New emerging peasantry and local food: Participatory Guarantee Systems as a strategy to re-localise and re-socialise the organic food quality. A theoretical analysis.¹

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Summary
Despite a farewell to peasants was predicted by modernisation theorists, nowadays we are witnessing a re-emergence of the peasant model; this new direction is today interpreted as a search of independence from the centrifugal thrust of the agro-industrial sector. This paper, with a theoretical approach and an analysis of the relevant bibliography, links the new emerging peasantry to the dynamics which are changing the organisation of the markets through, for instance, the construction of new food circuits or changes in consumers’ behaviour. These elements are framing agriculture in a process of transition in which the primary sector have to face new challenges. Considering that both industrial agriculture and peasant agriculture are trying to cope with new demands by reorganising themselves, this work presents the Participatory Guarantee Systems as a peasants’ tool to re-socialise quality within the organic markets and bring back food to a local dimension, moving it away from the processes of commodification.

Key words: Peasantry, Participatory Guarantee Systems, Quality, Alternative Food Networks, Organic production

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, the global agricultural sector has undergone a transition process characterized by both continuity and rupture traits with the past, which resulted in a reshaping trend of the consumer attitudes in urban spaces and the emergence of new forms of rurality in the countryside. Subsequently to the agricultural modernization of the 1950s and the development of innovative technologies during the Green Revolution, an imminent disappearance of peasant agriculture was envisaged (Bernstein, 1990). On the contrary, today the peasant model is re-emerging as a new and more equitable reinterpretation of social needs and demands. This paper is aimed to explain – with an analysis of the main contributions of the literature – how the dynamics that are marking the current agricultural transition process can lead to the configuration of new production and consumption practices by influencing the connection between food and territory. In the first part, this paper clarifies causes and trends of the peasant re-emergence through a comparison with the operating logic of the agro-industrial system. The analysis continues following the main idea that both industrial agriculture and peasant agriculture survive and regenerate themselves responding to social and economic demands. The need to respond to new demands and challenges, posed by society, sets the foundation to create new food circuits, often considered as alternative to the mainstream networks. As will be described later, the creation of new circuits or the adoption of more sustainable production techniques and consumer styles – under an environmental point of view – are not exclusive dynamics of the re-emergence of the peasant model but they are also a strategy adopted by food regimes to deal with a changing demand. The element that really should make the difference in defining a circuit as alternative is its ability to guarantee and pursue – besides an environmental sustainability - an economic and social equity. After having analysed the issues regarding the alternative food networks, the article continues by
defining the concept of quality and interpreting its re-socialisation as a mechanism proper of the new peasantisation wave. Referring to the organic markets, which have experienced a large increase in demand, and a consequent increasing necessity to ensure quality through certification processes, at the end, the article proposes the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) as a tool to distance production and consumption from conventional channels and – at the same time – assure consumers a standard of quality socially constructed. PGSs are useful tools to affirm the autonomy of the rural communities and counter the dependence mechanisms generated by globalised economies; for these reasons, I considered essential not analyse them individually but rather place them within the broader development of the peasantry.

**A farewell to peasants?**

Contrary to what was announced by the theorists of the modernisation paradigm between the 1950s and 1970s, who preannounced a progressive disappearance of the peasantry and peasant agriculture, currently we are witnessing a reverse outcome, the re-emergence of the peasant model. This is delineated, by van der Ploeg (2009), as one of the main trends that are transforming the global agricultural sector. The re-emergence of the peasant model appears as a global externality of the neoliberal organization of the agricultural sector, and it constitutes the most recent phase in the evolution of the peasantry. Following Shanin (1971) peasantry must be read as a process composed by a non-regular course that – through expansion and contraction trends – structures, deconstructs and restructures itself basing on economic and political changes (Bundy, 1979).

On a first theoretical level, the peasantry was ascribed to a stagnant economy exclusively addressed to subsistence, labor-intensive, unable to generate output for external actors. The
term peasant was referred to a social group of the past, part of an undifferentiated system, organised – as underlined in the Durkheim’s work (1997) *The Division of Labor in Society* – in a simple family-based society. Analyzing the Marxist thought expressed by Lenin (1967) in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, the disappearance of peasants was an unavoidable result of the penetration of agriculture by capitalism (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). These theoretical assumptions were used by the theorists of modernisation who predicted the involvement of the peasant class in a pathway of change; this process should have led to a reformulation of the boundaries of the peasantry in favor of an intensive agrarian transformation (Desmarais, 2007). Following Araghi (1995) the evolution of the peasantry in capitalist systems is oriented to an end-point of progressive disappearance of the peasant class which flows towards a transformation in wage labor. Today the theory of the peasant disappearance does not identify an ideal situation because peasant agriculture continues to exist worldwide as a new way to avoid the social and economic marginalisation caused by the advancement of the global agri-food regimes (van der Ploeg, 2009).

According to the logic of the industrial agri-food regimes, agriculture and food production are considered as a set of merchant relations aimed at maximising profits for capital-holders and increasing the economic reproduction of the labour (McMichael, 2010). A distinctive element of the industrial agricultural production is the complete commodification of the output (agricultural production is standardised and disconnected from the rural terroir) which causes the consequent reduction of common resources to consumer goods (the commons are considered as goods available on the market governed by an economic rationality). The progressive marginalisation of the peasants’ role within the food production cycle and ecosystem management has had repercussions not only on the peasantry but on entire portions of the population who suffer consequences of a gradual deterioration of the ecological capital.
Since the 1950s, the agricultural evolution was oriented towards a productivistic phase with the assumption to intensify and specialise production by introducing more chemical and financial inputs and reducing vegetal varieties on the supply chain to create strong economies of scale (Conti et al., 2004). Considering this background, today the re-emergence of the peasant model must be interpreted as a new phase of the non-regular flow of peasantry, a search of autonomy, an act of resistance to the unequal management of the economic system (van der Ploeg, 2009). Claims carried forward by the peasant class do not correspond to individual interests, instead they have collective relevance: mobilisations for the protection of natural resources, or actions to ensure access to safe and healthy food have repercussions on the whole society. The representation of collective interests is the key to understand the re-emergence of a traditional model that starts to become more and more innovative. Following Polanyi (1944), the relationships sustained between a class with the rest of the society mark its evolution, consequently, the success and the reproduction of this class is determined by the breadth and variety of interests that the class can serve beyond its specific class needs. The re-emerging of the peasantry, in the last decades, appears as an organised strategy to transform the structures of power in which agri-food regimes are rooted. It is an attempt to re-balance the power through the collective action. Accordingly, peasants or peasant organizations are able to enter into a covenant with others social groups in an effort to have a greater influence on the institutional decision processes, through actions aimed at facing the dynamics of economic exclusion on the market, and the extreme social polarization that is affecting the contemporary rural contexts (Haubert, 1997).

\[\text{Economies of scale arise when unit costs fall as output rises.}\]
David vs Goliath

Globalisation and progressive decrease in regulation in national agricultural systems created the favorable substrate to consolidate food regimes, where – under a hub and spokes logic – today we see a growing rift between practices of production and consumption behaviors and a consequent distance between food and territories (Wilk, 2006). This implies a detachment of production from the place of origin in favor of the creation of production and consumption sites – definable as non-places – devoid of any distinguishable character since – in the commodity market – the diversification related to the contextual variability of the social or ecological capital embedded in a product is not recognised as an element for competitiveness.

Food regimes are defined not only by economic actors but also by an obliging political system, in fact the functioning and the survival of these regimes depends mainly on the global governance that set patterns of economic and power relations determining a greater/lesser level of subalternity and dependency. In the same way food systems and their governance are boosting problems which are globally affecting the modern societies, like food insecurity, rural poverty or the partial access to land, contributing to reinforce an unequal classism.

For example, in Latin America, but also in Asia and Africa, the economic policy reforms launched during the 1980s with the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), promoted by the Bretton Woods Institutions, dismantled the state support to the national economic systems, by defining a more ‘market-responsive’ model. Reduction of food and agricultural subsides, liberalisation of trade and foreign investments, shift from domestic crops to cash crops, marked the first step for a progressive globalisation of the agri-food system. This culminated in the formalisation of the denationalization and liberalization trajectory resulted from the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1994 (Desmarais, 2002, p. 92; McMichael, 2010). Over the last twenty years,
regional free trade agreements have been signed in concordance with the economic guidelines established with the end of the Uruguay Round. For example, *The Dominican Republic-Central America FTA* (CAFTA-DR) is the first free trade agreement between the United States and a group of smaller developing economies (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic) signed in 2004. Looking at the case of El Salvador, under the CAFTA-DR framework, data of the national Ministry of Economy report that in 2005 there were 518,016 people employed in the agricultural sector while in 2006 there was a fall to 506,559. This means that in just one year of liberalization measures there was a net loss of 11,457 jobs. Moreover, the CAFTA-DR damaged part of the production for basic foods, as a result the cooperatives which produced mainly rice, corn and beans decreased by 28% between 2004 and 2006 in favor of massive imports of rice, meat and wheat from United States which caused an increase in the price of staple foods on the domestic market.

Thus, currently peasants are reacting to the effects of the negative externalities of the neoliberal agricultural system through the organization of *no-border strategies* which are oriented to exercise social pressure on the centres of power. Global alliances, like *La Vía Campesina* (LVC) or others agro-ecological movements like *Campesino a Campesino* (CAC), promote the reshaping of the economic relations by reconnecting the supply chain to the local control (Desmarais, 2002; Borras, 2004; Patel, 2005; Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). The new wave of peasantisation is configuring itself as a bridge between past and future laying the foundations for growth by looking at the protection of ecological and social resources in order to reduce their depletion and activate a virtuous circle of endogenous development. Peasant

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3 Data reported by the Salvadorean Department of Statistics and Census (DIGESTYC) in the Multi-purpose Household Surveys, Year 2005/2006.

4 *Ibidem.*
agriculture can generate positive externalities for the environment and collective system since, contrary to the monofunctional agro-industry, it is multifunctional and accomplishes non-market services (Velazquez, 2001; Marsden and Sonnino, 2008; Hebink et al., 2014). It shows “strong tendencies for local and regional embeddedness” playing a key-role in the process of re-localisation of food circuits (Wilson 2008, p. 2).

New food circuits

Nowadays peasants are trying to develop an organizational structure of the agri-food system able to reflect the territorial identity directly on the market. As highlighted by Shanin (1973), the term market can be used in reference to two different social and economic realities often conflicting: on the one hand, it refers to the place where people exchange goods through a compromise between seller and buyer, on the other hand it refers to an institutionalized system of economic organisation based on the laws of supply and demand where prices have a pivotal role. The peasant model is not limited to the use of alternative agricultural practices since it brings with it a traditional system, as well as today innovative, to organise the market based on the connections activated between producers, consumers, institutions and environment. Therefore, the application of the peasant model sees the market as socially set, it appears as an arena, site for social interactions aimed at exchanging goods, know-how and identity characters (Watson and Studdert, 2006).

With the growing differentiation of consumer preferences and consequent diversification of the outcomes, production is increasingly directed to a multitude of distribution trajectories ranging from conventional channels to Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) (Moore, 2006; Seyfang, 2007; Rossi et al., 2008; Oostindie et al., 2010). The AFNs are system of production, commercialization and consumption of food socially embedded. One of the main reasons that
drives consumers to prefer different circuits, compared to the conventional ones, is the lack of confidence and growing mistrust towards the productivist system hit by scandals and food scares (Renting et al., 2003). Through the logic of the AFNs, food circuits are re-localised and re-embedded on a local scale, this shall not be construed as a defensive localism but as the ability to create competitive measures to counter the negative externalities of globalisation (Morgan et al., 2006). Localise does not mean closing the system but rather re-configuring the relationships among the actors of the food chain through the means of the collective action, social solidarity and participation (Brunori et al., 2011; Raffestin, 2012).

Looking at the organizational structure of AFNs, following Renting et al. (2003), we can identify three main types of distribution channels:

I. Face to face: consumers purchase products directly from the producers. Personal interaction allows the creation of a bond of trust and transparency rooted in the direct knowability of the product.

II. Proximate: food is produced and sold in a specific region. There is a minimum intermediation that does not constitute an obstacle to ‘know’ the product.

III. Spatially extended: the product is sold in a different region from the place of production. Labels can be the vehicle to create consumer awareness on a specific product.

An additional study conducted by Watts et al. (2005) places AFNs on an axis where at the extremes we find strong AFNs and weak AFNs while, in the middle, there is a variety of hybrid forms. In the first type (strong AFNs), the spatial proximity is greater, and the direct contact ensures knowability and trust towards the product; in the second type (weak AFNs) the spatial proximity is reduced, hence, the relational connection between consumer and producer is supported by certifications, labels or intermediaries, elements that, according to the authors, erode the circular process of information exchange based on the mutual trust (Watts et al., 2005).
As seen, often, there is not a scientific point of convergence in the different contributions of the literature and although numerous researches – regarding the nature and the implementation of the AFNs – have been carried out to date, the bibliography on the topic is still not enough to explain the real and complete functioning of these new circuits, or in any case, scientific contributions are not sufficient to identify and explain the effective alternativeness to the conventional distribution system. In fact, in this perspective, we shall consider that in the modern neoliberal economies the actors operating in the agricultural complex are able to reinvent it with the aim to address some social demands that can influence the patterns of consumption. For example, they can intervene in the mitigation of environmental degradation, in the improvement of the animal welfare or the reduction of intermediaries on the market, under the pressure of new social requests, but without activating any process of de-commodification or de-standardization of the product (Evans et al., 2002; Leyshon et al., 2003). Therefore, further empirical studies are necessary to better understand the ‘alternativeness’ of the new food networks to the mainstream channels. Hence the need to identify specific attributes of the product deriving from the interconnection between practices of production, commercialisation and consumption, which can help us to understand both the evolution of the capitalist retail structure and the re-embeddedness of the food systems in the territory. Accordingly, the following sections offer an overview on the concept of quality as a useful filter to not fall into the trap of the false alternativeness.

**Quality as a multidimensional concept**

The term quality does not have a single meaning but appears as a multidimensional concept that changes spatially and temporally based on requests, rules and expectations arising from

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5 This process of (ecological) sustainable re-orientation of the modern capitalism is called by Evans et al. (2002) *ecological modernisation.*
the market, society, or governance apparatuses (see Henson, 2000). Not having the attribute of uniqueness, the concept of quality is marked by boundaries that limit the acceptance and validity of the various meanings. Quality is always a construction, an intermediation between different actors who recognise certain characteristics of a product. Recognising, understanding and sharing these characteristics orient the choices on the market and determine preferences towards some products – identified by a community as quality products – rather than similar others. Given its multifaceted nature, the concept of quality is difficult to define, for this reason, it should be contextualised in relation to the place, the group of actors that recognises it, and the socioeconomic system in which it is embedded.

Several studies link the food quality to regional contexts not affected by productivistic dynamics of agricultural industrialisation. Under this line of analysis, quality is rooted in local ecologies, wherefore the abandonment of and detachment from industrialised productions should foster the recognition of a product as a quality product (Murdoch et al., 2000; Goodman, 2003). Nonetheless, if we consider the multidimensionality of quality as a result of an interaction in different places, different times, and also between different actors, it is absolutely misleading to assign the attribute of quality to a product deriving from a single spatial and productive category, consequently it is more rational to correlate quality both to industrialised productions and small territorialised productions. In agro-industrial systems, the attribute of quality responds to standardised parameters vertically defined, generalised and extensible without spatial limits. I define this type of quality as ‘standardized quality’. On the contrary, in territorialised circuits, quality is built on the basis of different systems of knowledge, identified as an endogenous construction dependent on the local context and deriving from a local milieu consolidated over time. In this last case the attribute ‘quality’ is not standardizable and refers to specific contexts; it is site-specific since incorporates
elements (e.g. craftsmanship) proper of defined territorial contexts. It is a type of quality that I identify as ‘territorialized quality’ determined by quality parameters that cannot be generalised or easily extended in space.

**Quality and certifications in organic markets**

In the contemporary agri-food system the demand for local products characterized by a quality rooted in the territory is rising. This trend is highlighted by the process of *quality turn*, which is manifested through the transition of preferences from standardised products to quality foods embedded in the local dimension (Murdoch et al., 2000; Goodman, 2003). The recent social and political attention towards issues concerning food security and sustainability of agri-food networks is leading to the expansion of organic agricultural productions as well as the strengthening of the respective markets. Organic agriculture is defined by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) as:

> A production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involve.\(^6\)

According to the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, in 2014, 43.7 million hectares of agricultural land were managed organically in 172 countries and approximately 2.3 million farmers were involved in the production process (FiBL, 2016). The global sales of organic food and drink reached 75 billion euros in 2015. United States are the market-leading with 35.9 billion euros, followed by Germany (8.6 billion euros), France (5.5 billion euros), China (4.7 billion euros) (FiBL, 2017) while, on average, in 2015, the global organic market

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\(^6\) This definition was adopted in Vignola, Italy, in 2003, taking into consideration the four Principles of Organic Agriculture: the principle of health, the principle of ecology, the principle of fairness and the principle of care. All details are available here: http://www.ifoam.bio/en/organic-landmarks/definition-organic-agriculture.
showed double-digit growth rates. The highest per capita spending was registered in Switzerland (262 euros), while Denmark has the highest organic market share (8.4% of the total food market) (Ibidem).

Nowadays organic products can be widely found in the mainstream channels of the agro-industry, on the contrary in the early 1990s, 90% of the organic production was addressed to short circuits, farmers markets or direct sales in the farms for instance (Van Loo et al., 2012; Boza Martínez, 2013). In a context where the local can be easily contaminated and dominated by the global, the quality certification system has an important role in guiding consumer’s behaviors. Before the 1980s, the system of organic certifications was not widely developed since the scale of production was limited to small circuits, within which quality was guaranteed by trust and direct relations between producers and consumers. Until then, the few certification experiences were attributable to the first party system, a certification system marked by a character of voluntariness and self-regulation, which implied that productions were classified as organic if they had respected definite standards established by a specific group of farmers. Farmers are the actors encharged to monitor and evaluate the conformity of the product through peer-review operations (Michelsen, 2001; Nelson et al., 2010). By the early 1990s, the rising demand for organic products has led to the formulation of two new certification models with the aim to ensure quality on wider circuits. On the one hand, the second party system which is characterized by an evaluation of the quality standards carried out by intermediaries (actors that sell or transform the product); on the other hand, the third party system which works basing on the exercise of external control over the conformity of the product. In this latter, an external agency is responsible for the development of a framework of quality standards.
Although today, after decades, the third party certification is the system most commonly used, it is not exempt from problems which limit its application. Looking at different experiences in Southern countries (see Zanasi et al., 2009; Castro, 2014; Kirchner, 2015) a first issue concerns the difficulty in accessing organic markets due to the high costs that farmers must cover to obtain the certification. An additional problem regards the lack of receiving support during the bureaucratic process that they have to undertake for having recognised the certification and, not least, the fact that the quality standards are mostly established following the interest of Northern consumers (since the main certification agencies are located in North America and Europe). This translates into the imposition of a disciplinary which producers of Southern countries must respect without negotiate it (Gómez Tovar et al., 1999; Nelson et al., 2010).

Consistently to this structure, the social relations sphere has no value in defining quality since it is obscured by the top-down standardization and commercial logic of quantity and price. The standardization of quality pushes the product towards a commodification process. In this regard, we can use the concept of fetishism of commodities; Allen and Kovach (2000, p. 225), referring to Marx (1967) defined it as “a condition within capitalism in which the social relationships through which commodities are produced are obscured in the commodity as it appears in the market”. Therefore, the third party certification can became a tool of the capitalist system for eroding, on the market, the social connections activated to have a finished product. Auld et al. (2015), underline that the certification systems develop and work following two main logics, the logic of empowerment and the logic of control. Certifications can empower producers through the creation of a channel to access specific markets and, meanwhile, they bind producers to a certifying body by limiting their autonomy in the control over the production practices. Moreover, the logic of control excludes from the certification
process – and consequently from some specific market shares – those who not have the economic resources to access the system. The trajectory of empowerment is limited to the group of producers able to enter this bureaucratic process.

Socialised quality and Participatory Guarantee System

In the light of what has been discussed in the previous section, it appears clear that there is a need for alternative forms of certification, less exclusionary, which redefine the concept of quality and its application on a framework of territorial identity and social equity. As anticipated in the introduction, the development of an alternative system to certify organic productions should be placed within the strategies and action mechanisms proper of the new wave of peasanisation since it is representing a further effort to boost the de-commodification of food and production practices connected to it, starting from the re-socialisation and re-localisation of quality.

One of the systems that is now being an effective tool to achieve this objective is the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). PGSs are quality assurance systems that operate locally by certifying productions with the active participation of the actors (Sacchi, 2015). The primary aim is to provide a response and support for small scale farmers who want to sell their products on the domestic market choosing to not enter in the dynamics of the export channels (because of socioeconomic reasons or territorial limitations) (Torremocha, 2012). PGSs, through participatory dynamics try to give space on the market to small production realities and an answer to demands and expectations coming from differentiate consumers and the organized civil society. The operation of PGS is based on the ability of local actors, such as producers, consumers, local authorities or development actors (e.g. Non-Governmental
Organisations, NGOs), to structure a network adept at establishing mechanisms for the regulation, control and implementation of quality in the organic supply chain.

PGSs are guided by two basic principles: the principle of *democraticity* intended as the equal possibility to enter the certification system, and the principle of *specificity* through which production, consumption and commercialization of food are considered as cultural and social factors influenced by the local representations of food proper of the different territories.

These principles obviously reflect on the working logic of the system which develops respecting the following lines of operation (see *Figure 1*):

1. **Horizontality and circularity**

With the notion of horizontality, I refer to the way in which tasks but also know-how regarding practices of production and control are managed. While the third party certifications are marked by a selection of quality parameters, identified by a group of actors that plays as outsider for the territorial context, the PGSs are not managed through top-down impositions. They are, instead, built locally through the contribution of all the actors involved in the system which does not passively receive external standard imposed from outside. Through the exchange of information between peers, horizontality becomes circularity. The actors create a *dialogue of knowledge* for defining the rules that drive production practices and determine product requirements. Quality parameters are, hence, embedded in specific local contexts. They are not applicable to a standard certification system and depend on the context. The detachment from external expert systems of knowledge sets new conditions, less exclusionary, to facilitate the access to the markets creating new economic opportunities.

This, before being an economic fact, is primarily a political act, especially for peasants that in developing Southern countries move away from the expert systems imposed by developed Northern countries. The supremacy of an expert system of knowledge that defines...
standardized and non-negotiable quality parameters, consolidates – over time – subalternity relation due to the creation of a higher reference category to which peasants and small farmers must refer to support their access to and their stay in the market. PGSs are acts of resistance to this system that I call colonialism of knowledge. I define it through the lens of the Gramscian theory of hegemony according to which cultural hegemony is an indispensable aspect of the political control since the system of knowledge, values and mores belonging to a dominant group or class – is imposed to and internalized by the rest of society (Gramsci, 1971). In the case of the certification systems of third party, but also second party, there is the imposition of a complex of technical references that farmers – regardless the territorial context – must respect even if they do not exert any influence in the formulation of this standard framework becoming dependent on it. Accordingly, the colonialism of knowledge it is a form of globalization of the dynamics which characterize cultural hegemony on a local level.

2. Participation and inclusion

In the PGSs all the actors have a role in influencing the construction of the system; the non-pyramidal structure allows a rotational division of responsibilities and tasks (May, 2008). PGSs are dynamic systems that change in time and space and they are set not as systems of sanction, control and reward, but as collective instruments for achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability.

3. Trust and dialectic

Following Simmel (1998), trust is the hypothesis of a future behavior significantly sure to can find a practical action on the empirical reality or everyday life. Within the PGSs, trust results from a compromise between producer and consumer built on the guarantee of the transparency of production practices and certification mechanisms. This is made possible by the dialectical exchange among all the actors involved. Moreover, if We see the trust through
the Luhmann's thought, it can be interpreted as a reduction of the complexity that led PGSs to overcome the bureaucracy of third party systems and promote equity and social justice at all stages of the supply chain (Luhmann, 2002; Whatmore et al., 2003; May, 2008; Home et al., 2017).

**Figure 1**

Functioning of the PGSs. Source: Own elaboration

Hence, while mainstream certification models refer to quality products which respect requirements related to predefined standards, PGSs refer to quality food in which traditions, culture and history of a specific territory – temporally dynamic – are incorporated. The constant reference to the relational system which welds the elements of the territorial complex, as engine of the PGS, has a positive externality in the replication of the social capital. Taking into account the wide bibliography on the concept of social capital (see for example Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Lin, 2001), social capital appears as
a composition of joint elements (e.g. trust, social norms, networks, knowledge, etc.) made usable and accessible through the activation of a set of social relations of which an individual or collective actor can avail for a certain period. In addition, the use of these elements and the activation of the relational system to use them, favor the reproduction of the social capital in a virtuous circle and “enable actors to act jointly and actively in order to provide common goals” (Colemann, 1990; Trigilia, 1999; Tasdemir et al., 2017, p. 55 citing Putnam, 1993). In the light of the above and as a way to summarise what has been said so far, considering that a “territorial context results more or less rich in social capital depending on the greater or lesser participation of resident people in the relational networks ”, it can be stated that contexts where the PGS are working present high levels of social capital which is then also embedded in the finished product (Trigilia 1999, p. 423).

PGSs in practice

Currently, PGSs are spread all over the world, with a greater diffusion in Latin America and Asia. In 2015, 109,317 producers and processors were involved in PGSs and among them 46,945 were certified through the system. In spite of the different localisation, they have common organisational characters that determine their daily functioning. Producer or groups of producers that want to be part in a PGS, commit themselves through a compromise declaration submitted to a certification commission, to comply with the system regulation and adapt the production practices to it (Khosla, 2006). The commission is generally composed of five members from different categories (producers, consumers, development actors) who have the task of evaluating requests for participation in the system, by sending to the production site, a group of visitors in order to gather the information needed to assess the agricultural property management, production techniques, origin of seeds or other requirements
established by the regulation (Torremocha, 2012). If production standards are consistent with the PGS rules, the commission allows the access of the applicants in the system and authorises the use of a specific quality label. According to the principle of democraticity, each task is subject to rotation and each activity is public and transparent (Meirelles, 2007).

The involvement of different actors binds them in a common effort that goes beyond the mere production and consumption of quality food; indeed participatory certifications have a multifunctional character that guarantees – besides a greater economic efficiency and a healthy, safe and adequate food for local diets – ecological services like protection of biodiversity and landscape management (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Participatory certification and multifunctionality. Source: Own elaboration

The use of alternatives forms of guarantee is locally working in opposition to the standards of international certification models (e.g. the International Organization for Standardisation or ISO). A practical advantage that we can observe is an increase in farmers’ incomes due to a
rise in local consumption of organic product guaranteed through the participatory system (Fonseca, 2004; Cuéllar-Padilla and Calle-Collado, 2011; Hochreiter, 2011). Nevertheless, the greater diffusion of the systems is formally hampered by a deep lack in their institutional formalisation. In fact, only a few countries like Brazil, Bolivia and Peru attribute legal recognition to PGSs while in most cases only traditional certification bodies are recognised as legitimate on the basis of ISO Guide 17065. As a result, the local institutions do not adopt policies that could stimulate an extension of the participatory system and its credibility. As reported by IFOAM (2017, p. 2) “from more than 70 countries with an organic regulation in place or under development, only a handful has taken PGS into consideration when developing their organic laws and regulation”. The lack of legal recognition plays like a centrifugal thrust creating a distance between PGSs and new potential users and compromising its effectiveness and applicability to new contexts. This is the direct consequence of an absent or partial involvement of institutional stakeholders: when there is no effort from local or national governments, the level of confidence decreases, the process building credibility is interrupted resulting in a slump in the level of attractability and replicability of the system. Quoting Mutti (1998, p. 543), institutions have to play the key-role of “diffusers of trust”, that means they have to be “social mediators which create channels of linkage between different social networks [...] and favor the widespread accumulation of the social capital building bridges between relational areas marked by a lack in connections but rich in informative potentiality [...]”. So, if the formal recognition of PGSs comes from those who already have a certain degree of trust (i.e. governance apparatus), it would reduce the area of uncertainty around their applicability.

Conclusions

7 It specifies the quality requirements for external agencies that certify products, processes or services.
In this paper, the re-socialisation and re-localisation of food through quality certification systems has been interpreted as one of the strategies to guarantee the survival of a circular model of peasant agriculture characterized by the low use of external inputs and the participation of the entire community in the path that brings products from the field to the table (Desmarais, 2008). Through the contributions of the relevant literature, I have tried to identify an ideal tool (PGS), locally and democratically accessible, functional for the process of social construction of the quality in organic markets.

After having described the operating principles of the Participatory Guarantee Systems and having placed them within the most complex process of the re-emerging of the peasant model, the PGSs are a collective strategy to withstand the pressure of global markets on the local economies. We have seen that the practices for managing the PGS adopt not only the logic of a rational economy but reflect the principles of a peasant moral economy aimed at a collective advantage. As pointed out several times along the text, nowadays meeting a collective need is what allows peasantry to exist, reorganise and reinvent itself. The role of peasants is no longer confined passively to food production but is extended beyond the boundaries of the supply chain, thus to assure a multifunctional character of agriculture.

Looking at the current situation, despite a not completely favorable institutional behavior, peasant organisations and transnational peasant movements are working to frame PGSs in a broader framework of sustainable development within which policy-makers should have a role of connectors between the complex of new certifications and the policies for rural development, social inclusion and food security. Only following this trajectory, it will be possible to understand, and then expand, the real potential of the participatory guarantee system.
Bibliography


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