Mapping the Organisational Forms of Networks of Alternative Food Networks: Implications for Transition

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Abstract

In response to the failures of the dominant agro-food regime multiple practices for transition towards more environmentally and socially sustainable food systems have been proposed and put into practice by Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). To advance societal transitions, some AFNs have employed a strategy of developing broader networks. These network of networks, take various forms. To date, the ways in which networks of AFNs organise remains understudied, yet how they organise is likely to influence the transition pathways they advance. Drawing on organisation theory we propose a typology of organisational forms for networks of AFNs. We theorise that networks of AFNS that adopt organisational forms that are isomorphic to the dominant food regime may have their practices adopted, but that these risk co-option and dilution. Networks of AFNs that organise around polymorphic organisational forms are less likely to see their practices integrated at the dominant regime level, but their practices could have a more fundamental transformative impact.

Introduction

The current configuration of conventional food provisioning has failed to secure adequate, accessible, sustainable food for the world's growing population and changing climate. In response, multiple pathways for transition towards more environmentally and socially sustainable food systems have been proposed and put into practice. The organisations facilitating many of these practices have been grouped together under the broad label of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs). AFNs are typically associated with territorially-specific practices. They generally aim to foster connections between consumers and producers, while promoting socio-economic inclusion and sustainability (Feenstra 1997; Renting et al. 2003; Tregear 2011; Veen et al. 2012; D'Amico 2015). The use of the word 'alternative' reflects the deliberate positioning and attempts to differentiate particular food practices from the dominant agro-food regime. This dominant agro-food regime pushes the widespread adoption

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of intensification methods by undermining the productive capacities of less-intensive methods (Levidow et al. 2014, p. 1131).

In seeking to promote alternatives, some AFNs develop coalitions or connecting networks: they seek out strength in numbers (see for example Migliore et al. 2014; Hermans et al. 2016). These networks of ANFs serve multiple functions including, but not limited to, collective resource and knowledge sharing, motivation, coordination, organisation guidance, and marketing opportunities. To date, the ways in which networks of AFNs organise remains understudied. This reflects an important gap in the existing literature on the organising of alternative food networks, and more specifically on the organisational forms of networks of AFNs. Drawing from organisational theory, we take as a starting assumption that the ways networks of AFNs organise themselves (formally and informally) has an impact on the practices and processes of the networks and their members.

Consideration of organisational relations has been used to identify and understand the rules, values, and structures of novel practices which are dynamic and 'in the making' (Lutz and Schachinger 2013; Migliore et al. 2015). To enhance our understanding of the organisational forms of networks of AFNs we draw on a relational approach to organisation design (Boland and Collopy 2004; Grandori and Soda 2006), inter-organisational elements, and inter-firm network properties (Grandori and Soda 1995; Grandori 1997). The aim of this article is thus to enhance understanding of the formal organisational forms of networks of AFNs so as to advance an initial theory on relationships between organisational form and pathways for socio-technical transition. The results will contribute to organisational theory and theories of socio-technical transition which, to date, have under-theorised these relationships.

The article is organised as follows: first we introduce a framework for applying organisational theory to the study of networks of AFNs. We then introduce a typology of organisational forms of AFNs. The typology structures our analysis of the formal organisational forms of two international networks of AFNs: Slow Food International and Urgenci. Slow Food International is a global organisation founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat (Slow Food International 2016a). Urgenci is a network that formalised in 2008 with the aim to develop overall coherence at, and between, local, regional, national and global levels of projects to emphasise the relevant contribution of Community Supported Agriculture (Urgenci 2016b). With the formal organisational forms of these two networks of AFNs mapped out, attention turns to theorising the potential relationships between organisational forms and transition pathways. We conclude by reflecting on the opportunities and limitations of our theory in relation to transitions towards more just and sustainable food system, and raise further questions and possible research trajectories.

Methodology

Organisational forms can be classified according to different organisational relations. Following Grandori and Furnari (2008), we propose a typology of organisational forms of networks of AFNs based on four organisational relations: market-like

Assumptions		
Primary organizational elements used by organisations coherent with the dominant regime (isomorphic)	**Market-based Relations** • Price-like and control-by-exit ➢ e.g., commodity trading, fixing prices and linking to contracts	**Bureaucratic Relations** • Formal rules and plans • Division of labour • Hierarchy of leadership and accountability ➢ e.g., hygiene/quality standards, trade agreements
Organisational elements assumed to be alternative to dominant regime (polymorphic)	**Community-based Relations** • Knowledge and value sharing ➢ e.g. Fair trade, CSAs	**Democratic-based Relations** • Allocation of ownership, decision and representation rights ➢ e.g. food cooperatives, producer organizations

Figure 1: *Typology of organisational relations. Source: Adapted from Grandori and Furnari (2008)*

relations, bureaucratic relations, communitarian relations, and democratic relations (see Figure 1). We have clustered these relations into two categories defined by the dominant organisational practices of the agro-food regime: isomorphic forms that rely on organisational relations that are facilitated by the dominant regime (i.e., market-like relations, bureaucratic relations); and polymorphic forms that are marked by the predominance of organisational relations not explicitly facilitated by the regime (i.e., communitarian relations, and democratic relations) (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Kondra and Hinings 1998; Adler 2001).

Following this typology, AFNs can be categorised as isomorphic when their formal organisational relations are predominantly bureaucratic (e.g., use of standards, formalised participation rules, use of brands and quality labels) and/or market-based (e.g., premium or quality-based price mechanisms) and thus mirror the organisational forms favoured by the dominant agro-food regime. Drawing from the literature, we assume these organisational relations are more likely to foster a process of isomorphism, as organisations relying on these relations become increasingly similar (to each other) and aligned to the dominant regime, through the pressure of competition in the marketplace and the maintenance of institutional norms based on bureaucratic, coercive, and normative processes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Kondra and Hinings 1998). AFNs that organise themselves around community (e.g., sharing knowledge and values) and democratic relations (e.g., shared decision rights and allocation of ownership) can be categorised as polymorphic, since these organisation forms are less likely to conform with those facilitated by the dominant food regime. Drawing again from the literature we assume that since these organisational relations deviate from the pressure of markets and the influence of dominant instutional norms, they create the conditions for experimenting with novel practices,

organisational change and innovation (Kondra and Hinings 1998; Adler 2001). In so doing they facilitate processes of organisational polymorphism. This typology of organisational relations is used as a way to advance theory building around how networks of AFNs organise and, in turn, how there organisational forms influence pathways for socio-technical transitions.

To further develop our typology on the organisational forms of networks of AFNs, we undertook two case studies. The following criteria were used in a purposive selection of cases:

1. The case fit the scope of the research:
   a. The case was a network of AFNs; and
   b. The case was an established network of AFNs that operates at an international level. Note that given the aim of theory building, we opted to use cases of established networks with potential to impact the regime.
2. The case contributed to the diversity of the case study set. This diversity is especially important in explorative research;
3. The case is supported by the availability of rich content, such on-line documents, reports, scientific articles, and other sources suitable for triangulation.

Based on these criteria, Urgenci and Slow Food International were selected. In selecting these two cases our intention is not to contrast them. Rather, the cases are used to elaborate and test our typology, which in turn serves as a starting point from which we can theorise the role organisational elements of networks of AFNs in transition.

To map the specific organisational relations of the cases, we identified relevant, publically available documents (including webpages) and analysed them using Atlas.ti. Data was coded on the basis of formal organisation of the networks, particularly around the four organisational elements. To limit analytic bias we first identified typical constructs associated with the four typified organisational relations (see Tables 1 and 2). For bureaucratic-based relations we identified key organisational bodies, procedures, membership, and statutes and bylaws. For market-based relations we identified fees, (monetary) penalties, marketing incentives and monetary awards. For community-based relations we identified knowledge sharing, assemblies, relations between the international network and members, and values. Finally, for democratic-based relations we focused on decision-making, voting mechanisms and elections. With these sub-relations identified, we undertook another round of coding to identify formal mechanisms that relate to the specific elements. In this article we focus only on formal rules, here defined as the written documents that have been agreed to by the leadership of the networks and which outline the operation of the network.

We recognise that there are limitations associated with the research design, and particularly with regards to the data. There are limits to what can be understood, and more broadly generalised on the basis of analysis selected texts. We note that with a reliance on websites as primary sources of data we cannot guarantee equivalency of data available, whether the texts are up-to-date, or processes of selection of documents that are made public. We in turn acknowledge that we do not have potentially relevant documents that remain offline. Website policies, efficiencies or timeliness in

maintaining websites are all likely to be factors conditioning the data. The dynamic nature of both websites also presents challenges as documents are taken down and new ones are made available with no warning. Further, we recognise that the relationship between formal rules and everyday practices are not direct. Acknowledging these limits, we contend that the documents that we have accessed and analysed form a suitable dataset for analysing formal organisational elements.

Description and analysis of the cases

The cases, Slow Food International and Urgenci, are headquartered in the European Union and rely heavily on volunteers. Both refer to themselves as social movements and grassroots organisations that aim to improve connections between producers and consumers. Slow Food promotes the values of a food system that is 'good, clean and fair', while Urgenci's values are 'fairness, solidarity, reciprocity'. Both organisations align themselves with the principles of food sovereignty, and the right to food. While their stated objectives and values are very much aligned, their organisational forms differ.

In what follows we analyse and map out the organisational forms of the two cases using the typology described above, recognising that organisational practices used to identify elements defy neat categorisation and as such a practice might correspond to more than one type of organisational relation.

Slow Food International

Slow Food International (SFI) describes itself as a 'global, grassroots organisation, founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us' (Slow Food International 2016a). Elsewhere, Slow Food is described formally as 'an international member-supported non-profit organisation', but informally as the '"facilitator" of a world network committed to changing the way food is currently produced and distributed' (Irving and Ceriani 2013, p. 12). An overview of SFI's formal organisational elements is provided in Table 1. The table provides specific examples of rules and practices associated with each of the four organisational relations and sub-relations.

Slow Food emerged in response to its founder's growing sense of unease over trends in systems of food production (Pietrykowski 2004, p. 310). The idea of 'slow food' was advanced to contrast the onslaught of fast, cheap food (Petrini 2001; Kummer 2002; Pietrykowski 2004). More specifically, the seeds of the movement were planted in Italy in 1986 when a McDonald's was planned to open in Rome's historic Piazza di Spagna (Slow Food International 2016b). In December 1989, the international Slow Food movement was officially founded in Paris, at which time the Slow Food Manifesto was signed (Slow Food International 2016b). While much has been written about Slow Food (van Bommel and Spicer 2011; see for example Petrini 2001; Kummer 2002; Miele and Murdoch 2002; Leitch 2003; Pietrykowski 2004;

Table 1: *Review of SFI's formal organisational relations*

Main relation	Sub-relations	Examples of organisational relations: Slow Food International
Bureaucratic-based relations	Definition of different bodies	The bureaucratic organisation of SFI is top down across three levels: global (e.g., Congress, President, Executive Committee, Board of Directors, International Council, Secretary), national (e.g., associations), local (e.g., Convivia).
	Procedures	Standardised procedures for: • Monitoring a key tasks and bodies (e.g., Convivia, Presidia, brand, trademark, privacy) • Membership • Mediating relations, responsibilities and finances • Attending Congress
	Membership	Memberships are individually held. Highly structured membership rights.
	Statutes and bylaws	Key statutes include: The Slow Food Manifesto; the Code of Use for Slow Food Trademarks; and Slow Food Membership Regulations.
Market-based relations	Fees	Different fee categories of membership are available. Clear rules related to division of fees between Convivia and the various offices of Slow Food's international headquarters.
	Penalties	Penalties are limited and refer mainly to the loss of membership or the loss of the right to use the Slow Food Trademark.
	Marketing incentives	Marketing incentives can be found in the promotion of Presidia and the Code of Use for Slow Food Trademarks.
Community-based relations	Knowledge sharing	Knowledge sharing is a key activity for SFI and is largely defined through the promotion of SFI values vis-a-vis events and publications.
	Assemblies	The Congress (every four years), Terra Madre (every two years).

Table 1. *Continued*

Main relation	Sub-relations	Examples of organisational relations: Slow Food International
	Relations between the international network and members	Slow Food describes itself as a 'network of members' but is organised in a top-down way. Convivia are referred to as 'grassroots' and 'autonomous' in various documents but in practice they are legitimised and formalised by SFI.
	Values	The main values of Slow Food are 'good, clear, and fair' food.
Democratic-based relations	Decision making	Members have the right to vote according to the principle of a single vote. At the Congress decisions are taken based on the majority of votes, and at least half the members with voting rights must be present. The Executive Committee makes decisions based on the majority of those present. When there is a tie, the vote of the President prevails.
	Elections	Elections are used to elect members to executive roles at national and international level (i.e., Congress).

West and Domingos 2012; Chaudhury and Albinsson 2015), there has been little interrogation of its organisational structure.

Bureaucratic relations. To begin to map out the bureaucratic relations in the organisation of SFI, it is useful to start with a description of the different bodies that make up the organisation. SFI has an organisational structure that spans three levels: local; national/regional; and, global. At the global level the Executive Committee is the highest institutional governing body, with all appointments held for a four-year term. The founder of the movement, Carlo Petrini, has maintained the position of President since 1989, although within the statutes the President is to be 'elected by the Congress and remains in office until the subsequent Congress [every four years]' (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 9). The role of President is a powerful one, as the President chairs the Executive Committee, and proposes nominations for Executive Committee, Secretary General to the Executive Committee, and Treasurer to the

Council. Furthermore, the President 'has the power to nominate up to two Vice Presidents, who have the right to sit on the Executive Committee' (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 9).

There is also the Slow Food Association which is responsible for deliberating, finding consensus and managing the association through its own Board of Directors which is formed by the President, the Executive Committee, the International Council and the Secretary. SFI also has additional bodies to support its objective, including: Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, Terra Madre Foundation, and the University of Gastronomic Sciences. These are all located in Bra, Italy, with the exception of the University of Gastronomic Sciences which nearby, in Pollenzo. At the national level there are national associations that function as the coordinating and representative bodies within certain individual countries while at the local level there are also Convivia. Worldwide, there are over 1,500 Convivia.

SFI makes use of standardised procedures to control and monitor a number of tasks, for example how the SFI brand is used by network members. At the same time hierarchical elements are infused via the different bodies of the organisation, all connected to the Executive Committee and by extension, to the key figure of the president. There are procedures for voting and elections (e.g., procedures for how the Congress elects the Council).

SFI is a membership organisation and memberships are held individually. Upon becoming a member of Slow Food, one becomes a member of the international network but also a local organisation:

> When joining our network, you also become part of a local convivium. These groups provide an opportunity to meet like-minded people and discover the food culture in the place you live. Activities include shared meals and tastings, visits to local producers and markets, the creation of school and community gardens, and events such as conferences, festivals, film screenings and food education courses (Slow Food International 2016b).

Membership rights include: voting for, and/or being elected to a body of the Association; approving balance sheets; and participating in SFI's assemblies and all its activities (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 4). As explored in more detail below, membership fees differ depending on the country of residence and there are also different fees depending on the personal situation of the member. SFI also has an affiliation membership for other associations or entities. Affiliates have the right to participate in SFI activities but do not have the right to vote (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 4). National associations are responsible for 'defining the procedures for joining the National Association in agreement with the Executive Committee and in accordance with the Slow Food Membership Regulations' (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 18). In terms of organisational relations, SFI makes use of standardised procedures to control and monitor a number of processes. The result is that SFI is organised around highly bureaucratic practices, particularly when it comes to regulating participation, the use of the brand, and network reputation.

Market-like relations. Market-like relations can be found in the structure of membership fees, penalties, and market incentives. Up-to-date payment of membership fees are a prerequisite to obtaining and maintaining member status. Fees change

depending on country[2] and four types of memberships are offered: Individual (open to all); Sustainer (allows people to contribute more than the suggested amount); Youth membership (reduced price open to those under 30); and Couple membership (for shared households). Some national associations manage their own websites where individuals can directly register (e.g., USA, the Netherlands, Italy). For other countries, SFI provides website support for registration and fees (e.g., India, Hungary, China).

Penalties are limited and refer mainly to the loss of membership or the loss of the right to use the Slow Food Trademark. Membership status can be lost for failure to pay the membership fee, or failure to pay/renew the affiliation fee (or by the affiliate giving specific notice of cancellation). Expulsion is possible on serious grounds, for example, behaviour or activities in clear conflict with the principles or the aims of the Association (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 5). If membership is lost, membership fees are not refunded (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 4).

Marketing reflects a pronounced set of relations within SFI. This corresponds to other analyses of Slow Food, which have argued that Slow Food's products are designed to commodify features of local production (Lotti 2010). A related example of a marketing relation can be seen with the development of Presidia. Presidia, small-scale projects to help artisan food producers preserve their traditional processing methods and end-products, were launched in 2000 to defend foods at risk of disappearance (West and Domingos 2012; Irving and Ceriani 2013, p. 121). According to Slow Food, '[t]he Presidia sustain quality production at risk of extinction, protect unique regions and ecosystems, recover traditional processing methods, safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties' (Slow Food International 2016c). There are now 475 Presidia involving more than 13,000 producers. The Presidia function in a similar way to mainstream branding processes. As Slow Food International (2016e) explains:

> The 'Slow Food Presidium' is now a registered brand, including a graphic logo and guidelines which producers must subscribe to. The Slow Food Presidia brand has since also come to include two products from the Global South which are regularly processed in Italy: coffee and cacao. In this instance, production protocols and regulations were discussed not only with the producers (from the areas of origin) but also with Italian artisans (coffee roasters and chocolate producers). In 2012, Switzerland decided to follow on the same path: once again, in order to obtain the authorisation to use the Slow Food Presidia label, Slow Food Presidia producers subscribed to a set of guidelines, committing themselves to respecting the production protocols and to work in line with the Slow Food philosophy.

Another example of marketing elements can be found in *The Code of Use for Slow Food Trademarks*, which defines the rules governing the use of Slow Food trademarks. Consider that:

> Convivia are authorized to use the Slow Food trademark as long as they specify the name of the Convivium. Authorization is granted by the Executive Committee or the National Association, where existing, only after having signed a foundation protocol. This protocol allows the Convivia to use the Slow Food trademark (Slow Food International 2012a, 2A).

From participating in the Presidia producers have the potential to receive additional monetary gains (i.e., profit) associated with brand recognition. Similarly,

national and local associations benefit from the right to make use of the Slow Food trademark and from membership fees. We conclude that the formal organisation of SFI supports practices that induce members to take advantage of brand reputation to foster their market potential. In this respect SFI shows a strong organisational orientation to towards market-based relations.

Community-based relations. Formalised community-based relations are assessed through an examination of knowledge sharing, assemblies, relations between international network and members, and values. Education and knowledge sharing are priorities for SFI. For example, Slow Food focuses on 'teaching the pleasure of food and how to make good, clean and fair choices through food and taste education' (Slow Food International 2016e). The knowledge shared relates to values identified by Slow Food and insights to support members develop good, clear and fair food habits (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 3). The main space for developing relationships between the international network and membership is the Congress. The functions of the Congress are to: discuss, define and approve the Association's policies and program of activities; share the social report; elect the governing bodies and Board of Auditors and the Board of Appeals; and, approve changes to the Statute (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 7). The Congress is attended by delegates elected by members in geographic regions. The Council develops election criteria with the aim of guaranteeing that members can participate democratically in all Congress-related activities.

SFI claims that '[a]s a grassroots organisation, members are invited to play a direct and active role, bringing the Slow Food philosophy to life locally' (Slow Food International 2016d). Claims of being grassroots are however juxtaposed with the way in which Slow Food has set out to create a network of Convivia, from the international level, down. As defined in the statutes, SFI explicitly set out to:

> create a network of local communities. A local Slow Food community is a group of individuals who share the Association's philosophy and intend to cultivate common interests, taking the food production and consumption system as a starting point for promoting ways of life that respect people and the social, cultural and environmental context in which they live and work (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 3).

Thus while Convivia are often referred to as the grassroots of the Slow Food movement, they are formally organised in accordance with clear rules defined by Slow Food International. Further, the explicit role of the Convivia is to bring 'the Slow Food philosophy to life through the events and activities they organise in their communities' (Slow Food International 2016f). It is thus the Convivia that translate the Slow Food philosophy out to their local communities and not Slow Food sharing local experiences and values globally.

When it comes to values, Slow Food was founded as an 'eno-gastronomic' (wine and food) association with the initial aims of supporting and defending 'good food, gastronomic pleasure and a slow pace of life' (Irving and Ceriani 2013, p. 4). However, over time, the focus and values of Slow Food have evolved and come to embrace more environmental issues (van Bommel and Spicer 2011). The main values promoted by the organisation are those of good, clear, and fair (Petrini 2007; Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 3.d): meaning, good to 'educated and well trained senses',

clean to the environment, and fair for those who produce the food, as well as for their culture and traditions (Irving and Ceriani 2013, p. 9). These suggest that the values of SFI are oriented toward community-based practices, yet as noted above, overall the organisational relations are predominantly top-down (e.g., the Convivia are referred to as 'grassroots' and 'autonomous' in various documents, but from an organisation perspective they are legitimised and formalised by SFI).

Democratic relations. Ideological support for democratic practices is evident in Slow Food's Policy Strategy:

> [p]articipatory democracy cannot exist without the recognition and circulation of the food knowledge of communities for the well-being of future generations and the natural world. The right to food without the socialization of knowledge is a mere pipedream (Petrini et al. 2012, p. 15).

To better understand the democratic relations of Slow Food, we can examine formalised processes of decision making, and elections.

Across the organisations that make up the international network most decisions are made by way of voting. Members have the right to vote according to the principle of a single vote (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 4). At the Congress, '[d]ecisions are taken based on the majority of votes, and at least half the members with voting rights must be present' unless a decision is being made about modification of the Association's headquarters, the dissolution, liquidation or transfer of the Association's assets, or modification to the statute. In these cases, a consensus of 80 per cent of those who have the right to vote is required (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 7). The Executive Committee makes decisions based on the majority of those present. When there is a tie, the vote of the President prevails (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 10). Elections are used to elect members to executive roles. The Congress has the stated role of 'guaranteeing that all members can participate democratically in the life of the association, in social decisions and in the election of executive bodies' (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 7). At the level of National Associations, a National Congress is to be held at least every four years for the election of the executive bodies (Slow Food International 2012b, Art. 19).

Based on an analysis of formal organisational relations, SFI can be classified as being organised predominantly around bureaucratic and market-based relations. In short, formally, SFI is organised as a franchising network, in which a franchisor (SFI) and a number of franchisees (Convivia and Presidia) make use of a form of sub-contracting to manage brand, know-how and joint assets through the predominant use of market-like and bureaucratic elements. As such, SFI makes use of organisations relations that typify those of the key players in the dominant agro-food regime and can thus be classified as isomorphic.

Urgenci

Urgenci is the International Network of Community Supported Agriculture. Since 2008, Urgenci has been coordinating dissemination and exchange programmes to

Table 2: *Review of Urgenci's formal organisational relations*

Main relation	Sub-relations	Examples of organisational relations: Urgenci
Bureaucratic-based relations	Definition of different bodies	The bureaucratic organisation functions across three levels: Global (e.g., General Assembly, the International Committee and the Executive Bureau), national networks, local partner organizations (LSPPCs).
	Procedures	Urgenci makes use of standardised procedures for membership (partnership), elections, and voting (including procedures around proxies).
	Membership	Urgenci is a membership-based network, with a distinction made between active and affiliate members. Memberships are framed as partnerships. Active membership is not held by individuals but by LSPPCs or networks of LSPPCs. Individuals can join as affiliate members.
	Statutes and bylaws	Bylaws which are publically available, as well as Statutes which have not been made publically available.
Market-based relations	Fees	Urgenci has four annual fee categories: CSA local groups, CSA Networks, other organisations (non CSA or CSA networks), and committed individuals.
	Penalties	Under the Statute, the International Committee reserves the right to remove or not renew membership.
	Marketing incentives	Limited to knowledge sharing about best practices (see below)
Community-based relations	Knowledge sharing	Urgenci's practices are heavily focused on knowledge sharing, connecting and advocacy.

Table 2. *Continued*

Main relation	Sub-relations	Examples of organisational relations: Urgenci
	Assemblies	The General Assemblies are held every two years and are open to all members. Partner organizations are given two votes (in principle, one producer, one consumer).
	Relations between the international network and members	Regional/Continental priorities and related regional action plans inform the priorities and direction of the regional groups within the global network.
	Values	Four key principles are partnership; local; solidarity; and, the producer/consumer tandem.
Democratic-based relations	Decision making	At the General Assemblies, decisions are taken by voting. For the International Committee, decisions are, when possible, taken by consensus. When consensus is not possible, the rule is for decisions to be taken of a majority vote. If the vote is evenly split, the President's vote is decisive.
	Elections	Elections are held every two years for the International committee.

support and connect small-scale CSAs (community supported agriculture initiatives). Urgenci was started as an attempt to internationalise the Japanese concept of Teikei (a system of CSA, where consumers purchase food directly from farmer) in the mid-1990s. Samuel Thirion, who created the first French CSA, decided to create an international network of CSAs, which became Urgenci. The main objective of the network is building 'a space for sharing, discussing and analysing the Community Supported Agriculture practices and strategies' (Urgenci 2016a). With a small staff, and a large network of volunteers, Urgenci works to bring together citizens, small farmers, consumers, activists and concerned political actors at the global level to advance an alternative economic approach called 'Local Solidarity-based Partnerships between Producers and Consumers' (LSPPC) (Urgenci 2016b). The advancement of LSPPC serves to clarify key values of the network while remaining open to diversity. Thus, while Urgenci targets CSAs, there is recognition that not all initiatives conform to a

single definition of CSA, even if they share similar practices and values. Urgenci has been much less studied than Slow Food even though there are an estimated 1.5 million people in its network that spans the globe (personal correspondence, April 2015). An overview of Urgenci's formal organisational elements is provided in Table 2.

Bureaucratic relations. The governing bodies of Urgenci are the General Assembly, the International Committee and the Executive Bureau. The International Committee is composed of eight elected members but the current International Committee has additionally appointed a president of honour and special envoys for advocacy, education and training, institutional relations, and liaising with La Via Campesina (Urgenci 2015). Members of the International Committee are elected for two years, until the next General Assembly. The role of the International Committee is to support the network in the period between international symposia by providing guidelines on key initiatives and overseeing the progress of the Network's actions. It is supported by a Consultative Committee to the Executive Board (Urgenci 2010, para. 3.2.b). Within Urgenci, political staff, including everyone involved in the govering bodies, work on a voluntary basis.

Urgenci is formally governed by a set of bylaws which are publically available, as well as Statutes which have not been made publically available. Within these, formal procedures are defined for membership, elections and voting (including procedures around proxies). There are also formal procedures of communication (Urgenci 2010, para. 4.4). Urgenci is a membership-based network; however, a distinction is made between active and affiliate members. The former represent 'either an LSPPC as individual entities, irrespective of whether or not they are legally constituted entities, their regional or national networks or federations; this is non-exclusive (an LSPPC can be a member and also represent the membership of a regional and/or national federation or network)' (Urgenci 2010). Thus active membership is not held by individuals but rather by LSPPCs or networks of LSPPCs.

Organisations that support LSPPCs are also entitled to become members but in total, the number of supporting organisations with active membership must remain less than 10 per cent of active members in the countries or States where LSPPCs are already well established (20 or more). Further, their total number at the international level should be less than 20 per cent of the total number of active members. Urgenci provides a political justification for this rule, notably that it helps to facilitate the development of LSPPCs in regions where they are less prominent by encouraging other organisations to join the network. Further, it ensures 'potential pioneers in these countries or areas' have voting rights in General Assemblies. However, the granting active membership to a supporting organisation remains the responsibility of the International Committee (Urgenci 2010, para. 2.1.a). Individuals can join as affiliate members which includes all citizens, academic researchers, organisations, experts or people interested or indirectly involved in the LSPPC movement, who support the objectives of the network. While clear bureaucratic relations are evident in the organisation of Urgenci, the network does not make use of strong hierarchical and bureaucratic practices, such as those identified in the organisational forms of SFI.

Market-like relations. Market-like relations are quite limited within Urgenci and across the member organisations. There are membership fees, which are recognised as important from a financial and a political perspective: 'large membership is a precondition for designing efficient advocacy actions' (Urgenci 2016a). Urgenci has four annual fee categories: CSA local groups, CSA Networks, other organisations (non CSA or CSA networks), and committed individuals.

There are few penalties apart from loss of membership. Under the Statute, the International Committee reserves the right to remove or not renew membership:

> should a member fail to satisfy the Network criteria, or have committed a serious error. In such cases the International Committee requests that the member provide a written explanation. This request should be made at least one month prior to the General Assembly, in order to allow the member sufficient time to respond before the General Assembly takes place... In any event of discovery of membership being based on deliberately false statements in the membership form, membership will immediately be terminated by the Urgenci permanent staff member (Urgenci 2010, para. 2.3).

There are no explicit market-like incentives in the organisation of the international network. However, national members have adopted more market-like practices. For example, the word AMAP, taken from the French association for the maintenance of peasant agriculture – *L'association pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne* (AMAP) – was registered in 2003 as a French brand at the French National Institute for Industrial Property. The use of the AMAP mark now requires commitment to the Charter of AMAP. The association of AMAP is not only a member of Urgenci, but both networks share founding members.

There are few formal processes in place related to financial support. There is the possibility to apply to the International Committee for financial aid to attend the General Assembly (Urgenci 2010, para. 3.1.b). Further, if funds are available, the bylaws state that Urgenci will be able to support some of its members or specific actions, with preference given to supporting members of the poorest countries and areas of the world where there are few if any LSPPC-type initiatives (Urgenci 2010, para. 6.3).

Community-based relations. Partnerships in Urgenci are said to be 'characterised by a mutual commitment to supply (by the peasants) and up-take (by the consumers) of the food produced during each season' (Urgenci 2016b). Within their partnership structure, there is commitment to diversity and context and the recognition that '[e]ach producer-consumer partnership is independent' (Urgenci 2016b). Urgenci aims 'to develop overall coherence at and between local, regional, national and global levels of projects to emphasise the relevant contribution of Community Supported Agriculture to a sustainable and inclusive world' (Urgenci 2016b). Towards this end, Regional/Continental priorities and related regional action plans were developed to inform the priorities and direction of the regional groups within the global network.

Urgenci's organisational relations are geared towards knowledge sharing, connecting and advocacy and are reinforced through the practices of the network. Urgenci coordinates farmer field visits and exchanges. At the level of the international

network recent focus has been on projects (e.g., an FAO-funded pilot project 'Towards a Mediterranean network of LSP' (Local and Solidarity-based Partnerships between Producers and Consumers).

Democratic relations. According to the rules of Urgenci, each LSPPC is represented by two people, ideally a consumer and a producer. Each LSPPC is thus entitled to cast two votes in the General Assembly. Voting is done either by secret ballot or by a show of raised hands (Urgenci 2010, para. 3.1.d). Elections for the International Committee members are held every two years. For the International Committee, decisions are, when possible, taken by consensus. When consensus is not possible, the rule is for decisions to be taken of a majority vote. If the vote is evenly split, the President's vote is decisive (Urgenci 2010, para. 3.2).

Based on the formal organisational relations, Urgenci can be classified as primarily communitarian in its formal organisational form. Sharing values and best practices are the two key organisational relations that define Urgenci and in turn, its organisational form seeks to enhance the functions and organisational relations of its members, supporting the interconnection of communities which remain locally and regionally situated. Members are free to follow their own needs and practices but also incentivised, via democratic and participatory decision-making, to cross-fertilise each other and to jointly manage know-how. Overall, Urgenci's organisational form differs, even challenges, organisational forms facilitated by the dominant agro-food regime, and it can thus be characterised as polymorphic.

Discussion: Theorising the relationships between organisational forms and socio-technical transition

The mapping and analysis of the formal organisational relations of Slow Food International and Urgenci uncovered two distinct organisational forms that have been characterised as isomorphic (marked predominantly by market-like and bureaucratic relations) and polymorphic (marked predominantly by community and democratic relations). Attention now turns to theorising the potential relationships between these organisational forms and societal transformation. To do this we draw on the multi-level perspective (MLP) of socio-technical transitions.

Socio-technical transition: AFNs as niches

Socio-technical transition refers to systemic changes that result in alterations in the overall configuration of, in this case, agri-food systems. Such transitions entail changes to 'technology, policy, markets, consumer practices, infrastructure, cultural meaning and scientific knowledge' that are reproduced, maintained and transformed by actors including, policy makers, industry and civil society (Geels 2011, p. 24). While the MLP was initially designed to inform analysis of the development and entrenchment of new technologies in society (Genus and Coles 2008), and to analyse historical processes of radical socio-technical change (Elzen et al. 2012, p. 3), it has also been applied to analyse the adoption and diffusion of alternative food and

agriculture practices (Wiskerke 2003; Wiskerke and Roep 2007; Brunori et al. 2011; Roep and Wiskerke 2004, 2012; Crivits and Paredis 2013; Lutz and Schachinger 2013). Following MLP, transitions can be observed across: the macro level of socio-technical landscapes; the meso level of sociotechnical regimes, that is 'strongly embedded and self-reinforcing systems' (Smith and Stirling 2010); and, the micro level of socio-technical niches (for a review see Geels et al. 2004; Geels, 2011). AFNs, and by extension, networks of AFNs, conform to the MLP definition of niches insofar as they are developed around alternative socio-technical and techno-economic paradigms of food provisioning (Brunori et al. 2011). Niches often represent loci of radical innovation, and are able to evolve in so-called 'incubation' spaces where novel practices can be shielded, nurtured and empowered (Smith and Raven 2012), in relation to the dynamics of the dominant regime (Lutz and Schachinger 2013).

There are several reasons to examine networks of AFNs as niches. First, when networks are examined in the AFN literature, it is most often as a holistic study of the network and not at an organisational level or as a comparative analysis (e.g., Leitch 2003; West and Domingos 2012). Second, a focus on the networks of AFNs addresses critiques of the 'bottom up' bias of MLP and that the framework often fails to look at other sites of transitional potential. Third, the influence of the organisational elements of networks of networks has been an understudied component within the AFN literature, especially with regards to how novel practices are coordinated as niches and how they target regime level, if at all. Fourth, the tensions faced by AFNs around scaling up versus keeping their 'original radicality' as they grow necessitates examining not only the relationships between AFNs as niches and the mainstream food system as regime (Brunori et al. 2011), but also implications of how the development of networks of AFNs are organised and the related implications for transitional potentials. Finally, it is acknowledged that AFNs face obstacles when engaging with the dominant agri-food regime insofar as there are structural barriers that prevent AFNs from 'becoming abundant enough to disseminate into or even displace the dominant food regime' (Lutz and Schachinger 2013). We have already argued, as a starting premise of this article, that one way AFNs address this is the through the development of broader networks – network of networks – so as to gather additional resources, stability, and opportunities for promoting regime-level change.

Isomorphic organisational forms and transitional pathways

AFNs with isomorphic organisational forms are organisationally coherent with the dominant regime. It is here theorised that the ideas and practices of networks AFNs that take on isomorphic organisational forms can be more easily 'absorbed' into the regime, without actively creating an alternative. From this, we theorise that isomorphic organisational forms can work to support counter-hegemonic practices that can unwittingly reinforce neoliberal hegemony: the so-called 'hegemony of hegemony' (Day 2005). This means that isomorphically organised networks of AFNs (like SFI) have the potential to facilitate practices that serve to reinforce the neoliberal logic of the current food system, either by infusing weakened community or democratic relations into existing hierarchical,

bureaucratic and market-based organisations of food provisioning (e.g., multinationals sourcing organic products or engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships with NGOs), or by incorporating bureaucratically-based, hierarchical and market based mechanisms in the democratic and community relations (e.g., farmers' markets using large retailers strategies to manage sourcing and/or customer relationships). As an example, Slow Food's Policy Strategy states that 'local economy and small scale are the most direct forms of participatory democracy; they fully entitle people to be part of a community and make it lively and prolific in a proactive manner' (Petrini et al. 2012, p. 20). Here the link between community relations, democratic relations and market-like relations are reinforced. While we agree engaging in the local economy and supporting small-scale can be a key means of social change, we also recognise the potential for such practices to call prey to the so-called 'local food trap' (Born and Purcell 2006). Further, from an organisational theory perspective, this statement suggests that those more able to participate in a small-scale and localised economy can gain more entitlements to being part of a community: said otherwise, more money means more citizenship rights. Correspondingly, we anticipate that their practices and strategies for change are more likely to support a shift in the boundaries and imagination of the regime, than to provoke transformation. For example, through their actions, communitarian or democratic elements might be taken up within the dominant organisational relations. Indeed, this can already be seen in the case of multinational food companies sourcing organic products or engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable productions. This could help explain why in Italy, where Slow Food has popular recognition, you also see international fast food chains adopting new recipes that promote the values of local foods and traditions. It could explain the popular success of Slow Food, and the ability of its president to gain access to spaces such as the G8, as he did in 2009. We can also see that Slow Food International has already established a strategy for engagement at the regime level. For example, they have developed a number of partnerships with actors operating in the retailing sector (e.g., Eataly).

Reflecting on the sustainability of the networks of AFNS, we theorise that because isomorphic networks have the tendency to reinforce the relations characterising the dominant regime, they will also engage with dynamics and conditions similar to those affecting the dominant organisations. In turn, we theorise that while isomorphic networks of AFNs exist predominantly in opposition to the dominant regime, they fall short of creating alternatives to the regime itself. Further, we wonder if the top-down nature of these networks makes them more vulnerable should the international network fails. We hypothesise that in such a case, the local and national associations would be unlikely to continue given that as a result of the organisational form, the sustainability of the grassroots depends on the success of the larger network of networks.

Polymorphic organisational forms and transitional pathways

Following the logic of the typology, the prevalence of community and democratic relations in polymorphic AFNs will likely advance transition pathways that tend towards

localised operations. Further, polymorphic AFNs are also likely to tend towards pooling resources (e.g., knowledge and best practices) at the extra-local level. We anticipate that the practices of polymorphic networks are likely to conflict with the logic of those facilitated by the dominant regime. As such, we theorise that polymorphic AFNs will struggle to get their practices recognised, and even legalised. This assumption is supported by research that has, for example, highlighted the challenges of securing scale-appropriate food regulation for non-industrial producers (DeLind and Howard 2008), a trend we note has also affected Slow Food's efforts. We theorise that polymorphically organised AFNs will not only struggle to find opportunities to anchor and scale-up, but given the focus on democratic practices, are also more likely to engage in reflexive discussions about the implications of scaling-up (i.e., weighing pros and cons). Following Elzen et al. (2012, p. 3) we understand anchoring as 'the process in which a novelty becomes newly connected, connected in a new way, or connected more firmly to a niche or a regime'. We also note that polymorphic networks of AFNs are rooted in, and sustained by, autonomous local and national networks. Thus, if the international network fails, the local and national networks will most likely continue, or at least their identity as organisations will not be challenged.

Polymorphic organisations reflect a non-hegemonic approach, or what Richard Day (2005, p. 9) calls 'non-universalising, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based on mutual aid and shared ethical commitments'. We thus anticipate that there is a potential for polymorphic networks of AFNs to advance alternative pathways for transition insofar as their practices are less likely to be taken up by the dominant regime, and thereby are less likely to be co-opted or conventionalised (Goodman et al. 2011). However, we also anticipate that these networks will struggle to anchor their practices at the level of the regime. Reflecting back on our case, we note that Urgenci maintains a lower profile than SFI and is more focused on promoting 'coordinated' local impacts, although research and advocacy are becoming organisational priorities. The range of activities promoted by Urgenci remains largely regional, with emerging examples of more international engagement, such as being a member of the International Planning Committee for food sovereignty (IPC) and participating in the UN's Committee on World Food Security (two fora wherein Slow Food is not currently active).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to advance a framework to categorise organisational forms of networks of AFNs and to then begin to theorise relationships between organisational forms and pathways to socio-technical transition. We recognise that this research is not without limitations. First, there are limitations associated with using the language and tools of the dominant system to assess the potential success of practices to change this system (i.e., dominant, agro-food, market-like). As such, we recognise that our typology in particular may be blind to certain dynamics (Gibson-Graham 2008). While radical change is needed to address the current trajectory of the dominant agro-food regime (IAASTD 2009), we also acknowledge that AFNs are not always as radical or alternative as they propose to be, or as they are positioned in the literature (Hinrichs 2003;

Goodman 2004; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; DeLind 2011; Tregear 2011) and that transition is a longer-term (two to three generation) process, and also not inherently radical. To address this, future work could reframe the analysis in the context of transformation theory (Avelino et al. 2014), or transformation pathways (Leach et al. 2012; Stirling 2014). Future research could also evaluate what happens when an isomorphic network of AFNs gains influence at the level of the regime, or manages to anchor its practices. Does this 'mainstream' acceptance create space for more polymorphic ideas to come into play? As noted above, as their popularity and influence increased, Slow Food International evolved from an eno-gastronomic association to an organisation increasingly addressing issues of rights and ecology. Another limitation of this research is how to attribute socio-technical transition to one network when these practices are not only shared across multiple networks, but also increasingly viewed as market opportunities, and thus subjected to corporate capture. Future research is needed into the ways in which polymorphic organisational relations are being taken up at the level of the regime. Finally, the claims we make herein are not generalisable. However, that is not the intention. They are presented to initiate interest and discussion on the role organisational elements of networks of AFNs for transition.

Accepting these limitations, our results suggest that the development of networks of AFNs does not ensure transitional potential, but the way this aggregation is organised is likely to influence it. Based on our organisational typology and case-study analysis we have advanced theoretical proposals for how organisational forms could impact the transformational pathways of networks of AFNs. More explicitly, when a network of AFNs mimics the dominant relations of the regime they may gain in terms of incrementally shifting the regime towards their goals, but are unlikely to support pathways that present alternatives to the dominant regime. On the other hand, networks of AFNs that are organised around polymorphic relations to the dominant regime struggle directly against the regime. If they persist and succeed, that is, if their practices manage to anchor at the level of the regime, the alternative practices they promote stand to have a more pronounced impact in terms of radical change.

Notes

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[1] For example, in 2016, individual membership prices included:
- USA 1-year individual memberships: Standard 60 USD; Limited resources 30 USD
- The Netherlands 1-year individual membership: 60 Euro
- Bangladesh and Vietnam 2-year basic membership: 10 Euro; 1-year individual membership 35 Euro (Slow Food International 2016b)

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