



# Ethical Values in a Post-Industrial Economy: The Case of the Organic Farmers' Market in Granada (Spain)

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## Abstract

The importance of the collective management of immaterial resources is a key variable in the valorisation of products in a post-industrial economy. The purpose of this paper is to analyse how, in post-industrial economies, it is possible to devise alternative forms of mediation between producers and consumers, such as organic farmers' markets, to curb the appropriation of rent by transnational and/or local business elites from the value created by immaterial resources. More specifically, we analyse those aspects of the collective management of ethical values that, in the case of organic farmers' markets, can be a strategic source of competitive advantage for local producers. In this paper, the Ecomercado de Granada is studied as an example of mediation between production and consumption in a post-industrial economy.

**Keywords** Ethical values · Post-industrial economy · Agroecology · Organic farmers' market · Granada

## Introduction

Sustainable development of territories and its relationship with the management of their natural resources has been a subject of great academic interest in recent decades. The collective management of resources is not a sufficient condition for sustainable development in post-industrial economies (Alonso Gonzalez, 2014; Fernández Fernández et al., 2015; Zepeda et al., 2014); the efficient management of immaterial resources is also required. Thus, we find that the academic literature is overly focused on associating collective management of material resources with

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sustainable development (Agrawal, 2014; Ferrando et al., 2021; Gusjoy & Faisal, 2021; Ostrom, 1990). Under the influence of Ostrom's contribution (1990), the interest is concentrated on the analysis of the institutions and rules that manage these resources. With the development of post-industrial economies (Macías Vázquez & Alonso González, 2016), immaterial resources are playing a more structural role for the enhancement of production activities, which indicates that the collective management of those resources will have a significant impact on the sustainable development of the territories, interacting with the management of local material resources. In a post-industrial economy, consumers are willing to pay a higher price for traditional products that are more clearly associated with certain ethical values and social meanings, from the protection of the environment and local communities to the promotion of social justice and gender equality (Callon et al., 2002; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). However, it is often the transnational and/or local elites who, because of their close link to the sphere of consumption, have a greater capacity to appropriate this potential added value through a more efficient management of these types of values and meanings (Macías Vázquez & Alonso González, 2015).

The last two decades have been the stage of the emergence of movements of resistance against this appropriation of value by the business elites. Among these movements, we find the so-called "ethical" agri-food markets, a general term that comprises different experiences of social backgrounds, environmental, and geographical origins (Bidwell et al., 2018). Within the context of these markets, alternative food networks (AFNs) are often developed as the consumers react to their environmental, ethical, and healthcare concerns. They stand as an alternative to 'conventional' food supply systems, which are increasingly more industrialised and global (Ilbery & Maye, 2005: 823).

AFNs are described as economic spaces where social justice and political action may occur specifically (Goodman et al., 2012) in the redistribution of value to the producers through return networks, the creation of trust between producers and consumers, and the development of new forms of political association and governance of the market (Morgan et al., 2006). In theory, by revealing the hidden geography of food, these networks channel motivate the consumers' ethical motivations, including "remote care" for others, to support fairer and sustainable conditions for production and trade (Barnett et al., 2005; Lyon, 2006). From this perspective, the objective is to differentiate the products and increase their value, allowing them to compete in terms of quality and identity (Galtier et al., 2013; Goodman et al., 2012). AFNs encourage more harmonious community relationships (Winter, 2003) and reshape urban-rural dynamics (Jarosz, 2008). In AFNs, both producers and consumers have a close and direct relationship that contribute to building trust in the food consumed by providing information concerning their origin and provenance and stimulating concern for ecological and social sustainability (Kessari et al., 2020). AFNs appear on the margins of the conventional system but operate within it and according to the market logic. Due to their hybrid nature, AFNs have not developed any common and coherent regulation scheme of their own (Renting et al., 2012) and are often defined in relation to what they are not, instead of to what they actually are (Tregear, 1998). For this reason, they can be automatically marginalised and run the risk of normalising adverse "conventional" practices (Seyfang, 2006).

In this work, we look at an alternative type of management of common immaterial resources through the study of an AFN, more specifically an organic farmers' market, which may halt the current trend of an excessive concentration of commercial middle-men in the agri-food sector (Vorley, 2003). We explore the relevance that the collective management of immaterial resources may have in the process of overcoming the current crisis of the Spanish agricultural sector, where there are asymmetric power relationships in the value chain. The gap between the selling price of agri-food products and the price received by the producers keeps increasing. The importance of distribution links are increasingly growing, leading to a rentier appropriation of the value generated by farmers (Serres, 2013). The situation in Spain is similar to the one observed in the rest of Western countries. The management of immaterial resources can rebalance power relationships along the value chain and put an end to the rentier appropriation of the value and the excessive concentration in commercial inter-mediation, granting greater decision-making powers to local producers through what has been called "branding from below" (Mancini, 2013), "negotiating their own terms" (Mutersbaugh, 2002) or even "development from within" (Bowen, 2011).

Our objective, as we say, is to analyse how, in post-industrial economies, alternative types of mediation can be articulated between consumers and producers, such as organic farmers' markets, to slow-down the rentier appropriation of the created value for these immaterial resources by transnational and/or local business elites. More specifically, we analyse those aspects of the collective management of ethical values that, in the case of organic farmers' markets, may be a strategic source of competitive advantages for local producers.

In this article, we study the organic farmers' market (Ecomercado) in Granada, Spain. More specifically, we analyze how the relationships between producers and consumers are built around two immaterial resources which are of significant importance in the functioning of these types of collective management commercial institutions. On one hand, the consumers' social awareness concerning the consumption of local, organic, and healthy food, i.e., the ethical values associated with their food consumption choices. On the other, the producers' ethical commitments to the preservation and maintenance of local agroecologically managed agri-food systems.

The selection of this case was determined by the fact that the organic farmers' market in Granada combines three key elements. First, the management of a material resource like the Vega de Granada (area neighbouring the city from where the products of the market originate) using an agroecological approach compatible with sustainable development. To this we must add the management of two immaterial resources, the consumers' social awareness and the producers' ethical commitment. Both the material and immaterial spheres are collectively managed by an AFN that mediates between production and consumption, not only of organic products but of knowledge and know-how. This mediation may put an end to the rentier appropriation of value by large transnational corporations.

## Immaterial Resources in a Post-Industrial Economy

The process of enhancement of immaterial resources is governed by laws that differ substantially from those of other production processes. According to Rullani (2004), the main characteristic of immaterial resources is an underlying quality: when they are used, they are not consumed; instead, by being available for other uses, they multiply themselves from one use to the next. These immaterial resources have a potentially infinite stock of value, corresponding to all the possible future uses that, through various symbolic interpretations, human consumers groups can give them. The more these immaterial resources spread, the greater their value. Every new use implies a higher degree of usefulness, at little or no reproduction cost. Knowledge, culture, values, immaterial resources in general, are enhanced when they are shared and disseminated (Hardt & Negri, 2009).

In the agri-food production sphere, various strategies are used to enhance material resources (Bellelli et al., 2017). A frequent strategy is based on quality certificates and labels, including those referring to a protected certificate of origin, organic agriculture or fair trade (Rullani, 2004). Through these certificates, producers achieve three goals. First, they increase the consumer's capacity to interpret the meanings attached to the material production, because the labels enable the consumers to easily identify the quality of the products through a series of objective parameters. Second, they increase the number of times that these meanings are propagated and replicated, because, by means of abstract coding, the standardised character of these labels facilitates the extensive spread of the products through different marketing channels. Finally, the use of these certificates and labels makes it possible not only to enhance the products, but also to appropriate the rents generated, insofar as they grant exclusive legal rights over the exploitation of the resources.

Nevertheless, the last decades have revealed some problems associated with the appropriation of the value created which in the long term have led to the deterioration of food quality and a reduction in consumers' ability to interpret the meanings embodied in material production (Macías Vázquez & Alonso González, 2015). These problems are closely related to the difficulties that local producers have to control during the process of commercial intermediation. In fact, during the 2008 crisis large supermarkets used certain products with quality certificates, such as wine or olive oil, as loss leaders (Gómez-Limón & Parras Rosa, 2017). This aggressive price reduction policy significantly trimmed the profit margin of local producers (Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca & Alimentación, 2019a), which made it difficult for them to maintain the cost structure required to guarantee the quality of food as well as the use of environmentally friendly production practices.

Therefore, commercial intermediation has become a critical variable in the process of enhancement of agri-food products. We find that local producers have the possibility of gaining some competitive advantage if they can create a bond with their closest customers through new values and meanings. In other words, the incorporation of certain immaterial resources of a collective nature, with the

abovementioned property of increasing their value through use and dissemination, could be an opportunity to reduce the capacity for rentier appropriation of large supermarkets along the value chain. If producers and consumers are bound through values and meanings that those commercial entities cannot easily generate, it would be possible to further empower the local actors along that chain. Thus, values and meanings like social awareness that the consumers may develop in relation to ecological, healthy and local consumption, or the producers' commitment to maintain local agroecology-based agri-food systems could be among the most suitable options to meet this objective.

It is important to point out that differentiated food production and supply schemes are based on local immaterial resources that are not easily replicable: implicit, informal, and practical knowledge; artisanal know-how; contact, information, cooperation, and favour-exchange networks, etc. On the other hand, the presence of factors that add further complexity to every complex situation need to be taken into account (Hassanein, 2003). For instance, the behaviour of these local communities is increasingly mediated by reflexive consumerism and production processes that incorporate exogenous aesthetic values (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). They are then included in the processes of social construction of food quality. Thus, common immaterial resources are the result of the historical crystallisation of a set of practices, social relationships, physical qualities, and ideas developed by a human group, which can be perceived by other groups, markets or states as 'different', and therefore be subject to a process of enhancement (Kaljonen, 2006).

This is what Boltanski and Esquerre (2017) call "enriched objects". Goods are not valued for their utility or resistance, as is the case of standard industrial products, but for being new or different. They are often associated with national identity markers, to guarantee their "authenticity". There is an intense demand for differentiation and demassification, as the capitalist system undergoes a process of endogenization (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). In order to claim a label of authenticity, goods need to come from outside the material sphere, in the so-called "deposits of authenticity", which are spaces outside the commercialised sphere and, in most cases, can be linked to the traditions and customs of the different societies (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). Enriched objects coming from a deposit of authenticity are given, at least tacitly, a higher value than that of products of the commercial sphere. An immaterial aspect is also attached to them making them interesting during the process of commercialisation (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017). The commercialisation of the authentic products enables a re-launch of the transformation process of a non-commercialised sphere into a capitalistic one, which is one of the main drivers of capitalism, in order to face the threat of the mass consumption crisis looming since the 1970's (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). For Harvey (2012), the distinctive markers developed by post-industrial capitalism to maintain the monopolistic exploitation of value through rents imposed on material resources, like trademarks associated with food, require the participation of these common immaterial resources, which bring added value to the process. In this sense, following Harvey, we would be confronted with a process of rentier appropriation of these common resources by transnational and/or local elite businesses.

In these circumstances, the struggle of local producers to keep control over the food value chain no longer stems from the organisation of material production, but rather from the control of these immaterial resources and their modulation in relation to the management of material resources (Pasquinelli, 2008). As analysed before, these difficulties are made evident through the crisis of food quality models based on protected designations of origin, where success in improving the quality of the material resources is not enough to revert asymmetric relationships in the value chain (Alonso González & Parga-Dans, 2020; Belletti et al., 2017; Bowen & Gaytán, 2012; Bowen & Hamrick, 2014). Nevertheless, in the food production sphere, there are various tools that can be used to modulate the relationship between the enhancement processes of material and immaterial resources. These tools aim at establishing symbolic relationships between community production processes and geographical connections (protected designations of origin or protected geographical indications, territorial labels, etc.), historical connections (local traditions), products (varieties of grapes, olives, molluscs, etc.), qualities (organoleptic properties, organic or integrated production, sulphite-free wine, etc.), social activities (gastro-nomical fairs, culinary competitions, etc.) or practices (artisanal fishing, agricultural and agro-industrial techniques, etc.).

However, these modulations do not ensure *per se* greater control by the community, but are only “one mechanism potentially available to communities” (Ray, 1998: 15). In fact, a successful modulation of the combined enhancement of material and immaterial resources is not a sufficient condition in itself. We have to take into account that these immaterial resources interact with the consumption patterns and perceptions of product differentiation developed in different cultures, which end up reinforcing these processes of enhancement of the demand. Paradoxically, the business elites (particularly, transnational ones) have a greater knowledge of global markets and, consequently, a greater potential capacity to appropriate the immaterial rents (Harvey, 2012).

Entrepreneurs have seized the opportunity to combat the saturation of traditional markets by sharpening consumer appetite through the supply of quality products that provide both higher safety and greater authenticity (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). Agri-food products are artificially “enriched” to favour their commercialisation (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017). This commercialisation of “authentic” products has been stimulated by a growing interest in physical beauty and health (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2002). Rullani (2004) stresses the need to articulate a series of cognitive mediators whose role will be to integrate knowledge by recontextualising the existing knowledge so that it can be used in different contexts, in response to the consumers’ desires, in the form of alternative markets, museums, or health and nutrition centres. It is not by accident that large supermarket chains, like Carrefour, Auchan or El Corte Inglés, are investing in the commercialisation of organic food products. If this were to be consolidated, local agri-food systems would see the capturing of the value created by their own production strongly reduced, and will be disempowered in relation to controlling the value creation processes.

From the production perspective, in the agri-food systems of post-industrial economies, ethical values are used for either of two purposes: as part of a strategy developed by large corporations to increase their profits or as an argument put forward by

local producers to subsidise their losses (Birch et al., 2010; Pasquinelli, 2008). The public sector often uses a rhetoric of free markets, competitiveness, and entrepreneurship, which masks the reproduction and generalisation of clientelistic, oligopolistic and anti-market dynamics with negative consequences for the common good. This is the so-called "corporate neoliberalism", a system of intermediation of interests where social groups, employers and associations representing specific objectives influence and negotiate political incorporation, public decisions, and income distribution beyond the competitive market sphere (Alonso González & Macías Vázquez, 2014).

There is therefore a need to look for management mechanisms in the local sphere to counteract this negative influence. In general, the management of immaterial resources is an unresolved matter for local producers who, in the last decades, have focused their efforts on improving the quality management of their products through various types of certificates, including protected designations of origin and organic agriculture labels (Macías Vázquez & Alonso González, 2015). In the next few years, if we wish to successfully overcome the crisis in Spanish agriculture, we will have to give an adequate response to the management of immaterial resources by local producers, which poses a major challenge. In this sense, organic farmers' markets are an opportunity to control the management of the abovementioned immaterial resources in the local sphere, limiting large intermediaries' capacity to appropriate the corresponding rents.

## Case study: The Organic Farmers' Market in Granada (Spain)

### Methodology of the Case Study

Our research is based on a case study of the organic farmers' market in Granada, Spain. The research methodology was qualitative and ethnographic. For its execution, a total of 8 field approaches have been carried out, combining different data collection tools (participant observation, field diary, semi-structured interviews and a survey). The field work was performed in two separate stages.

The first one, which was mainly exploratory, stretched from September 2018 to April 2019. During those months, the organic farmers' market was visited five times. Participant observation was carried out according to the guidelines provided by Kawulich (2005).

During the first two visits, our efforts were focused on familiarising ourselves with the setting and the participants. In later visits, informal interactions with producers, sellers and buyers were established for the purpose of scanning their feelings and behaviours and getting acquainted with the functioning of this AFN, its importance, and its political aspects. A survey was also conducted among 30 buyers concerning their motivations to attend the organic farmers' market and on various organisational aspects. Questions were asked about relevant aspects concerning this AFN such as the support to the local economy, the improvement of the environment, the greater quality of the products, the price of those products, or close proximity production, underlining the importance of the resilience aspect towards

**Table 1** Profile of the key actors interviewed

Actor	Role in the organic farmers' market	Age	Sex	Time as member of the organic farmers' market	Educational level
1	Facilitator	45	Male	Since its creation	PhD
2	Facilitator	50	Male	5 years (until 2017)	PhD
3	Producer <sup>a</sup>	40	Female	5 years (since 2014)	University degree
4	Producer	45	Male	Since its creation	Secondary education
5	Producer	55	Male	Since its creation	Secondary education
6	Producer	42	Female	Since its creation	University degree
7	Consumer	35	Male	5 years (since 2014)	University degree
8	Consumer	63	Female	Since its creation	Primary education
9	Consumer	47	Female	5 years (since 2014)	Secondary education
10	Consumer	38	Male	Since its creation	University degree

*Source* Own elaboration

<sup>a</sup>The producers interviewed are also sellers; only 10% of the producers at the organic farmers' market do not sell their products themselves and are not interested in this study

the globalised food market in the farmers' market. During participant observation, several actors, whose involvement in daily and strategic decision-making processes concerning the organic farmers' market were identified. After the visits, both the information gathered, and the main discourses identified through participant observation were analysed. Based on the research objectives and the literature on collective management of material and immaterial resources, a semi-structured interview was designed to find out how these resources were managed through a collectively managed AFN. The information obtained from the survey was processed and it became clear that it was necessary to include questions on the exchange of knowledge and the different workshops conducted at the farmers' market in order to understand the mediation between food production and consumption.

Subsequently, a second set of visits to the organic farmers' market was undertaken (between April 2019 and October 2019). The purpose now was to study in greater detail the mediation between production and consumption and the collective management of material and immaterial resources. During these visits, a total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants (see Table 1), and a questionnaire including the above-mentioned questions was given to 20 consumers. We decided to interview key actors because of their greater knowledge on the process of founding the market and its objective of offering an alternative to the global food system. Similar interviews were conducted with producers–sellers, facilitators of the process of creation and operation, and consumers. The script for the interview focused on four main topics. First, the ethical commitment of producers who implement an agroecological approach to their work, and the consumers' social awareness. The key informants' opinion about the material resource managed by the organic farmers' market, i.e., the Vega de Granada area, was also deemed important. Finally, the exchange of knowledge and know-how taking place in workshops is underlined in its capacity to mediate between production and consumption.



The following criteria were used to select the interviewees: (1) five years or more as active members of the organic farmers' market, having been involved in its creation; (2) being acquainted with the agroecological approach and with alternative food networks; (3) participation in the daily operation of the market.

Gender parity was taken into consideration for the selection of the actors interviewed. The number of interviews was determined by the point of saturation of the information gathered (Weller et al., 2018). The average length of the interviews was around 1 h, and they were all recorded.

The information collected during the field work was subjected to a content analysis performed according to the guidelines established by Mayring (2014).

Finally, the documents of the organisation were examined. Press releases and other documentary sources gathered during the exploratory phase of the research and the ethnographic field observations were also analysed.

### **Presentation of the Case Study. Organisation and Operation of the Organic Farmers' Market**

The organic farmers' market in Granada (Ecomercado de Granada) was created through a participative process in which individuals and institutions related to the agroecological sector in this Andalusian city were involved. The initial purpose of this working group was to access a public subsidy aimed at promoting short commercialisation channels. The process was supported and dynamized by a research group of the University of Granada, PLANPAIS, which, for the abovementioned purpose, designed a participatory action research (PAR) project in 2013 (Matarán & Castillo, 2013). The working group was denied the subsidy by the competent authority. Nevertheless, given their concern about food and local practices, they decided to create an outdoor common market for individual producers and associations (De la Cruz Abarca & Calle, 2015). Outdoor organic farmers' markets have flourished in recent years, as a value on the rise (De la Cruz, et al., 2016). The Red Agroecológica de Granada (RAG, Agroecological Network of Granada), created during the same process, is the entity in charge of facilitating the work and representing the organisations and individual producers participating in the organic farmers' market.

The main objectives of the organic farmers' market in Granada are the following: to articulate and organise the supply of organic products; to promote the visibility of the agroecological production and its relationship with the consumers; to facilitate the coordination and representation of the agroecological sector; and to reinforce short commercialisation channels for the purpose of controlling all the stages of the commercialisation process. The idea of sustainable development is highly valued by the participants in the organic farmers' market, who are trying to preserve and maintain a material resource like the Vega de Granada area, often threatened by urban planning (Zapiain, 2011). The areas that compose it are in a transitional state; they materialise a denaturalised and pressurised transition between two opposing realities (rural and urban) that has not been planned. It is precisely this situation of lack of definition that allows us to understand them today as areas of opportunity to improve the relationship between urban and rural dynamics in conflict. (Arredondo Garrido,

2021). Given the social complexity associated with that relationship, the management of the material resource of the Vega de Granada area by the organic farmers' market becomes decisive. The adoption of an agroecological perspective contributes to the promotion of the collective and sustainable management of the resource through the AFN. It may well be considered a reconnection of the urban and rural spheres (Fonte, 2013). The organic farmers' market is held in a square in-front of the Palacio de Congresos (Conference Hall) in Granada, a very central area of the city, which has been made available free of charge by the City Council. It is held monthly, every first Saturday of the month. In a totally self-managed way, the producers and partners of the RAG set out their market stalls to sell their agroecological products. The participants are very diverse, we find associations, consumer groups, agroecological cooperatives, and civil society organisations. From the 15 associations and producers that initiated the farmers' market project, the number of associations and producers that have joined has grown steadily to 23 that make up the RAG today.

The organic farmers' market is governed by an assembly, and several working committees. As an institution that does not receive any public subsidies; its decisions are taken solely by vote of the partners. The products sold at the market are produced or manufactured according to agroecological principles and are mostly produced by the market's partners. Only 10% of the products sold at the market can come from external agents, and must be preferably produced in nearby areas. By imposing these conditions regarding production, it avoids the risk that this type of experiment may become a market for commercial intermediaries, blurring and obscuring the primary objectives of the project. (Mauleón, 2010). If a larger percentage of external products were allowed, the organic farmers' market would become nothing more than a distribution platform and miss the target of favouring local trade. This restriction to reselling has been observed in most case studies of AFNs (Kessari et al., 2020; Rosol & Barbosa, 2021).

The partners of the organic farmers' market form a very heterogeneous group. This heterogeneity is reflected in their different positions in relation to each other. There are partners who produce food according to agroecological principles, whether individually or within a producers' association. There are consumers or consumer groups who have joined the organic farmers' market, support it with their membership fees, and participate in the decision-making processes. The fact that, since the beginning, the organic farmers' market has grown from the union of producers and consumers, who jointly make all decisions, is noteworthy. This has also been observed in other AFN (Bidwell et al., 2018; Kessari et al., 2020). The way the market is organised cannot be understood without the consumers' social awareness and support to organic production. In addition, people who share the objectives of the market can pay the fee and become a member, though they can neither vote in the assembly nor participate in the daily activities of the institution. Even if these people cannot benefit from the advantages that being a full member entails, it is a way for them to support the values that the market upholds. It exists because the organic farmers' market is not only a distributor of food products, but a space to advocate for a different understanding of food based, alternative values, and meanings. It is a mechanism that helps the market increase resilience in contexts of difficulty.

Due to the high degree of commitment and dedication that requires the organic farmers' market, a decision was made to work preferably with producers' organisations, individual producers or families are also welcome with a high degree of political commitment. Producers who sell their products at the market pay a fee to maintain it. These fees allow purchasing the materials that are needed to build the market, such as marquees or tables, as well as paying for various forms of promotion. The producers are the ones responsible for improving the infrastructure of the market and for supporting it through the payment of fees. This trend towards cooperation, this collective commitment with agroecological production systems is, in itself, an important immaterial resource, which contains a potentially infinite stock of value, because the more it is used, the higher its value. The organic farmers' market connects new and alternative forms of food management to local traditions, thus favouring their acceptance and valuation by local consumers. As a result of its success, the market continues to expand, in contrast with other AFNs in Spain, which not only are not growing, but are in fact struggling to survive or about to disappear (Mauleón, 2010).

### **The Organic Farmers' Market in Granada as an Alternative Mediator**

The organic farmers' market guarantees that its products are produced or manufactured according to certain production criteria, and it is a clear example of a participatory guaranteed system. This participatory guaranteed system (PGS) is understood within the organic farmers' market as an alternative to protected designations of origin in quality certification systems. In this type of food quality validation schemes, the mediation between producers and consumers is qualitatively transformed. While protected designations of origin prioritise objective indicators, sanctioned by expert systems and transmitted through labels based on abstract codes, in PGSs the mediation between producers and consumers is of a more subjective, based on a relationship of trust between the different actors (beyond all expert systems). These systems are used by many AFNs as a quality validation method outside of the traditional system (Chaparro-Africano & Naranjo, 2020; Mastronardi et al., 2019; Miralles et al., 2017). Under these conditions, the capacity to propagate and disseminate the meanings is reduced, due to the lack of abstract codes (which are easily transmissible through information and communication technologies). In contrast, the consumers' capacity to interpret the meanings associated with the production of food increases significantly, because the consumers assume a major role in the social construction of food quality.

In fact, protected designations of origin of the area have not made it easy to translate into economic terms the differentiation of products by quality (Macías Vázquez & Alonso González, 2015). Large supermarkets, modern large distribution systems in general, have succeeded to fully appropriate all of the benefits generated by these geographically based quality certificates, translating them into a food security guarantee associated with trademarks, while local producers have had to bear the production costs associated with the actual improvement of quality. In contrast, PGSs are differentiation systems based on fully participatory construction of food quality

(IFOAM, 2007). In the case of the organic farmers' market in Granada, consumers know beforehand that the products sold there have been grown or manufactured according to criteria and following procedures aligned with an agroecological approach, excluding raw materials that have been subjected to phytosanitary treatments or methods that are not compatible with such approach. In addition, as mentioned before, reselling is not allowed because it would undermine the credibility of the market's environmental objective and significantly reduce the capacity to appropriate the value generated. In this way, the logic of value generation that irremediably benefited large retail outlets in a post-industrial economy is broken by basing consumers' increased ability to interpret the meanings embodied in material production in a direct relationships of trust between local producers and consumers.

Therefore, a strong commitment is not only required from producers, but also from citizens. The support granted to this kind of initiatives, as opposed to large supermarkets, is essential for their survival. When the distribution of value among the different actors involved in the production and maintenance, the value is increased through cooperation between producers, engaging citizens in the social construction of food quality, increasing the consumers' capacity to interpret the meanings attached to the material production as well. The important aspect for local communities, particularly for small-scale farmers, is to generate a dynamic of value production in a post-industrial economy, which does not reinforce the propensity for economic and business concentration, but rather the development of more self-concentrated economies at a local level. All these processes are based on certain emerging behaviours, which are characteristic of post-industrial societies and intertwined with other behaviours that have been deeply rooted in the Granada and Andalusian societies for centuries.<sup>1</sup> In order to understand the agricultural characteristics of this area we need to look back to the Islamic period in Spain, which first contributed to shape its landscape. Agricultural techniques such as the expansion of irrigated areas and the division of land into plots, as well as the construction of an extensive network of irrigation canals that has survived until today, date back to that period. The agricultural activity thus moulded through history has become an essential heritage of this area (Puente Asuero, 2013). The Vega de Granada area (where most products sold at the organic farmers' market are grown) preserves the Islamic structure of irrigation canals and plots that are still managed according to century-old traditions supported by the organic farmers' market. Traditionally, the products cultivated in this area were sold at the market of Abastos, a custom that is still maintained in most villages and towns in Andalusia. This practice contributes to the greater acceptance of the organic farmers' market by the locals, and is the cultural basis that supports the agroecological experience of this market in Granada. In addition to managing the material resource of the Vega de Granada area, the market collectively manages two immaterial resources through an AFN that opposes the rentier appropriation by large transnational corporations of the value generated in that area.

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<sup>1</sup> Granada is located in Andalusia, a southern Spanish region with many historical and ethnographical characteristics due to having been a melting pot of various cultures (Christian, Muslim and Jewish) for centuries.

**Table 2** Consumers' motivations to attend the organic farmers' market by importance (1–4)

Motives/Importance	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)
Support to local economy	–	–	10	90
Improvement of the environment	10	10	30	50
Higher quality of products	10	30	40	20
Price of products	–	20	30	50
Proximity of production areas	10	10	20	60

Source Own elaboration from data gathered from primary sources

Thus, nowadays, consumers increasingly demand to know the traceability of the products they consume. There is a growing concern for food and food quality products. In addition, the square, the open area where the organic farmers' market is held, becomes a place for the exchange of experiences, sharing values and meanings by the participants. On the other hand, the producers involved in the organic farmers' market have an implicit and practical knowledge, a know-how. Also, agroecological production is intimately related to the generalisation of technical cooperation processes and to the exchange of favours between local agents.

Without consumers, the producers would not sell their agroecological products and this meeting place would not exist. The organic farmers' market is a space to advocate for local production, in opposition to large chains and distributors. Among the consumers participating in the survey, 60% say that their monthly expenses in the market is over EUR 50, which is approximately one fourth of what Spaniards spend on food in a month, on average (Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca & Alimentación, 2019b). Up to 40% of the people surveyed attend the market 6 to 11 times a year, while 27% go every month, which confirms the consumers' fidelity to the event. So much so that, due to the increasing demand of the consumers, an additional organic farmers' market was created in the northern part of the city which is held every third Saturday of the month. The consumers demanded that it be located in this specific area the city and be held more often. This frequency of visits of consumers is not exclusively related to food shopping. Beyond being a place where organic and local products are sold; the organic farmers' market has become a meeting point for people with common interests on agroecology and sustainability. In their premises, training workshops (on food fermentation, urban gardens, etc.), tasting and cooking sessions are held, among other activities that strengthen the bond between producers and consumers and generate a simultaneous increase of the knowledge incorporated into the material production and the propagation and replication of the consumers' capacity to interpret the meanings attached to material production.

Regarding the consumers' motivations to attend the market, the consumers underline the importance to support the local economy, the greater quality of the products supplied in the market in contrast with those sold through conventional channels, the improvement of the environment, and the proximity of the production areas, that increases their trust in the production process, in contrast with the food marketing channels of large supermarkets (Table 2). The data indicate that the main reason for consumers to attend the organic farmers' market is their wish to support and

promote the local economy, which is of maximum important for 90% of the respondents. Secondly, we find the proximity of the production areas, highlighted by 60% of the respondents. These two reasons clearly stand out amongst the others, including the improvement of the environment (that is the main motivation for 50% of the respondents). These data show that there is ample room to develop an alternative mediation between consumers and producers, to the detriment of the one articulated by large supermarkets, and that this mediation can indeed be based on the values and meanings that the citizens give to food production. Large supermarkets can certainly invest in the commercialisation of organic products; some big chains like Carrefour and Auchan are already doing it. But it is much more difficult for these transnational organisations to appear as supporters of local production because they have, to a great extent, contributed to the crisis and disappearance of this sector by imposing abusive profit margins on the value chain. On the other hand, the data also reveals that the consumers significantly value local practices and production techniques, to which they can more clearly relate themselves through the mediation of the organic farmers' market.

As for the improvement of the environment, most consumers attending the organic farmers' market consider themselves aware of climate change and of the actions required to fight against it. This is especially important considering that the city of Granada and its metropolitan area are among the most polluted areas of Spain (Ecologistas en Acción, 2014). Most consumers agree on the need to encourage a more sustainable production by consuming local produce, which is an essential aspect of sustainable development. On the other hand, the greater quality of the products is another aspect highlighted by consumers. In their opinion, products sold at the organic farmers' market taste better than those supplied by large food distribution chains. This is one of the reasons for them to choose to shop at the market, despite higher prices. In this case, we can observe how the differentiation by quality translates into higher prices, avoiding the bad practices of the large food chains. As analysed before, when consumers are involved in the construction of food quality, the results on the evolution of consumers' capacity to interpret the meanings incorporated in the material production are really positive. Finally, the survey respondents also indicated the need to increase the variety of products and the amount of meat supplied at the market. Currently, this need is being addressed by incorporating new partners specialised in the production of meat according to agroecological parameters.

The smooth running of the initiative helps increase the capacity of the community involved in the market to capture the added value through the developed production activities. Despite the growing adaptation of large supermarket chains to new trends in food, and their appropriation of the economic rents of local producers, the organic farmers' market in the city of Granada has been welcomed by the population and its potential is still growing, while maintaining the management of its activity. The

proof of it is found in the fact that more and more people are aware of its existence. Thus, among university population, which is very large in the city, 300 out of 900 survey respondents affirm to know the organic farmers' market and having attended it.<sup>2</sup> Even if university students are temporary consumers because they leave the city after finishing their studies, they represent a good indicator for the increase of the number of times these meanings are propagated and replicated given that, in many cases, their families live in villages and towns surrounding Granada. In addition, before they leave the city, they may attract other students to the market, and, thus, an organic farmers' market–university connection can be developed beneficial for both parties. We cannot dismiss the possibility that, in the future, this connection between the university population and the world around the organic farmers' market will translate into academic and social collaboration projects, which may give prestige to this collective institution.

If the organic farmers' market can improve its communication with the population—survey respondents identified it as a weakness —, it will be possible to set a limit to the capacity of the large chains to appropriate the economic rent of producers. Better communication and further visibility of the market would favour an increase in the number of times that the meanings incorporated to the material production are propagated and replicated, which is one of the main problems presently affecting its operation.

## Conclusions

The experience of the organic farmers' market in Granada shows that the processes of enhancement of material and immaterial resources can be combined so that the mediation articulated between producers and consumers becomes an alternative to the commercial intermediation imposed by the modern large distribution systems. For this purpose, it is important that production practices closely intertwine with the values upheld by both producers and consumers. In parallel, this experience shows that, in a post-industrial economy, production includes consumption as a decisive phase of its production process. Consumption and production are not separate spheres, because the consumers' contribution of values and meanings have a crucial influence on the evolution of material production (Toscano, 2007).

In this work, we did a case study based on a theoretical framework that allows to analyse local development dynamics in a post-industrial economy. We have started by studying how value is created in this type of economy. In this way, we developed an analytical approach that is not reduced to the typical voluntarist local analysis, but rather approaches local development problems from the structural features at a macroeconomic level. The model proposed has enabled us to interpret value creation in local economies from a new perspective, and to identify value-adding vectors

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<sup>2</sup> This data was collected through an exploratory survey conducted among the students at the University of Granada. Up to 900 students responded to this survey, the purpose of which was to assess the degree of acceptance of the organic farmers' market among this population.

that have rarely been studied in this kind of research work. We are referring to the role that common immaterial resources and, more specifically, ethical values play in these processes. Thus, through an AFN institution like the organic farmers' market, collectively manage both material resources (the Vega de Granada area) and immaterial resources (the consumers' ethical values, manifested in their consumption of organic food, and the producers' ethical commitment to maintain local agroecologically managed agri-food systems). Combining the collective management of both types of resources through an AFN may allow the reconstruction of the rural–urban identity (Jarosz, 2008). In addition, incorporating the management of immaterial resources may “enrich” organic products (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017) sold at the organic farmers' market, offering a possible way out of the current agricultural crisis.

Although it is usual to relate post-industrial economies with the predominance of business concentration in “big brother” economies (Lanier, 2014), our objective in this work is to focus on its operating logic, based on the enhancement of immaterial resources, to provide self-reliant development alternatives in the local context. It is not a matter of using ethical values as another attribute of the economic activity developed by large corporations. It is rather a matter of incorporating the ethical values of both consumers and producers to the daily operation of the economic system, not in a voluntarist way, but by considering its own structural laws. We have approached the analysis the organic farmers' market in Granada from this point of view, as an example of an ethic that merges with the economy that opens new possibilities for development at a local scale, as well as alternatives to business concentration in agri-food markets.

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