



Agro-food consumption patterns to favour social and economical resilience

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Abstract – We can distinguish two different approaches to agro-food consumption. The main model follows the value chain nutrition rules and it is focused on establishing the quality and product price-stability. At the same time, strengthening the short circuits of commercialization is significant, as an alternative to the main model. These initiatives, which have different working matters, promote the roll to involve consumers in the consequences of their consumption habits. In addition, these types of consumers value direct connection between producers and local stakeholders. In the context of Network Society, ICT adoptions offer a tool to organize these short circuits of commercialization business.

This article studies the case of the municipality of Sant Cugat del Vallès, located close to Barcelona metropolitan area and where we can recognise much of the short circuit of commercialization patterns. On the one hand, we are evaluating if the proliferation of these initiatives into the proximity territory can offer a consumption alternative thanks to the interaction between producers and consumers. On the other hand, taking into account the Case of Sant Cugat del Vallès, we are going to analyse the significance of a new pattern between rural and urban space relations through agro-food consumption.

VALUE CHAIN VS. LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT

The value chain model is the dominant one in Spain. This theory started by Porter (1985) describes activities developed in a sector or a business so as to generate value to the final customer. Toribio et al. (2012) analyses the distributed organization of agro-food products as a piece of value chain under Porter's theory. The possibility to control the quality and regulate prices has been the main reason to implant this economical model.

The value chain model has developed some strategies to improve agro-rural food commercialization. Indeed, food commercialization has a big importance for economy. According to Mauleón (2009), 25% of TV advertisements are focused on food. Even though food is a priority for marketing, the 'consumer deskilling' is growing (Jaffe and Gartler, 2006). A lot of consumers have missed their knowledge and required abilities to evaluate the products they consume.

In this sense, Internet has been proposed as a tool to connect without any intermediaries. But as

we have mentioned before, the value chain has created an opaque gap between producer and consumer. Although the consumer is able to buy agro-rural food products in a supermarket chain in 'one click', he/she does not know a lot of things about them. In the majority of cases, Chris Anderson's theory (Long Tail, 2004) interpretation has developed an Internet vision as a space where costumers anywhere in the world are able to buy whatever product they want. According to that, the idea of selling to any place around the world is possible and that strategy strengthens another consumer group around the product.

In spite of that marketing vision, the investigations give ITC other opportunities better connected with the sense of local food movement. In that vision, the priority is not to keep the possibility to be able to sell anywhere around the world through the Net, but to engage citizens around the product they consume. The result is a community, which has a big connection with local localization and using ICT to organize and collaborate among them.

Local food movement works in that sense. This model has reached another approach to food consumption, through short circuits of commercialization, with some successful examples, based on engagement and networks. This model believes the main current system of food consumption is acting against the benefits of people. Their structures are not vertical and lineal like the way big supermarket chains work. They work as a net of knowledge. In addition, their goal is not economical benefit; it is improving the quality of population feeding and increasing local development. Local food movement, which is based on permaculture, tries to give a positive and encouraging answer to communities in front of peak oil, climate destruction and economic instability (Hopkins and Pinkerton, 2009).

SHORT CIRCUIT BUSINESS MODELS

Nowadays, effervescence of short circuits of commercialization, which, in fact, has never disappeared, is growing in a lot of countries so as to follow the local food pattern. New models of commercialization have been arising during the last years allowing new approaches between production and consumption, as well as, urban and rural world.

Binimelis and Descombes (2010) represent the short circuits commercialization focusing on the proximity between producer and consumer, understood in terms of relocation and resocialization strategy. They define a large list of business forms: specialized shops, consumer cooperatives, consumers' cooperatives, producers' and consumers' cooperatives, producers' cooperatives & collective place

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sellers, community orchards, catering, sponsorship systems, supermarkets with local products, direct seller at home or consumption groups, direct farm sales and direct market sales.

To sum up, in the majority of short circuit business models, producers and consumers are organized in communities to get more advantages. Collaboration is a good way to reach the objective to connect consumers and producers. The added value is the possibility to know more things about food consumption and how to share the knowledge among the people involved in the process. That proposal goes further the value chain theory of getting better economic advantages and improving product quality. Indeed, networks and knowledge, both transformed in confidence, are the key points of organization around agro-rural food consumption in the local food movement.

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF ICT USES IN SHORT CIRCUIT COMMERCIALIZATION

According to the Spain Food Price Observatory, the smaller a food business is, the higher probability of direct commercialization. At the same, it is trending an increase of short circuits of commercialization thanks to Internet possibilities.

In the general vision, ICT can help to *break knowledge gaps*, promoting the exchange of information through a direct connection between consumers and producers. That close relationship in a short consumption circuit breaks the gaps to knowledge. Consumers have direct information about product through the producer or processor who has made it. The consumer is able to know food characteristics and growing process. In addition, consumers are more aware about who is the beneficiary of food commercialization activity.

ICT also makes personal demands easy, because it helps to *organize the commercialization*. A website or social tools give the opportunity to make consumer orders. At the same, in some cases, technology is an effective space to improve a collaborative backstage. In a consumption group for instance, ICT help to organise them (to choose each products or to coordinate supply spot, to name but two). Most groups have 'the distribution day' when they meet in place to take each food supply. What is more, ICT is able to improve distribution logistics, connecting local stakeholders.

Other important technological use is related to create a *social framework to communicate*. ICT allow producers to connect and interact with consumers. Sometimes interaction between both parts allows *improving innovation around products or services*.

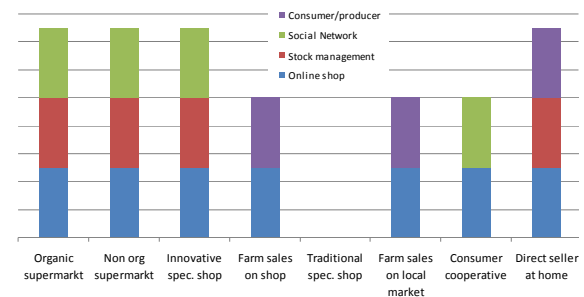
THE CASE OF SANT CUGAT DEL VALLÈS, CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Sant Cugat is a town located 10km to the north from Barcelona centre. Fifty years ago only 12.000 people lived there, it was mainly rural and the vegetables and fruit came from their own fields and orchards. Nowadays Sant Cugat has some 80.000 inhabitants and a GDP per capita 33.2 k€, and fruit and vegetables come mainly from Barcelona Central Market, Mercabarna following the aforementioned main model.

However, since 1985 some commercialization initiatives that correspond clearly to the ones men-

tioned in Binemelis (2010) have bloomed as to demonstrate that the local food model is a real alternative to the main model. Indeed, only Barcelona city has more than 30 consumer groups that follow this distributed model.

A qualitative and quantitative analysis of eight cases of Sant Cugat shops that offer short circuit commercialisation has been carried out. A first – somehow obvious- conclusion is the consolidation of short circuit commercialisation business models that increase year by year in quantity and modality. The second conclusion that arises is that while local food model is always organic and enhances direct contact between production and consumption, the one-click-away model is not always organic and does not allow the direct contact. Thus, the information barrier between consumer and producer remains.



The role of ICTs has been studied as well on the eight cases defining four uses as depicted on the Figure 1: online shop, social networks consumers, stock management, and producer-consumer channel. Two main conclusions are also drawn: first, that the use of ICT is quite widespread in all cases, large and small, except for the oldest one that voluntarily does not use them. The second is again that in spite of this extended use of ICT and in particular social networks and online channels, only two of eight cases –the Direct Market one and the Direct Seller at home patterns - relate the consumer with the producer. All the rest but one –the traditional organic shop- have social networks mainly as a promotion channel with recipes and the like, but present no way to access or identify the producer.

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