three decades, a number of frameworks have been developed to promote and measure well-being, quality of life, human development and sustainable development. [...] Currently, there is not a universally accepted definition. This expression is an umbrella term that refers to several separable components: gross domestic product (GDP), life satisfaction and satisfaction with life domains such as marriage, work, income, housing, and leisure. [...] Currently, many studies focus on the quality of relationship as crucial determinant of well-being. People get pleasure from spending time with others, be it their family, friends or colleagues. Activities are more satisfying when shared with others. Furthermore, social networks can provide material and emotional support in times of need, as well as providing access to jobs and other opportunities" (Iezzi & Deriu, 2014, pp. 849-50; for reviews, see Kahneman, 2006; MacKerron, 2012). In this paper we will argue that, despite the growing awareness of the many subjective and inter-subjective dimensions of well-being, it is necessary to further deepen the conceptual framework of this term to deal with its genuine relational essence.

Definition of social concepts	Explanation of social phenomena	Reduction of social laws
Social concepts should be <i>defined</i> in terms of individuals, their physical and psychic states, actions, interaction, social situation and physical environment.	Social phenomena should be <i>explained</i> in terms of individuals, their physical and psychic states, actions, interaction, social situation and physical environment.	Social laws should be <i>reduced</i> to laws about individuals, their physical and psychic states, actions, interaction, social situation and physical environment.

Figure 1: The methodology of the individualistic research tradition

Source: Udehn (2002, p. 499, our adaptation)

A common feature of most of the recent explorations of the well-being concept consists in their relying on some form of methodological individualism. We define the methodological individualism as an approach so that "all knowledge about social phenomena can, at least in principle, be stated in terms of individuals: Social concepts can be defined in terms of individuals, social phenomena explained in terms of individuals, and macro-theories reduced to microtheories" (Udehn, 2002, p. 498).

Figure 1 recalls the richness of articulations expressed by this research tradition. For our purposes, a first weakness of almost all the versions of this approach lies in rejection of the use of the terms “collective” in the social sciences, i.e., those terms which designate groups of individuals, or attributes that characterize these groups collectively (and not distributively). However, the well-being is not only “living well,” but it is even more “living well together”; and the latter does not arise from the mere aggregation of individual behavior (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010). As we shall see in § 2, the idea that some of the “collective” terms should not be defined by “individual” words, does not imply any metaphysical holism, according to which collective terms designate absolutely emerging social totality, rather than their individual constituents. On the contrary, we have fruitful recent strands of literature — such as those on collective rights (Jones, 2014), shared agency (Roth, 2011) or agency team (Gold & Sugden, 2007) – than cannot be easily placed in the continuum of theories of society going from the methodological individualism to the opposite organicist, collectivist opposite.

The second weakness of methodological individualism which we draw attention to here is the idea that individuals interact in social life as independent “entities,” i.e., that relationships are exterior to, rather than constitutive of, the subject. On the contrary, according to a genuinely relational perspective, “the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction. The latter, seen as a dynamic, unfolding process, becomes the primary unit of analysis rather than the constituent elements themselves. [...] Individual persons, whether strategic or norm following, are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded” (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 287). Relationships are not something that an individual “has.” People become who and what they are in and through their relatedness to others. “The fiction of individuals not yet involved in social relations but originally knowing what their interests are and what the consequences of their choices can be is discarded in favor of a view in which the interaction between persons mutually recognizing their right to exist is the only originally conceivable reality. No pre-established interests are imagined. The individual human agent is constituted as such when he is recognized and named by other human agents” (Pizzorno, 1991, p. 220). Figure 2 presents some important implications of this view for a conception of well-being.

Feature compared	Independent	Interdependent
Definition	Separate from social context	Connected with social context
Structure	Bounded, unitary, stable	Flexible, variable
Important features	Internal, private (abilities, thoughts, feelings)	External, public (statuses, roles, relationships)
Tasks	Be unique Express self Realize internal attributes Promote own goals	Belong, fit-in Occupy one's proper place Engage in appropriate action Promote others' goals
Role of others	Be direct; "say what's on your mind" <i>Self-evaluation</i> : others important for social comparison, reflected appraisal	Be indirect; "read other's mind" <i>Self-definition</i> : relationships with others in specific contexts define the self
Basis of self-esteem*	Ability to express self, validate internal attributes	Ability to adjust, restrain self, maintain harmony with social context

* Esteeming the self may be primarily a Western phenomenon, and the concept of self-esteem should perhaps be replaced by self-satisfaction, or by a term that reflects the realization that one is fulfilling the culturally mandated task.

Figure 2. Summary of key differences between an independent and an interdependent construction of Self

Source: Markus & Kitayama (1991, p. 230).

In the following pages, section 2 discusses aspects of a shared well-being, while section 3 focuses on aspects of relations. In section 4, the case for Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) is presented with a specific emphasis on their relational and sharing features. Section 5 tests the proposed interpretive framework for analyzing well-being within AFNs. Section 6 presents the conclusion.

2. Participatory goods as shared or joint goods

According to the most widespread conception of well-being, "the goodness or badness of social arrangements or states of affairs is evaluated on the basis of what is good or bad *for* individual well-being and freedom and is also reduced to the good *of* those individuals" (Gore, 1995, p. 242). However this approach ignores, or inadequately addresses, a very relevant dimension of our lives: the shared use of goods, places, and cultures. The philosopher Charles Taylor argues that "as individuals we value certain things; we find certain fulfilments good, certain experiences satisfying, certain outcomes positive. But these things can only be good in that certain way, or satisfying or positive after their particular fashion, because of the background understanding developed in our culture. Thus I may value the fulfilment that comes

from authentic self-expression, or the experience that arises from certain works of art, or outcomes in which people stand with each other on a footing of frankness and equality. But all this is only possible against the background of a certain culture" (Taylor, 1995, p. 136).

As noted jurist Jeremy Waldron says, "a culture is (something like) an enduring array of social practices, subsisting as a way of life for a whole people. Moreover, a culture is not like an array of clubs and hobbies; it represents the heritage of a particular people's attempts to address and come to terms with the problems of social life. A given culture will comprise a particular way of dealing, for example, with relations between the sexes, the rearing of children, the organisation of an economy, the transmission of knowledge, the punishment of offences, and in general the vicissitudes that affect all the stages of human life and relationship from conception to the disposition of corpses, and from the deepest love to the most vengeful antipathies. So when a person talks about her identity as a Maori, or a Sunni Muslim, or a Jew, or a Scot, she is relating herself not just to a set of dances, costumes, recipes and incantations, but to a distinct set of practices in which her people (the people she identifies with when she claims this as her identity) have historically addressed and settled upon solutions to the serious problems of human life" (2002, p. 219).

It is easy to realize the importance that culture has for a non-individualistic conception of well-being. Culture is a shared good that does not exist separately for me and for you, but only jointly for us: it is the system of meanings on the basis of which we form opinions and preferences. A concept proposed by jurist Denise Réaume (1988) that can help us to understand this crucial point is that of "participatory goods." According to basic economic theory, public goods cannot be delivered to a person without being offered to all members of the group. Many public goods generate individual benefits: clean air is, for example, a public good which benefits individuals. However, this is not the case for participatory goods. These are goods whose individual enjoyment depends on the fact that other people enjoy them. While the clean air cannot be individually produced, but can be enjoyed by the individual, the public good of a "cultured society" can be enjoyed by someone as soon as a critical mass of people read, write, study, do research, attend arts activities, discuss ideas, and so on. It's impossible to play football without the other members of the team, as well as a rival team. Similarly, someone can enjoy a social culture only if many others do the same. "A cultured society is not a set of artefacts – plays, paintings, films. The

good does not consist in some end product, such as clean streets, which, once in existence, is only externally related to its enjoyment as means to ends; it consists in participating in the production of those artefacts which constitute a cultured society. But there is no end product because, in a sense, these artefacts are never completed but are continuously reinterpreted and re-created by each generation. This process is the essence of a cultured society and can only take place *through*, not simply *because* of, the involvement of many. Unlike clean air, its enjoyment cannot be separated from its production" (Réaume, 1988, pp. 10-11). The participatory goods are usable, in an irreducible manner, as joint or shared goods: in fact a completely isolated individual who speaks a language or writes e-mails, would not have someone to talk to or write to. Obviously, it is sometimes feasible to have a particular use of these assets on an individual scale: I can, for example, listen to music alone; but this happens because I draw to a musical heritage that is played through the participation of many. A solipsistic culture can exist only as a contingent and parasitical derivation of a social culture. On the legal level, Réaume notes that if there is a right to a participatory good, it can only be a collective right, in the sense that no individual may hold separately the right to stay in a cultured society, nor to self-determination of a people, nor to speak a language, nor to pray in public. These rights cannot be the simple sum of the rights of the various members of a group; if they exist they are held by a group *qua* group.¹

Therefore, the participatory goods are defined by three main characteristics: (a) it is not very important who possesses them or who is the owner; (b) the members of the reference group do not exchange them for other goods, and they don't trigger forms of reciprocity; (c) they are used and usable in a context (indeed the term comes from the Latin *contextus*, which means "a joining together") or in terms of sharing, i.e., as shared or joint goods. Following Russell Belk, we can distinguish the social situations of sharing focused on strong and direct links from those based on weak and indirect links. Two key prototypes for the sharing of the first type are "mothering and the pooling and allocation of resources within the family. In giving birth the mother shares her body with the foetus and subsequently shares her mother's milk, nurturing, care, and love with the infant. This care is given freely, with

¹ One year after the publication of Réaume's essay, Carol Uhlener's paper (1989) was published on "relational goods." These goods are characterized by the fact that if the positive consumption of one of them by a subject increases, then this increases the positive consumption of that good for others. As participatory goods, relational goods also cannot be consumed by one individual; but this is explained by Uhlener where consumption occurs on the basis of the interactions of the subject with the other, instead of on the basis of a form of sharing, as happens in Réaume.

no strings attached and no expectation of reciprocity or exchange. [...] Within the family, shared things are, de facto if not de jure, joint possessions. Their use requires no invitation, generates no debt, and may entail responsibilities as well as rights" (Belk, 2010, p. 717). A crucial intermediate case occurs with the "intergenerational sharing outside of the home and immediate family [...], both upward to parents and downward to adult children and grandchildren. Some of this sharing is concerned with helping financially, while sharing heirlooms and other family possessions is often more about passing family meanings and myths from one generation to another" (*Ivi*, p. 725). Finally, for the second type of sharing, "it takes only a moment of surfing the web to realize that the Internet is a cornucopia of information, entertainment, images, films, and music—mostly all free for accessing, downloading, and sharing with others. This wealth of goodies is there in the first place because others have shared. [...] Sometimes the sharing model is commercialized, as with all the .com "sharing" sites that are more accurately short-term rental sites. But in many other cases the sharing model is being applied in a non-commercial manner. And the mechanisms of blogs, social media, and photo- and video-sharing sites have sharing as their primary rationale" (Belk, 2013, p. 484). Figure 3 suggests some key examples of participatory goods, whose presence and extent in choice baskets of the subjects is measurable.²

² There is a difference between Belk's position and the one proposed here. Belk writes (2007, p.127): "We can share not only places and things, but also people and animals (to the extent they are ours to share), as well as our ideas, values, and time. I do not include the simple coincidences that we may 'share' a common language, place of birth, or set of experiences. These are all involuntary coincidences that do not depend on volitional sharing." Rather, we consider the voluntary as an unreflective form of sharing. In fact, culture or language is expression of socially decisive sharing, even though it arises from a "spontaneous order," according to famous expression of the Austrian school of economics, and not by deliberate choices of individuals. In this regard, Belk is still operating within the scope of individualistic methodology.

Sharing within strong and direct links	Sharing within weak and indirect links
Breastfeeding Double matrimonial bed Dialect of the village Palio of Siena A religious procession Cheer of the local team	Common symbols, languages and myths National-popular culture Blogs, social-media, and photo/video sharing sites Cheer of the team of a distant city

Figure 3: Some participatory goods

3. Person as locus of relations: A relational concept of well-being

In anthropological thought “the idea of the person has been a central issue throughout the twentieth century” (Douglas & Ney, 1998, p. 9). The individualistic subject is intended “as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background” (Geertz, 1983, p. 59). On the contrary, “the human being as a person is a complex of social relationships. He is a citizen of England, a husband and a father, a bricklayer, a member of a particular Methodist congregation, a voter in a certain constituency, a member of his trade union, an adherent of the Labor Party, and so on. Note that each of these descriptions refers to a social relationship, or to a place in a social structure. Note also that a social personality is something that changes during the course of the life of the person” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940, pp. 193-4; see also Ingold, 1991 and Palsson, 2013).

Often well-being is interpreted as an accomplished state in physical, mental, and social condition of the individual. It is a rich and comprehensive meaning, but not without problems. We can feel good for this or that; for the feeling that our life is for the best; or because we are happy with our life as a whole (Nozick, 1989, pp. 108-

09). The three perspectives coincide if the well-being is conceived as a *final state*, or as a snapshot, and diverge if it is seen as a *process* in which it is important the temporal distribution of well-being – for example, usually we prefer a life of increasing well-being, to a life of decreasing well-being, even if we arrive the same total amount – as well as expectations about future periods, and our eventual identity changes (*Ivi*, pp. 116 and 102). These difficulties do not appear to receive adequate attention in current literature on well-being. But “the quality of personhood depends on the variety of relationships persons are capable of sustaining with others” (Douglas & Ney, 1998, pp. 93-94). If, therefore, we focus on the person, we should examine the continuous process of the formation and breakdown of her well-being.

We propose to adopt a meso-level of analysis investigating the paths of interpersonal relations through which people act in their network of relationships, sharing their lives and enjoying participatory goods with others. In this work we intend to elaborate some key elements of this approach. In particular, we will focus on four main coordinates of the “dynamic positioning” of the person in the society:

- how and with whom she reacts to incentives;
- how and with whom she spends money;
- how and with whom she spends her spare time;
- how and with whom she adopts innovative behavior.

These four dimensions, listed in Figure 4, are representative of what we can call “relational activities” of the person: her personal ability to interact with other persons, groups, and institutions; i.e., the set of dynamic trajectories along which she navigates society. These dimensions were not selected on the basis of some abstract principle, but with a reference to the empirically determined (and civically committed) interpersonal paths of an Italian citizen in 2015. Obviously, our interpretation descended from subjective “lenses”; but it should be a useful starting point for researchers in the field to begin a discussion.

HOW and WITH WHOM people			
React to incentives	Spend money	Spend spare time	Adopt innovative behaviour

Figure 4: The main dimensions of relational well-being

We call “incentives” rewards or punishments motivating actions. Based on well-established literature (for all: Gneezy *et al.* 2011), we distinguish (Fig 5.) between “positional incentives,” whose purpose is to obtain and consume goods, or perform activities, whose usefulness arises from being distinguished from others; “egalitarian incentives,” whose purpose is to obtain and consume goods, or perform activities, whose usefulness stems from complying with others; “intrinsic private incentives,” that orient towards activities from which derives utility only because you do them, or for reasons internal to the activity itself; and “intrinsic relational incentives,” which, unlike the previous ones, require a joint consumption of goods or activities or the enjoyment of shared goods.

<i>Extrinsic Positional incentives</i>	<i>Extrinsic Egalitarian incentives</i>	<i>Intrinsic private incentives</i>	<i>Intrinsic relational incentives</i>
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Fig. 5: Incentives motivating actions

A first activity deeply rooted in the social (relational) life of persons is using money, both for consumption and in pursuing other economic goals. Following Aknin, Dunn & Norton (2008), we consider not only the amount of money available to each one, but also the way in which it is spent. These authors suggests that “personal spending” produces a lower well-being, for the person, relative to the “prosocial spending” and that this circumstance triggers a virtuous circle, according to which the person using money for others also becomes happier herself, and greater happiness results in a greater commitment to spend for others: see Figure 6. For our argument, it is not necessary to adopt this hypothesis; it is sufficient to accept that, in general terms, the motivations according which money is used affect the level of well-being that the person reaches.

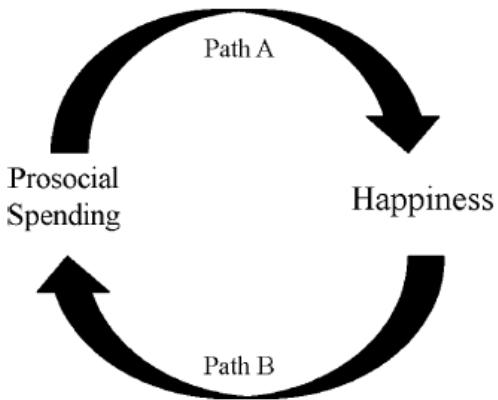


Figure 6: Model of positive feedback loop between prosocial spending and happiness

Source: Aknin, Dunn & Norton (2012)

A further relational activity of decisive importance in affecting personal well-being concerns the use of free time. In fact “a life without leisure, where everything is done for the sake of something else, is vain indeed. It is a life spent always in preparation, never in actual living. Leisure is the wellspring of higher thought and culture, for it is only when emancipated from the pressure of need that we really *look* at the world, ponder it in its distinct character and outline” (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2012, p. 220). We define free time as non-work time, during which the person can indulge in idleness, have fun, relax and consume. As it is easy to detect empirically, today the separation between duty and pleasure seems blurred—the distinction between *otium* and *negotium*, effort and *loisir*, repetitive tasks and playful practices. The prevailing trend seems to involve the gradual integration of working into free time, because activities previously regarded as an escape have often become aspects of working time—from traveling to reading the newspaper, and from phone conversations to playing sports. The hobby, strictly understood as unproductive and unnecessary use of free time, usually starting at sunset, apparently straddled the boundaries between what one does for others, for instrumental reasons, or for oneself. Yet, despite the exhibited interpenetration of *homo faber* and *homo ludens*, the attitude of the subject remains crucial in distinguishing between time subject to the constraints and objectives of work, and time spent for other people however they are labeled and classified. If indeed this distinction were to disappear, this would cause a complete rationalization of human life, its total submission to the reproductive logic of the market and capital. What is needed, instead, is to cultivate an area of inquiry exploring the actual attitude of the subject outside of work. The relational

dimension is a fundamental in characterizing the way people use spare time and the consequences that these activities can have on personal well-being.

In our discussion we will refer to three different motivations in using money and spending spare time (Fig. 7), according to an increasing importance given to the relational sphere. The questions we will ask are: what are the purposes for which the subjects use money or spend free time? Do their aims relate to their personal sphere? Or to strong linkages? Or, finally, do their aims relate to weak, indirect, and socially extended linkages?

<i>Acting for oneself</i>	<i>Acting for weak relationships</i>	<i>Acting for strong relationships</i>
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Fig. 7 Relational motivations in acting

These questions will be crossed with a classification of resources used in acting, according to their origin (Fig 8). Where do they get the resources? Do they use the resources inherited from the past generations? Do they use commons? Do they use earned money? Or do they get in advance, through debt, resources that will be able have in the future?

Using common resources	Using resources received by others	Using earned money	Using borrowed money	Without money
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Fig. 8: Origin of spent money

The last relational dimension of acting on which we will focus concerns the methods for conceiving and practicing paths for change in society. Here, we will adopt the classification system of the political scientist Kathleen Thelen, according to which the change of institutions – based on the long-term accumulation of smaller changes – tends to be achieved primarily through three modes (Thelen, 2002; Streeck & Thelen 2005). The first mode is displacement or substitution: the characteristics of a social entity are removed and replaced with a process involving the active destruction of the existing configuration and the active creation of new alternatives. The second mode is layering or stratification: it is a discontinuous process in which an entity is altered by

the introduction of new properties or characteristics; however, the change does not occur with the replacement of the previous arrangement, but with the addition of a further configuration on top of the existing arrangement. Finally, we have the modes of drift or relocating: the key attributes of an entity remain on the surface, but they change in function. In our view, these rules can also apply to the personal paths for change. In the first scenario, a subject acted in one manner, but now she operates in another way. In the second, the subject acted in certain manner, and now she *also* operates in another way. Finally, in the third scenario we find a disconnect between formal and substantive properties: the subject seems to act in a certain manner, but underneath she still works in another way. Figure 9 summarizes these three scenarios.

Substitution	Stratification	Displacement
New rules replace the old ones:	New rules are added to the current ones:	Formal rules remain the same but their meaning changes:
<i>in the past we did that now we do this</i>	<i>now we do this and also that</i>	<i>we declare doing this but actually we do that</i>

Figure 9: Pathways for personal change

In the following paragraphs the interpretive framework outlined above will be used to analyze and discuss the so-called “Alternative Food Networks.” AFNs are an emerging area of the global food industry whose distinctive features can be associated with the presence of a peculiar relational setting to support market transactions.

4. Shared goods and relational dimensions in the Alternative Food Networks

“The term Alternative Food Networks is here used as a broad, embracing term to cover newly emerging networks of producers, consumers, and other actors that embody alternatives to more standardised industrial mode of food supply” (Renting et al, 2003, p. 394). This broad definition of AFNs encompasses a wide spectrum of market experiences in the food system under the comprehensive (and fuzzy) concept of “alternativeness.” The vast quantity literature developed since the 1990s

characterizes AFNs from different perspectives. According to the recent and comprehensive review by Angela Tregear, at least three distinctive features of AFNs are often alleged as “beneficial,” despite the absence of robust empirical evidence: their being rooted in a particular location, their orientation to economic viability of involved actors (both producers and consumers), and their superior sustainability—both in environmental and social terms (Tregear, 2011).

The first instances of AFNs emerged the late 70s as local reactions to the global articulation of industrial food chain, which was perceived as an increasing threat to the safety of food and the resilience of rural economies in developed countries. Very early on, such a movement also became the expression of a “quality turn” (Goodman, 2003) in food consumption, with consumers seeking answers to their increasing distrust in the definition of “quality” stemming from the conventional agro-food industry (Renting et al., 2003). The consumers’ participation in the definition of “new food practices,” with a direct involvement in the organisation of the food supply chain, is a distinctive feature of AFNs. The consumers’ movement involved in AFNs focuses mainly on environmental and social issues linked to food production. However, such a “quality turn” in food consumption also coincided with the growing demand for luxury and positional goods in affluent economies (Winter 2003).

On the supply side, the first farmers exploring the “alternative” forms food market were often motivated by the pressure on farm incomes caused by the long-run decreasing trend in agricultural prices and to the so-called “technological treadmill” of industrial forms of agriculture, which required large investments in new technologies to compress production costs (Santini et al, 2013). Nowadays, the participation in AFNs is increasingly perceived as one of the opportunities to diversify farming activities, within an entrepreneurial management of the agricultural business (Tregear, 2011).

More recently, AFNs have been associated with the emergence of a “new rural economy” or “neo-rurality” where the processes of de-intermediation and the cooperation between responsible farmers and aware consumers are able to return the largest part of food prices under their joint control. Interestingly, relations among involved actors are central in describing these ‘visions’: “Principles and practices of caring, equity, shared responsibility...paths like these are rather lived and stated as expression of ‘sovereignty’: food sovereignty ... and construction of territory as a common good” (Ferraresi, 2013, p. 81). The concept of ‘food sovereignty’, despite its vague content. can be found in the Milan Charter launched in Italy during EXPO 2015.

AFNs are often described as “short food supply chains” (Renting and Madsen, 2003), an expression implying a contact between the final consumer and the producer, as well as the simplification of the food production process itself towards vertically integrated and geographically-characterized production activities (as in traditional forms of food supply). This configuration doesn’t necessarily imply that exchanges should be realized only within local food markets. Rather, the ‘identity’ of food should preserve its personal and geographical features, enabling consumers to maintain ‘direct’ relations with persons and places it comes from, even when they live far away.

This ‘alternative’ segment of the global food system is generally perceived as more able to promote environmental sustainability and to foster development in rural areas. Such a perception grounds a broad set of policy measures carried out both in the European Union (under the so-called “Second Pillar” of the Common Agricultural Policy) and in the US. Though the evidence of such positive impacts is still episodic and non-conclusive, the increasing number of AFNs and their long-term persistence within advanced rural economies proposes them as a viable form of business and a social arrangement suitable to be pursued within the food sector, despite their still small market share (Santini et al, 2013).

The emphasis on the “reconfiguration” of producer-consumer relations (Goodman, 2003) explains why AFNs have received increasing attention from social science scholars in the last two decades. Despite some ideological roots shared with ‘alternative’ trade experiences, developed during the 60s to support countries marginalized in the global trade for political reasons,³ from their very beginning AFNs claim being local as their characterizing feature. Murdoch et al. (2000) depict AFNs as the manifestation of an ‘alternative geography of food.’ The alternativeness of AFNs is stated in opposition to the globalization processes affecting food production and trade. In their theoretical paper, Murdoch and colleagues interpret the local nature of AFNs as a manifestation of the resilience of ‘natural’ to the increasing pressure of ‘social’ in the modern food supply chain: “...continued efforts are made by producers and manufacturers to reduce the importance of nature in the food production process, and this has been a primary concern of main food sector analysts ... as nature is squeezed out of the production process global linkages are increasingly consolidated, making the food system an intrinsic part of globalization of commodity production” (Murdoch et al., 2000, p. 109). The vertical division of the production process among farming,

³ The same alternativeness currently inspiring the ‘fair’ trade systems (Renard, 2003).

processing, trading and retailing phases that is typical of the global supply chain is described by these authors as a process of 'social construction' of food, which increasingly interposes between the production and consumption elements that would be directly linked in the 'natural' configuration of the supply chain. Such an opposition between social and natural sounds quite paradoxical, since the process of re-localization leading to the creation of AFNs is often presented as a necessary condition to guarantee the re-socialization of exchanges: within AFNs, they "... are not the result of some kind of external, elusive 'free market'. They result, rather, from the active construction of networks by various actors in the agrofood chain, such as farmers, food processors, wholesalers, retailer and consumers" (Renting et al., 2003, p. 399). According to Mardsen and colleagues a common characteristic in AFNs is "... the emphasis upon the type of relationship between the producer and the consumer in these supply chains and the role of this relationship in constructing value and meaning" (Mardsen et al., 2000, p. 425). The peculiar features of single AFNs emerge from a large number of case studies and comprehensive literature reviews (Santini et al, 2013) and almost always could be described as an increase of personal relations caused by narrowing the geographical identity of food. Goodman describes them as "... place-based and socially embedded alternative food practices" (Goodman, 2003, p. 1).

The concept of "socially embedded" has been widely used to characterize AFNs. In his seminal paper Granovetter (1985) shows the pervasive relevance of social relations in explaining economic behavior, well beyond the under-socialized description proposed by past economic theory. Granovetter's approach has been widely used to discuss the nature of AFNs. According to Sage (2003, p. 50), among the basic attributes of alternative 'good food' networks in Southwest Ireland are "...socially embedded features that are established by [their] scale of production and by [their] generally localized distribution through short food supply chains." A wide survey of five study areas in England and Wales on purchases of locally produced food showed that consumers' preference was likely to be the expression of a 'defensive' localism "based on sympathy for farmers, an ideology equally at home amongst outside incomers and more established rural residents" (Winter, 2003, p. 29). The embeddedness of AFNs is often described as the result of a deliberate attempt to re-embed food market relations into a given local social environment. In his paper on farmers' markets (FM), Kirwan applies the concept of re-embedding proposed by Thorne, to describe "...the purposive action by which individuals or communities seek

to create accessible structures that can allow them to regain some control within exchange processes" (Thorne, 1996, p. 397). In their attempt to re-embed market relations into social links, farmers' markets can be compared to the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) phenomenon developed in US (groups of consumers or communities supporting local producers in exchange for production shares) (Hinrichs, 2000).

A further concept can be found in literature to describe the relational nature of AFNs: that of 'regard.' In his 1997 paper, Offner explores the wide area of non-market exchanges that still persist within modern societies and analyzes the concepts of 'gift' and 'regard' and their connections with reciprocity and well-being. Reciprocity is essential in establishing relations of regard, which in turn is described as an attitude of approbation: "Trade in regard is vital: self-regard is difficult to sustain without external confirmation... Gift exchange has two elements: the gains from trade and the satisfaction of regard "(Offner, 1997, p. 452). Among the areas of modern society where gift/regard relations are still pervasive, Offner also lists agricultural production and food consumption. Farming fundamentally remains a family-managed activity, even in developed economies, and, according to Offner, "Families remain the wellspring of regard. They are held together by two intense bonds: between spouses and between generations" (*ibid*: 458). On the family farm, face-to-face relations used in allocating household work for market productions are efficient in overcoming the problem of monitoring work efforts typical in the sector. The stability of sharecropping contracts in agriculture has been related to the flexibility of wages they imply, requiring an exchange of trust and commitment between the landlord and the sharecropper that is able to increase their mutual regard (Bandini, 1991; Rocchi, 2013). Relation of regard have also been described as characterizing market relations within AFNs. Farmers Markets (FMs) and other community-supported forms of agriculture are widespread typologies of AFNs (Hinrichs, 2000), where the closeness between producers and consumers is based on face-to-face relations. According to Kirwan (2004), personal contacts are an integral part of FMs experiences. Not only do they provide consumers with a means of quality evaluation based on trust; personal relations are very often considered a benefit as such that the consumer can obtain by participating in this form of market exchange: "... the gains from trade are still important, but in addition there are the 'satisfaction of regard' ... from the creation and maintenance of personal relationships which are cemented through such mutual responses as: reputation, friendship, sociability, respect, attention, and intimacy – or,

in Offer's terms, the exchange of 'regard'" (Kirwan, 2004, p. 399). The last quotation exemplifies what Tregear rightly defines a "headline claim" of "high quality ... relationships" that in AFNs would be generated by the direct interaction between the buyer and the seller, neglecting the negative aspects that such a marketing setting may produce (Tregear, 2011, p. 426). Nonetheless, the discussion about regard highlights the central role that personal relations can play in market exchanges, suggesting that it is worthwhile to consider their nature when studying the creation and development of AFNs, and look at the impact of personal relations on the well-being of involved actors.

A last perspective used in studying AFNs that can be linked to our analytical framework is the so-called 'cultural economy' approach. Localism in food networks is often the expression of a specific culture shared and dynamically created and re-created by local actors. As Dixon argues, the cultural concerns should be explicitly considered in studying food systems, as the actors involved in the food supply chain "are engaged in constructing regimes of value in which exchange takes place" (Dixon, 1998: 157). Indeed, social identities are strongly connected with food production and consumption and are also likely to affect market relations within the food supply chain. Not surprisingly, the differentiation of food through an explicit geographical identity, as in the face-to-face short food supply chains or in the case of the Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) products, has been described as the creation of a 'culture economy' (Ray, 1998). According to this author, the process involves different modes of manifestation. On one side, regional agro-food products actualize a sort of "commodification" of the local culture. On the other side, the creation and the promotion of a PDO product reinforces the territorial identity both by selling the 'place' outside the territory and by contributing to the internal sharing of a cultural marker. Many forms of AFNs may be interpreted as part of a rural development process based on the strengthening of local cultural identities where "... the local culture ... becomes more than an instrument to fuel trade in the global economy and instead is rediscovered as the source of local wisdom and ethics" (Ray, 1998, p. 8).

In the next section we try to interpret the socio-economic phenomenon of AFNs, in the broad sense just outlined, in terms of relational settings, personal paths for change, and the emergence of shared social goods according to the theoretical framework proposed above.

	<i>Spending money for oneself</i>	<i>Spending money for weak relationships</i>	<i>Spending money for strong relationships</i>
<i>Extrinsic Positional incentives</i>	Holidays at a luxury rural hotel in a renowned wine region Purchasing food specialties to organize a dinner party at the country club	Funding community supported forms of agriculture <i>Locavore</i>	Purchasing a special wine bottle for a family celebration <i>Locavore</i>
<i>Extrinsic Egalitarian incentives</i>	Grocery shopping at the high-end modern retail stores Saturday dinner at a trendy wine bar	Purchasing PDO, fair trade and organic food products <i>Locavore</i>	Adding high quality food products to the weekly grocery basket <i>Locavore</i>
<i>Intrinsic private incentives</i>	Purchasing a food specialty on a whim Attending a course on traditional cooking	Using only natural products to grow the family garden Purchasing the old friend's olive oil	Purchasing local products to prepare traditional food for the family Growing vegetables in the family garden
<i>Intrinsic relational incentives</i>	Going to the farmers' market	Joining with a Ethical Purchasing Group Funding community supported forms of agriculture	Going to the yearly farmers' market fair with children

Fig 10: Purchases and consumptions classified according to personal incentives and social motivations

5 Testing a sharing and relational approach to well-being: Rural life and alternative food networks

In this section, we will describe a set of actions that could be included in the narrative of AFNs, using the four dimensions we proposed in section 3 to describe the dynamic positioning of persons within society. A typology of behaviors results from combining the nature of incentives affecting choices, the motivations followed in spending money, and the resources used in acting. We will use this typology to stress

the similarities and differences among different actions from a relational point of view and to discuss how personal pathways of change operate at the meso/social level of AFNs.

In Figure 10, purchasing and consumption choices are classified according to incentives and social motivations followed in spending money. In our view the 'personal meaning' of consumption choices, and the well-being they can produce, is deeply affected by their relational features. The reading of the table along both the rows (according to social motivations) and columns (according to incentives) shows a spectrum of behaviors moving from positional, luxury consumptions in the upper-left corner of the table to purchasing activities mainly motivated by relational bonds in the lower-right corner. The direct relation between the 'quality turn' in food consumption and the increase of positional expenditures observed in affluent societies has been stressed in literature (Winter, 2003; Tregear, 2011). Still, the industry of luxury wine tourism as well as the quest for specialty food by 'authenticity seekers' as a distinctive form of purchase (Ray, 1998) represent a non-negligible share of the AFNs turnover. Despite the fact that their relational nature does not perfectly fit with the intended social aims of the networks (where cooperative relations should prevail over competitive ones), the economic viability of AFNs in many cases depends *also* on the persistence of these forms of consumption.

Moving from the upper left towards the lower right quadrant of the table, well-being is increasingly dependent on two-way relational achievements. Nonetheless, the classification doesn't show a one-to-one correspondence between actions and typologies. The same action may be described as the response to the incentives placed at the opposite ends of our classification. In figure 10, for example, the funding of community-supported forms of agriculture is represented as a use of money to react both to extrinsic positional incentives and to intrinsic relational incentives. Consumers joining AFNs are often urban residents using the 'local' characterization of food as a cue for its quality rather than seeking lower prices due to income constraints (Rocchi et al., 2013; Tregear, 2013). Studies in the US show that community-supported forms of agriculture often fail to attract people with economic problems (Macias, 2008), while AFNs sometimes reinforce forms of social exclusion, for example when they are "... the preserve of white, middle class and affluent consumers" (Santini et al, 2013, p. 29). Also the phenomenon of 'locavorism' is likely to be motivated by different relational settings. The term 'locavore,' originally created for the launch of a new local food initiative by a group of highly motivated consumers (challenging the

population of the San Francisco Bay to eat only locally produced food for one month) in 2007 was selected as the 'Word of the Year' by the Oxford University Press. The account of the author of the neologism (Prentice, 2007) suggests the overlapping of this purchasing behavior with more than one typologies of purchasing behavior, including both individual and egalitarian incentives and more or less strong relational motivations in spending money.

Overall, the proposed results seem able to account for a wide spectrum of actions from the actors within AFNs', including some which are more controversial from a relational point of view. A further deepening in the representation of the 'relational map' of AFNs is provided by figures 11 and 12, where motivations are cross-tabulated against a classification of monetary sources used in acting. The results are used to map both the farmers' participation in AFNs and the people's use of rural space for leisure during spare time. Interestingly, the framework seems able to support the analysis of both these vastly different economic behaviors.

Again, the participation in AFNs emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon, with actions that may be classified as both entrepreneurial and leisure behaviors, as in the case of 'hobby' farming carried out on small family-owned holdings. The persistence of small scale family farming is a typical feature of developed agricultures, where the increase of off-farm labor opportunities allows agricultural households to maintain land ownership as a family asset even when technical progress increases the efficient scale in farming, and to continue farming as a secondary source of income. Despite their small economic size these forms of farming often show clear entrepreneurial features (Rocchi, 2013). Figure 12 includes some of the actions previously mapped according to incentives and relational motivations—such as luxury expenditures, the purchase of local food, and the participation in short food supply chains—with a broader picture where the interactions between supply, demand, and 'civic' forms of participation are described.

Non-monetary forms of participation in AFNs can also be included in the picture, both as a part of farming activities and as a possible use of spare time. Motivations are able to discriminate between economic and relation-driven behaviors: for example 'hosting' can be included among management choices of farmers, as in the case of 'wwoofers⁴ (reducing costs in labor intensive production processes) or among their

⁴ The acronym WWOOF stands for 'World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms': Wwoofers are voluntary workers exchanging labor services for on-farm hospitality. Wwoofing is an 'alternative' way to travel; the global network of national WWOOF associations support wwoofers in finding hosts (farmers) and supervise the compliance of a minimal set of rules during the exchange. For further information on wwoofing, see www.wwoof.net.

mainly ‘relation-driven’ actions, as in the case of relatives’ holidays (during which a spontaneous contribution of relatives to farming activities is likely to be expected within an exchange of ‘regard’). The ‘spare time’ map allows us to discuss the different motivations underlying these forms of non-monetary exchanges. The self-interested motivations of wwoofers (purchasing accommodations with labor services) can be considered aligned with those of their hosts. Interestingly, the relational motivations can reverse the sign of the economic value of the supplied labor: while for the wwofer labor is a ‘cost’ within a non-monetary transaction, in the case of voluntary workers or, even more so, in the case of parents working on their son’s farm, labor efforts may become a direct source of well-being.

Resources Motivations	Using common resources	Using resources received by others	Using earned money	Using borrowed money	Without money
<i>Acting for oneself</i>	Funding on farm investments with CAP financial support	Funding on farm investments with the husband/wife money	Purchasing a farm with profits from other activities to diversify assets	Borrowing money to finance on farm investments	Hosting wwoofers during harvest time
<i>Acting for weak relationships</i>	Helping the Local Action Group to apply for a Leader Plus grant to promote traditional food products	Non farming landowners joining the local farmers' association	Becoming a shareholder of the local farms' cooperative	Sharing liabilities for a loan to finance the activities of the local farmer's association	Hosting pilgrims and foot travellers in the family farm (Santiago Way)
<i>Acting for strong relationships</i>	Using CAP support to transmit the farm to children	Carrying out hobby farming with the family in the inherited small holding	Purchasing a rural house with garden for family holidays	Borrowing a long term loan to support the start-up of the son's farm business	Hosting relatives in the family farm during holidays

Fig 11: resources and motivations in farming

Resources Motivations	Using common resources	Using resources received by others	Using earned money	Using borrowed money	Without money
<i>Acting for oneself</i>	Fishing alone in the lake of the municipality	Using an inheritance to purchase a luxury country-side villa for spare time	Purchasing only local food (locavore)	Borrowing money for spending vacations in a luxury rural resort	Joining the grape harvest during a holiday
					Woofers
<i>Acting for weak relationships</i>	Joining the Slow Food Group during a visit to a traditional cheese factory	Neo-rural residents joining the local action group to support local food specialties	Funding Community Supported Agriculture	Borrowing money to rent a country-side villa to host friends for playing golf	Working as a volunteer at the local Farmers Market
					Summer holidays as a voluntary worker at a NGO-managed non profit farm (Libera)
<i>Acting for strong relationships</i>	Sunday family trip in the surrounding countryside (Norman Rockwell picture)	Carrying out hobby farming with the family in the inherited small holding	Purchasing local foods for Christmas presents	Borrowing money to organise the daughter's marriage party in a country-side resort	Working at the son's farm during harvest time

Fig. 12: resources and motivations in using spare time in the countryside

Most of the actions mapped throughout in the proposed typology rely on a shared good that is often described as 'rural environment' or 'territorial identity' (Ferrari, 2013). Individual goals of some of the described actions can be achieved only if such an asset is available together with monetary resources. Thus, the beauty and the accessibility of the countryside, together with its social attraction (such as a traditional cheese factory to visit with a Slow Food group), are the basis of the enjoyment of a Sunday trip by a family group such as the one in the Norman Rockwell picture (Figure 13), but are also an asset for producers promoting local food culture, which they can use to enhance their business and to strengthen a local cultural identity. The achievement of individual goals (both in economic life and in living spare time), even in absence of monetary transactions, confirms the existence of a shared good. Such a rural environment/context appear to be a 'shared' good in the true sense: that is, in some extent it cannot be enjoyed/exploited without sharing it with other people pursuing their own goals.



Figure 13
Norman Rockwell, 1948: "The Outing"

At the same time, a relevant part of the value of such a shared asset seems to result from the prevalence of relational or pro-social motivations for acting. The personal pathways of change are likely to affect the dynamic of AFNs and of the shared, relational assets they rely on. In figure 14, some examples are provided of alternative strategies (substitution, stratification, and displacement) that can be followed in changing personal behavior to join AFNs both as producers and consumers.

Substitution	Stratification	Displacement
<p>Starting to produce and consume only organic products</p> <p>Purchasing only food from alternative food networks</p> <p>Purchasing fresh vegetables only at the Farmers' Market</p> <p>On farm regular employment</p> <p>Actual compliance with conditionality CAP rules</p>	<p>Consuming/producing food both from organic and conventional farming</p> <p>Purchasing sometimes food from alternative food networks</p> <p>Purchasing fresh vegetables at the Farmers' Market when possible</p> <p>On farm regular employment except during harvest time</p> <p>Formal compliance with conditionality CAP rules</p>	<p>Consuming organic food and managing a conventional farm</p> <p>Purchasing food from alternative food networks only making presents</p> <p>Purchasing fresh vegetables at the Farmers' Market only during tourism</p> <p>Hosting wwoofers only during harvest time</p> <p>Minimising pay-offs from possible controls on compliance with conditionality CAP rules</p>

Fig. 14: pathways of personal change in farming and consuming food

A displacement strategy also allows persons to pursue their individual goals by joining AFNs, but is unlikely to contribute to the process of social reproduction of the underlying shared assets. In absence of enough persons following a substitution/stratification paths, the relational setting of AFNs would be progressively consumed to the point that displacement strategies might become unfeasible.

6. Conclusion

We argue that the AFNs are a form of *civic* agriculture; more exactly, a form of *commonality* which mainly occurs in rural areas. Indeed, “the citizen is not merely an individual endowed with certain rights; he is also defined by his relation to others, his *fellow citizens*. What Émile Benveniste tells us about the etymology of the word *civis* is especially enlightening in this regard. The Latin *civis*, he argues, was originally a term applied to people who shared the same habitat. Implicit in the meaning of the word was a certain idea of reciprocity. It was thus a term of relative order, as can be seen by comparison with the root of the Sanskrit and Germanic words for friend,

relative, and ally. The *civis* was a person who joined with his peers in the construction of a *civitas*, a common society. I propose the term ‘commonality’ as a name for this dimension of citizenship, citizenship as a social form, as distinct from its legal dimension” (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 277; see Benveniste, 1969, pp. 335-337: the author distinguishes the Latin model of communal citizenship, to which we refer, from the Greek model in which the city comes first).

The several forms of AFNs and short food supply chains emerged in the last decades are an interesting case to highlight the limits of an individualistic conception of well-being and to suggest a possible development of the analysis towards a genuine “relational” approach. Our framework focuses on relations as a constitutive feature of individual being and acting and on the emergence of participatory goods, i.e. goods whose individual enjoyment depends on sharing them with others. In this paper *rural commonality* yielding from success forms of AFNs is analyzed within a framework explicitly recognizing that some of its features are intrinsically irreducible to the simple interaction among individuals conceived as “independent entities.” Within these forms of agriculture and rural life people follow pathways of personal change affecting the relational dimension of their lives, according to how they use money and spare time. At the same time these personal pathways contribute to the emergence and reproduction of rural economies and cultures as participatory or shared goods they jointly use in pursuing their personal goals.

As Carol Rose reminds us, the Romans divided property into common property (*res communes*), state property (*res publicae*), and private property (*res privatae*). The first is “a distinct class of “inherently public property” which is fully controlled by neither government nor private agents. [...] It is] property collectively “owned” and “managed” by society at large, with claims independent of and indeed superior to the claims of any purported governmental manager” (Rose, 1986, p. 720). The territory where rural commonality emerges becomes a modern form of *res communes*, or, in the terminology introduced here, a participatory good. There, both people and environment are continually developing within a mutual interaction, and “both cultural knowledge and bodily substance are seen to undergo continuous generation in the context of an ongoing engagement with the land and with the beings—human and non-human—that dwell therein” (Ingold, 2000, p. 133). “By this view, landscape is dwelling—not land, not nature, but rooted in corporeal human perception of the surrounding environment. It follows that landscape becomes known by those who

dwell within it, by the skills of involved practice involving both long-standing cultural meaning and the performative sensorium” (Cloke, 2013, p. 233).

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