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Local food governance and territorial development: the case of Echt Texels Lamvless initiative

Gobernanza de comida local y desarrollo territorial: el caso de la iniciativa Echt Texels Lamvless

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Abstract

Nowadays, agriculture and food policies are trying to re-organise and re-shape production, processing, and consumption of food in Europe. These regulations answer to different models and come from different regulatory actors, such as the State or the European Commission. They promote specific institutional frameworks that may support the creation of nested markets controlled by local communities or commodity markets controlled by agro-food empires. Our paper demonstrates that nested markets are the right response for market failures. They successfully support local food governance and promote sustainable territorial development through the collective management of the common pool resource (CPRs).

Keywords: rural development; food governance; common property; actor-oriented approach; collective organization; economy; economic impact; global economy; communities

Resumen

En la actualidad, la agricultura y las políticas públicas alimentarias viven un proceso de re-organización y re-estructuración en términos de la producción, el procesamiento y el consumo en Europa. Los nuevos marcos legales son una respuesta a distintos modelos, y son consecuencia de la acción de diferentes actores, como los Estados o la Comisión Europea. Estos diferentes actores promueven nuevos y más específicos esquemas regulatorios que, por un lado, impulsan la creación de mercados anidados y gestionados por las comunidades locales o mercados de productos básicos controlados por los emporios agroalimentarios. Este trabajo demuestra que los mercados anidados son la respuesta correcta a las fallas del mercado en el sector. Dichos mercados impulsan un modelo local de gobernanza alimentaria y una versión sostenible de desarrollo territorial por medio de un manejo colectivo de los bienes comunes.

Palabras clave: desarrollo rural; gobernanza alimentaria; bienes comunes; enfoque orientado al actor; organización colectiva; economía; impacto económico; economía global; comunidades

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1. Introduction

This research aimed at studying practices of local food governance and their contribution to the sustainable development of the territory. As many scholars have discussed, rural development is a highly controversial and contested concept (Jingzhong, Jing and Huifang, 2010; Saquet y Alves, 2020; Tregear, Arfini, Belletti and Marescotti, 2007; Ploeg, Jingzhong and Schneider, 2012).

However, we defend an easy but complex idea of rural development as the development of the rural (Ploeg and Marsden, 2008). Thus, the problem goes back to the old question of «what is the rural?». There are many ways to approach this question, but not all of them provide a definition that will help us to accomplish the task of understanding the contribution of local food governance to the sustainable development of the territory. Hence, we define rural as «a place where the ongoing encounter, interaction, and mutual transformation [...] of man and the living nature is located» (Ploeg and Marsden, 2008, p. 2).

This definition of *rural* underlines two important elements: society and nature. These two elements and their interrelations are the key for the idea of sustainable development. Society and living nature interact in particular forms, and the contribution of local initiatives to these particular forms of interaction is the central question in our framework. Two concepts are important to analyse that contribution: co-production and co-evolution (Ploeg, 1997). Co-production concerns the ongoing interaction and mutual change of human and living nature (Ploeg, 2008). It is the process where «living nature is used, reproduced and transformed into a rich variety of often highly contrasting expressions» (Ploeg and Marsden, 2008). Existing practices of rural economy, like farming, forestry, agro-tourism, hunting, cheese making, etc., are expressions of co-production. In the same way, it is expected that the social and the living nature co-evolved in a specific, and often mutually reinforcing, way. However, some practices may change this co-evolution, and subdue living nature to society in such a way that the cycle of co-production is broken, and sustainability undermined. This has been the case of the agro-food empires raised in the last decades. They change pattern of co-production and co-evolution of nature and society, disconnecting agriculture and food from the living nature (Ploeg, 2003).

Therefore, sustainable rural development are those practices and dynamics that preserve and enhance co-production and co-evolution of man and living nature in a given place (Ploeg and Marsden, 2008). Furthermore, in the case of the local food governance, sustainable development would be those practices that enhance the creation of nested markets able to preserve and reproduce Common Pool Resources (CPRs) (Ventura and Ploeg, 2010).

The notions of nested market and CPRs are based in Polanyi's approach to economy as socially constructed realities embedded in specific sets of economic and no-economic institutions (1944). The concept of nested market links local food governance and territorial development (Shanin, 1973). They are defined as places where specific transactions take place between specific suppliers and specific consumers who are linked through specific networks (Polman et al., 2010). However, the way this transaction is coordinated is a key issue since its affect the CPRs and actors engaged in the market. There are four types of coordination according to the Convention Theory (Vihinen and Kröger, 2008): market coordination, industrial coordination, domestic coordination and civic coordination. The market coordination seeks to enhance the profits and reduce misinformation among the actors engaged, but it takes any other element of the system as externals to the problem. The industrial coordination focuses on the specific qualities and characteristics of the production change, but it lacks interest on non-quantifiable elements. Thus, we understand the last two types as the most suitable for promotion territorial development through local food governance.

The paper is structured in three sections including the conclusion. The next section describes the methodology designed and implemented, it follows the actor-oriented approach, and thus uses as main method the ethnography. The following section focusses on the key actor of this governance model: The Waddengroup Foundation, the observational unit and the CPR. The last

section analyses the case of Echt Texels Lamvless (Lamb Meat Really from Texel) as an example of nested market, which enhance food governance and create cohesion for further territorial development reproducing the CPR. The article closes with the conclusions, where we underline the importance of this case as a potential reference for future initiatives of rural development that seeks to coordinate and increase synergies among social and nature dimensions.

2. Methods, techniques and instruments

The Actor Oriented Approach as guidance for design and implementation of our methodology

Nested markets are, at an analytical level, institutional agreements. It means that they are new rules of the game between the different actors involved in producing, processing, and consuming the products. The process of setting these rules is an exercise of re-thinking and re-designing the reality where the product is embedded. We approach them as instrument of territorial development because they allow actors (1) to market their products with a better position in the globalized economy, (2) to re-define farming and processing practices within the supply chain and reduce transaction cost, and (3) to preserve and reproduce their CPRs. These assumptions were key for the design and implementation of the methodology.

Our research followed the Actor-Oriented Approach (AOA) (Long, 2001; Long and Ploeg, 1989) to study these processes and understand their complexity from an internal point of view. We needed to understand the practices and sense given to them by the people involved in the project, and at the same time, how they agencies engaged developing new networks (Ploeg, 2003). This tradition, also known as the Wageningen School, position itself on the sociological debate about the structure and the individual. The AOA understands that structural forces are not autonomous or immaterial entities, but realities that materialize in the modes of life of the individuals and social groups (Long, 2007). At the same time, it uses the concept of social actor to understand human beings as able to unfold social actions based on symbolic understandings of reality mediated by the exercise of power by other actors and social groups. Another key concept of this tradition is agency, understood as the capacity to anticipate interactions and potential synergies among several projects (Van der Ploeg and Long 1994). The third key concept used to design our methodology was interface, as Long underlined (2001):

> Interface studies, then, are essentially concerned with the analysis of discontinuities in social life. As I mentioned above, such discontinuities are characterised by discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power. Interfaces typically occur therefore at points where different, and often conflicting, lifeworlds or social fields intersect (p.177).

These three concepts require a specific method to work, the ethnography (Long, 2007). Ethnography is a naturalistic and inductive method, it is common in social and cultural anthropology, but it has surpassed its disciplinary borders (Ingold, 2017). The AOA mainly uses two if the key instruments of ethnography: interviews and participant observation (Guber, 2011); and it adds a third one: group discussion. These three technics allow as to collect empirical data during field work, as we will explain on the next subsection, and later, we analyzed it with the conceptual framework described.

The methodological praxis

Our research was divided into three different phases: a) documents and literature review; b) fieldwork, and c) data analysis. The first phase allowed us to define the analytical and observational units. The delimitation and enunciation of the problem unfolded the main objective, and the review of several case studies helped to find our observational unit: the island of Texel located in the Netherlands, and the Waddengroup as a key actor of the local food governance.

We contacted the Waddengroup on several occasions and made two previous visits to the organization and to the territory. These visits and the literature review identified two different groups of key actors: those involved in the supply chain (producers, processors, and consumers), and the supportive actors (organizations that mediate, support, or promote the project). Once they granted us permission for our research and agreed on the procedure and terms, we started the second phase: fieldwork.

Fieldwork was divided in two phases: six months on Texel, and three months at the Waddengroup Foundation in Buitenpost (Frisia, The Neterlands). The sequence of these fieldworks followed the logic of the AOA and allowed us to observe the system working in Texel, and later, how the designer works and builds their initiatives. On Texel a set of semi-structured interviews was carried among social actor using a snowball strategy with two starting lines: the farmers and the Waddengroup Foundation. The information obtained was continuously reviewed using external resources, such as newspapers, official documents, and other interviews. At the same time, we used participant observation on meetings, daily events, and special celebrations. This technique gave us a good understanding of economic logic and cultural patterns underlining and giving sense to their social interactions. Group discussions complemented the phase of data collection, and helped us to observe the interfaces, their conflicts, and their agreements.

At the end of this phase, we had 35 interviews, five group discussions and an extensive field diary with the observations obtain during our daily participation living in Texel and Buitenpost

3. Results

The Waddengroup Foundation

In this part of the paper, we introduce a brief description of the Waddengroup Foundation. Although they are not involved in the supply chain per se, they are the key factor in our case study. They mediated among the different parts of the supply chain to make the new agreements, which are the infrastructure of the nested market that support the premium price and reproduce the CPRs.

The Waddengroup Foundation was created by two organisations in 1996: Sint Donatus Foundation, an organic dairy farm founded in 1976 in Texel; and Stichting Wraldfrucht, a Frisian organisation for the promotion of organic growing, processing, and marketing of fruit crops. The sustainable economic development of the Waddenregion[1] is the main objective of the foundation according to their statutes; and they achieve it by stimulating an environmentally friendly agriculture, the processing of raw materials produced by the primary agricultural sector, and the promotion and sales of local products and services that accomplish two requirements:

[1] The Waddenregion is a heuristic territorial reference used by the organization. It is assumed that includes the Wadden Islands from The Netherlands to Denmark, the Wadden Sea, and 25 km of the mainland from the coastline.

1) They must be produced in the Waddenregion.
2) They have to be produced in a sustainable way, which must be certified by an independent certifier.

The internal structure of the Waddengroup Foundation includes a Supervisory Board, an Executive Board, and a group of technicians contracted by the former. The members of the Supervisory Board are local people with good reputation and knowledge of the area, and they offer insight and advice to the Executive Board. The members of the Supervisory Board are volunteers and must ensure that the Executive Board follows the guidelines of the foundation. The Executive Board is responsible for the implementation of the strategies agreed within the foundation, the promotion of the foundation, and the financial support. They can be dismissed by the Supervisory Board, but only as a group, not individually. They contract the technicians that complement the team. The Waddengroup Foundation is certified by the Stichting Streekeigen Producten Nederland (SPN) as certifier entity for regional products. In 2003 they created the label Waddengoud (Wadden Gold) and they use it to certify those products and services that follow the philosophy of the foundation.

The foundation works with local, regional, and national governments to unfold sustainable development in the Waddenregion, and they apply for subsidies to the European Union to support the projects that they design and agree with local actors.

The island and the lamb, the CPRs of the project

The island of Texel and the Texel sheep constitute the CPRs of this nested market. Texel is one of the Wadden Islands located on the northwest of the Wadden Sea in the Netherlands, and it belongs to the province of North Holland (figure 1). The island is approximately 25 km in length and 9 km in width; and there are 13,600 inhabitants living in seven villages. The town-hall is situated in Den Burg, the biggest village with almost 7000 inhabitants.

Figura 1. *Ubicación de la Isla de Texel en los Países Bajos.*
Figure 1. *Location of Texel Island in The Netherlands.*



Fuente: Realización propia.
Source: Own design.

The landscape of the island is the outcome of co-evolution between the farmers and the clay soil that characterise the island. At the west coast of the island, we can find dunes, which were developed in the 17th century by the inhabitants. The dunes are a natural protection against the sea and created possibilities for the gaining of new land. There are two polders in the northern part, which used to be small islands, but they were connected to the main island by building dikes around them. Texel thus has a wide variety of soil types, resulting in great mix of landscapes, dunes, beaches, forest, meadows, and fields, with many possibilities for tourism and agriculture (figure 2).

Figura 2. *Diversidad paisajística de Texel.*
Figure 2. *Landscape diversity in Texel.*



Fuente: Propia, del trabajo de campo
Source: Own, from fieldwork.

Many tourists from the Netherlands and Germany visit the island every year. 4 million overnight stays can be counted every year. Approximately 1 million people visit the island (including one day visits). Tourism accounts for 2000 jobs according to the local administration. They are divided in different places, such as camp sites, hotels, and restaurants. Thus, tourism is the most important sector for generating jobs (seasonal as well) and profit for the island, and agriculture is the second. Livestock farming consists of (dairy) cattle, horses, goats, but mainly sheep. On Texel there are more sheep than people: around 30.000. This number of sheep and farmers have a clear influence on the aesthetic and landscape of the island. It is quiet usual to see all kind of agricultural infrastructure when tourist walk the island (figure 3)

Figura 3. *Paisaje agrícola de Texel.*
Figure 3. *Agricultural landscape in Texel.*



Fuente: Propia, del trabajo de campo
Source: Own, from fieldwork

The Texel sheep is a famous breed. It is known for its high-quality meat (figure 4). The breed is the outcome of a cross between a Dutch breed called Pijlstaarten and different British breeds. The loss of importance of wool due to synthetic textile industry reinforces the meat orientation of this breed during the last 20 years. Although this breed is worldwide available, the sheep born in the island have a distinctive flavour and texture. It is said that when the lamb is born and raised on Texel, local people describe it as pré salé, a French notion, meaning pre salted. This is a highly contested notion; however, some cooks say that it is impossible for meat to be pre salted, but people from the island disagree. Eating grass from the salty soil in combination with other traced elements may make changes in the structure and flavour of the meat. It may be paradoxical, but lamb is not very important in the local cuisine. Indeed, the tourist and the mainland are the consumers of this delicatessen.

Figura 4. *Ovejas de raza texel.*
Figure 4. *Texel lamb breed.*



Fuente: Dominio público, obtenidas de https://pixabay.com.
Source: Public domain, retrieved from https://pixabay.com.

Analysis of the Echt Texel Lamvlees initiative

In the 1979 Sint Donatus and other local actors created the Verening van Ecthe Texelse Producten (Association for real Texel products, VETP in English), the objective of the project was to differentiate the products that were really from the island from the rest. Tourism was already important in those years, but the main profit was usually going with the boat instead of remaining in the island. This initiative proves the local awareness about the loose of potential added value for the local economy has a long trajectory, so does the attempts for internal organisation of the local market. Nowadays, the VETP accounts for 45 local products and services certified, although they have not been certified by the SPN yet.

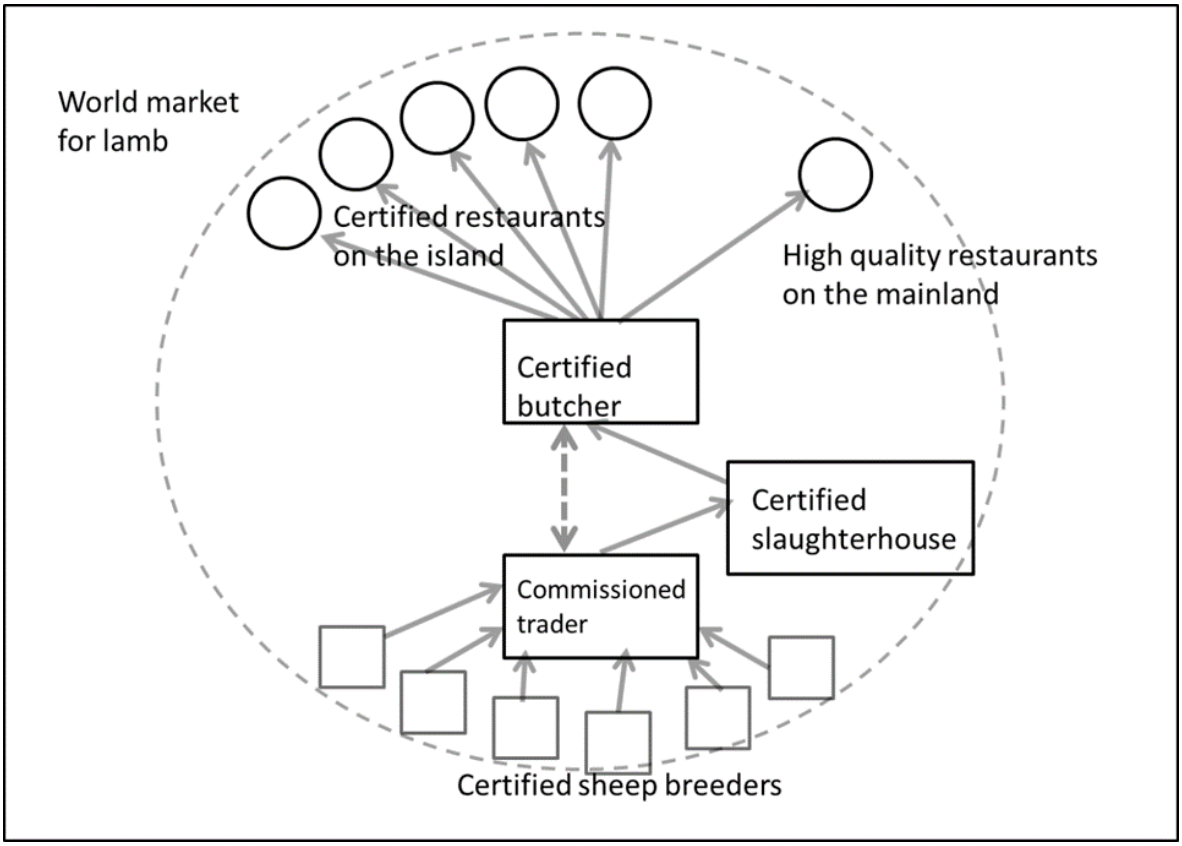
The Echt Texels Lamvless was institutionalised in the first years of this decade, but at the end of the 90s there was already an informal supply chain in the island for this product. However, not much added value was created within. At the beginning of 2000 the VETP ask Marc van Rijselberghe (from the Waddengroup Foundation) for help to formalise this supply chain and create added value for the actors involved.

The Waddengroup Foundation worked simultaneously with two lines, they apply for subsidies to the Local Action Group, and start to meet with each group of the supply chain to unfold the rules and agreements that will guide each step. 12 farmers join the first round of meetings and design the rules that will have to be followed to join the initiative. Later they were passed to the slaughterhouse, the butchers, and some restaurant. They were allowed to ask for

changes and discuss them once again. Both lines of work produced the right outcome, and eventually, they manage to obtain financial support and defined a code of practice that satisfied everyone. This process took two years, and the transaction costs were assumed by the Waddengroup Foundation. Several organizations and associations were contacted at the local, regional, and national level for support and advice. Although most of them could not do much for the project, they became an informal network for further collaboration and co-operation.

Nowadays, the project includes 29 farms, one slaughterhouse, one trader, two butchers, 6 butcher shops and 36 restaurants (figure 5). Every year more than 3000 lambs pass through the supply chain, and the added value in comparison with the local lambs that are not included in this chain is more than 15 % in each stage. It is also importance to underline that the fluctuation of the price is lower than the conventional price. The stability of the supply chain is related to its shortness and to the weekly routine of the exchanges. This last part is a key factor for the management of the CPRs, every Monday and Wednesday the trader visits the farms to collect the lamb that the restaurants and shops need. The following morning, they are taken to the slaughterhouse and them to the local butcher. Although the cost of slaughtering in the island is higher than in the mainland, it is compensated by the cost reduction in transportation and transaction cost.

Figura 5. *Infraestructura socio-material del mercado anidado.*
Figure 5. *The socio-material infrastructure of the nested market.*



Fuente: Realización propia.
Source: Own elaboration.

This supply chain is more efficient than conventional supply chains, and the quality of the meat is much higher because in the initiative supply chain, the lambs are selected by the trader among the herd available in the farms every week (figure 6). The trader selects the lambs that are at the optimal level of growth to assure the level of quality required within the system. From the point of view of the Convention Theory (Vihinen and Kröger, 2008), we can see a mixed coordination of civic coordination since the actions of the supply chain answer to a predefined institutional framework know by all and whose objective is the guarantee of the survival and reproduction of the CPR.

Figura 6. *Seleccionando las ovejas adecuadas.*
Figure 6. *Selecting the right lamb.*



Fuente: Propia, del trabajo de campo.
Source: Own, from fieldwork.

The openness of this system, as we represent on the previous figure, is a key element of its success. As Sonnino and Marsden demonstrated (2006), alternative and conventional food supply are in continuous competition. We asked to one of the farmers about this situation in one of the interviews, and he explained how he works and the reason for doing so:

> We have been shepherds for generations. I remember the times when working with sheep was synonyms of poverty, the poorest of the boeren (peasants). They use to come once a year to buy all the sheep and transport it to the mainland, it was hard, because price were low and the flock suffered a lot. Nowadays we have two different buyers for our lamb. We could sell to the best buyer, buy it is important to remember and to be gratefull. Everyone needs lamb and we can refuse to sell, I know him and I new his father, the new buyer pays well, but it is better to work with both of them.

In this explanation we can see how alternative and conventional food supply chains overlap on the farms. The same happens on the consumption chain of the supply, we saw lamb in the local butcher from both chains, and restaurant with both options in their menu. In some way, we can see a highly efficient system of production, where each level of quality finds a place in the market. According to one of the Waddengroup Foundation workers, there is a line of contracts that holds the system but leaver it open for each actor to make business elsewhere:

> There is a contract between the Waddengroup and the restaurants and butchers. [⋯] The farmers, in turn, have a contract with the butchers and the Waddengroup. But there isn't any contract between the farmers and the restaurants. Also, they can sell outside if they please, that's not a problem for any of us.

However, it is important to underline that the lambs included in the initiative are slaughtered in the last artisan slaughterhouse of the island, Boschma Slachtbedrijf, located in Oudeschild, on the east side of the island. The conventional chain exports the local lamb to the mainland, where it is slaughtered without breed recognition. Thus, the impact goes further than the economic benefit for the farmers, it also reduces food miles and improve social recognition of the breed.

The institutionalization of the system took place in a few years, and positive outcomes started to rise within the nested market. The added value is one of them, and soon or later it becomes a temptation for other local actors. They may try to get advance of the reputation that the CPRs achieved, and that is when labels and certifications become necessaries. There is lack of strong regulations against this kind of *fake* replications in the Netherlands, which makes necessary that the actors involved in the project make visible the boundaries of the nested market by themselves. The Waddengroup Foundation plays a very important role in this task. Each actor of the supply chain is certified by the Waddengroup Foundation as part of the Echt Texels Lamvlees, and devices such as flags, plates or diplomas identify them as part of the project (figure 7).

Figura 7. *Placas de la iniciativa colocadas en restaurantes de la isla de Texel.*
Figure 7. *Plates from the initiative located at the local restaurants in Texel.*

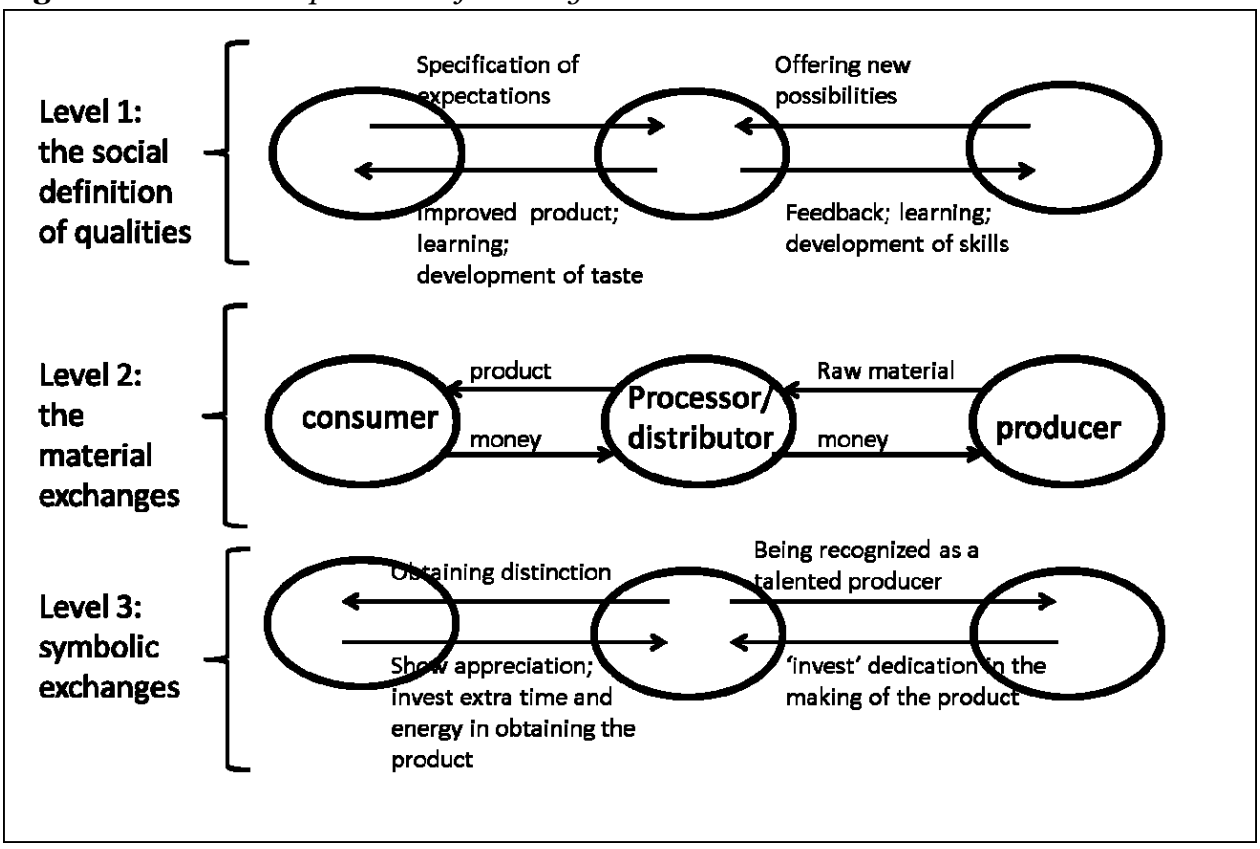


Fuente: Propia, del trabajo de campo.
Source: Own, from fieldwork.

The devices are located along the supply chain, and the WF gives the recognition in a public act, where local journal and other participants of the initiative are invited. In this way, the nested market became visible for consumers and easy to identify local partners.

We found that the supply chain goes further than the material exchange of goods; there is a triple complex process of exchange (figure 8). One level of exchange is the material one, where resources as meat and money move from one side to the other between the three stages. Then, overlaying this one we find an exchange of meanings over quality, where definitions and expectations move as information between the different actors. The last level of exchange is symbolic, and it is the source of added value for this case. Texel is a tourist area, a place where people travel to enjoy and have fun with the family. Therefore, all these memories and experiences are consumed together with the material reality of the lamb. The existence of these three levels differentiates nested market from commodity markets and gives them qualities that the other ones cannot achieve. For example, the exchange of meanings for quality increases the adaptability of the system and facilitates the re-definition of practices according to expectations. The information moves fast within the supply chain, and the regulatory actor (WF) is in continuous contact with each part of the chain in case that anyone has a problem.

Figura 8. *Procesos de intercambio multinivel.*
Figure 8. *Multi-tiered processes of exchange.*



Fuente: Elaboración propia.
Source: Own design.

4. Discussion

The Echt Texel Lamvless initiative re-organise and re-shape the way food is produced, processed, and consumed in Texel. It also re-embeded these processes within society and nature through the re-negotiation of practices and meanings.

It is necessary to design new policies able to support initiatives that try to re-embed commoditized markets within localised nested markets. At the same time, the overlaying of conventional and nested markets is another issue that need to be study to understand how local actors use them to market their products.

CPRs and nested markets help to understand how private partners can reproduce collective goods, such as landscapes or animal breeds. We need to focus on governance practices to unfold a better theory about the adequate way to maintain both.

Self-regulation can be successful for local food governance, but no kind of coordination. It is important to promote civic and domestic modes of coordination because embedded markets can unfold from them.

5. Conclusions

In summary, there are very important issues within local food governance, and many dichotomies to overcome. We found that local actors are re-embedding food within specific social and natural realities as a strategy for territorial development in Texel and other parts of Europe. We see how these practices are supporting the reproduction of CPRs without generating dependency on government subsidies. Indeed, they can generate autonomy from food empires for farmers and other rural actors. However, it must be said that this strategy may not be suitable for every rural area within Europe. The same situation must be observed for any reader from Mexico o Latin-American the cultural patterns, institutional and economical context influence these strategies, however, local actor anywhere and anytime can unfold similar processes if their agencies engage in common objectives where different views may have place.

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7. Contribución de los autores en el desarrollo del trabajo

Ignacio López Moreno: diseño, levantamiento, análisis y redacción. Carlos Chávez Becker: propuesta teórica y análisis del caso.

8. Conflicto de interés

El autor declara que no existe conflicto de interés.

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