Ways of Knowing Food: Perceptions, Participation, and Process

Oslo Kooperativet
Norway

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Abstract

Alternative food networks (AFNs), in their myriad forms, have the potential to challenge the destructive tendencies of the globalized food system, affecting how food is produced, distributed and consumed and the logics these processes are based on. The form AFNs take and goals they seek to achieve are shaped by the context in which they are developed, not the least by the people who participate in them. The following thesis explores an AFN; a member-owned and operated food cooperative (Oslo Kooperativet) in Oslo, Norway. It looks at the principles that guide its overall trajectory, the processes that enable its operation, and the reciprocal relationship between the members’ perceptions and the form and function of the organization. I analyze the Cooperative’s principles and processes using “orders of worth” as developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (1999). I then explore the members’ perceptions, of both the organization and the goods it provides, using the same framework. In so doing, I find that there is variation in the extent to which certain “orders of worth” are important among members. Those who are most involved in the Cooperative seem to have internalized and operationalized the values embedded in the principles of the organization. Ongoing participation in the processes of the Cooperative embeds new logics, based on consideration for the environment and others, more deeply into day-to-day practices. This has an impact on the way members’ perceive food and themselves within the food system. While participation in the organization shapes member perceptions of food, members’ perceptions and expectations shape the form and function of the organization. I explore this reciprocal relationship. The thesis is interdisciplinary in nature as it draws theoretically from sociology and economic theory while being methodologically based in social anthropology.
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These reusable member bags are packed with produce from local farmers and waiting to be picked up by members. In many ways, the bag and its contents symbolize the time, energy, and care that producers and members put into making the organization a success. Photo credit: Martin Haagensen
1 Introduction

1.1 Topic

Global food systems have made goods that were once impossible to attain, attainable. However, this attainability comes with environmental and social costs. Increasing awareness about some of the negative impacts of both industrialized agriculture and the opacity of expanding food supply chains has led many to consider alternatives. The innate complexity of a globalized food system brings with it a lack of transparency. It is difficult, to nearly impossible, to know where food has come from, how it was grown, whether it is “safe” (Berg et al. 2005, Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000) and/or “just”. The necessarily complex networks that enable the global food system are intertwined with the abuse of resources, ecosystems, and people. Actors at the global, national, and local level are trying to find ways to address these inequities and destructive tendencies. Some argue that more responsibility is being placed on the shoulders of individuals to consider their consumption practices (Spaargaren 2011) and to “do their part” (Evans 2011, 109) as “ecological citizens” (Seyfang 2006) and get involved in more collective action, such as “food democracy” (Hassanein 2003). There is growing concern about injustices the food system may conceal (Nugård and Storstad 1998, Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal 2013). Whether for personal concern (health, safety) or concern for the common good (environment, society), there are several entry points from which individuals may find local, organic, and/or smaller food networks appealing. It is suggested that smaller food initiatives bolster the local economy, build community and organic farms encourage conscious production methods while contributing to the cultural and ecological value of the landscape (Clemetsen and van Laar 2000). People have been and are engaging with food in alternative ways. There is a growing body of research discussing the transformative potential of alternatives and the role of individuals in collective action. Though action from all levels and all actors will be necessary to confront the destructive aspects of the dominant food system, this thesis explores the local level. I explore how and why people participate in an alternative food network (AFN) and to what degree participation in collective action shapes participant perceptions of food and
the reciprocal effect this has on the network. Why and how people attempt to “do their part” provides insight into the transformative potential of AFNs and alternative food.

1.1.1 Alternative Food Networks

Many food initiatives have been lumped under the general term “alternative food networks” (AFNs) (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014) even though they vary in size, structure, operations, values and work to achieve different goals by different measures (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014, Forssell and Lankoski 2015, 66, Kloppenburg et al. 2000, Parkins and Craig 2009, Qazi and Selfa 2005). Though many of the initiatives seem to share a “common critique of conventional models of production and consumption – claiming that they are neither sustainable, fair, healthy nor tasty” (Terragni, Torjusen, and Vittersø 2009, 2), the way in which this shared critique is manifested is informed by the time and space in which networks are developed. There are not models of production, provision and consumption that are purely conventional or purely alternative. Both conceptualizations are dynamic, complex and relational. Often conventional and alternative systems have overlapping qualities. Some AFNs replicate aspects of industrial food systems in ways that encourage excessive resource use, use profit to guide organizational/corporate growth, or reinforce structures of concentrated power in the hands of a few actors along the supply chain. Because both conventional and alternative systems operate alongside one another through cooperation, opposition and everything in between, they shape one another. It is not within the scope of this thesis to compare one conceptualization against the other. I mention these oversimplified categorizations to demonstrate the pertinence of researching AFNs in order to better understand how “alterity”\(^1\) is manifested in food networks and to what degree alternative networks challenge the destructive aspects of the existing food systems. By exploring the priorities and operations of alternative food networks, based on contextually situated data, one can more accurately discuss how these alternatives attempt to embed sustainability and justice into food and food

\(^1\)Alterity comes from the development of new ways of doing things that coexist with the powerful hegemonic capitalist system - often depending on capitalistic markets for their material and social reproduction - but these new approaches can have different operational logics and value systems that attempt to change the powerful system from within. (Goodman, Dupuis, Goodman 2012, 9).
practices. This thesis explores the reciprocal relationship between an alternative food network, its participants, and to what degree each shapes the other.

I chose to use the both vague and loaded term “alternative food network” throughout my paper because it is accurately descriptive. I researched a collaborative organization that connects people and food in an alternative way. Alternative, in this context, refers to the incorporation of civic and ecological criteria into the organization’s operations and the goods that this network provides. My case study focuses on Oslo Kooperativet (the Cooperative), a member-owned and operated food cooperative in Oslo, Norway that works to connect urbanites to local farmers via food. The operations, processes and purpose of the Cooperative redefine relations between producers, consumers, and the community and encourage new ways of relating to food. I suggest that it is the way the organization is operated and organized and how it connects people to food and one another that enables the Cooperative to potentially transform destructive tendencies in food systems.

1.1.2 Oslo Kooperativet as a Case Study

My research began with a keen interest in local food initiatives and it is this interest that drew me to the food cooperative in Oslo, Norway. I joined Oslo Kooperativet (the Cooperative) in 2016 and as an active member, I enjoy access to fresh vegetables, dairy, and meat supplied by local organic and biodynamic farmers. As a member, consumer, and researcher, I wanted to know more about the work behind the fresh food I received bi-monthly. To do this I began to participate more often in the Cooperative and spoke with members more pointedly about their involvement and satisfaction with the organization. Over a period of eight months, I interviewed sixteen people, all of whom are involved or have been involved in some capacity with the Cooperative. Additionally, I joined one of the five working groups (the Logistics group) to increase my interaction with members and familiarize myself with the operations of the organization.

I knew that the Cooperative was relatively young (founded in 2013) and wildly popular, with waiting lists upwards of 300 people. Acting as an intermediary, the Cooperative connects local farmers’ produce to people in the city who want
organic, local produce. The concept itself seems simple and straightforward. What I have learned is that it takes a great deal of work to make this possible.

In the beginning, the founders established relationships with farmers, assured them that there was consumer demand and then developed a platform that enabled urbanites access to local farmers’ goods. The organization is built upon these relationships which require constant communication, juggling of interests, and a lot of time. As a novel idea, based on principles that appealed to consumers seeking new ways of accessing food that did not rely upon chain supermarkets or industrial production methods of food, and with little other option in Oslo at the time, the organization grew rapidly. Its initial popularity shocked the founders who could barely balance the growing demand with the time it took to organize procurement of the local produce. By the time I joined, the membership-rush had subsided and the Cooperative had entered a reflective phase, evaluating what its role was and could be in the local food system.

To better understand how the Cooperative attempts to appeal to new members of the Cooperative, I examined its website. It is easy to find the principles the organization was founded upon, the various ways one can be involved, the specific farm-produced goods that are available, and many colorful and inviting photographs of food, smiling people, working farmers and wandering farm animals in bucolic settings. Short descriptions of the farms are available so members can read about the production methods and the farmers behind their food. Members can order food bags online, access recipes to maximize the use of the goods they receive, or scroll through the archive to read articles about the Cooperative in the media. The Cooperative also manages a blog that shares stories about the activities the Cooperative has organized and updates within the organization. Overall, the inviting website imbues a sense of community. Structurally, the organization is a community that relies upon member participation to operate. As a member-owned and operated cooperative, the members themselves constitute the organization and carry out the operations. This form of organizational governance encourages not only a sense of community but also provides a somewhat built-in lens of reflexivity (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014, 7). Participation of members in the organization and the necessary communications between actors reinforces a
continuing process of reflection about how and why the Cooperative operates the way that it does. This continuing reflection among and between actors informs processes of the organization that enables the Cooperative to remain in-tune with the interest of both the members and the producers involved in the network. This is not an easy or efficient way of operating, but it is an inclusive way of establishing relations between actors that enables the organization to remain relevant to and cognizant of those in the network.

The principles of the Cooperative laid the groundwork for the organization’s ‘alterity’ as it was originally founded to address some of the injustices (low pay to farmers, degradation to the environment) present in longer and larger supply chains. In addition, its governance model – as a member organization – and the form this model takes as member participation shapes processes, reinforce the Cooperative’s “alterity”. Processes are based on constant communication between actors and the ongoing interaction between actors and their conscious consideration of one another reinforces a lens of reflexivity in which the Cooperative evaluates how and why they are doing things the way they are. During my research, it became apparent that members have varying perceptions of the organization and its goods and this influences the nature and level of participant involvement. Reciprocally, participation in the Cooperative influences member perceptions of food and community. To better understand how perceptions and participation reinforce one another, or not, I set out to explore this reciprocal relationship.
Here is a photo montage that was in the 2016 Årsmelding (Kooperativet 2016). This collection of photos is one example of how the Kooperativet endeavors to communicate the organization’s principles in action. From the top-left down to the photo of the black and white calf are photos taken by Emma Gerritsen at Bergsmyrene gård from the Cooperative’s summer party. The remainder of photos were taken at Ommang Søndre by Thomas Anker Hodnebrog-Vibe.
Figure 3: Farmer profiles on the website

Many of the farmers have a small biography and profile picture on the organization’s website. 25.09.2017. http://kooperativet.no/gardene/

Figure 4: Farmer profile photos

A sample of the farmer profile pictures from the organization’s webpage. From top left – Ommang Søndre, Virgenes Gard, Heinrich Jung, and Jonsi Gard.  
http://kooperativet.no/gardene/
Figure 5: Recipes

Screenshots of the ‘recipes’ page on Kooperativet.no. By posting recipes, the organization hopes to provide some guidance about how members can use the goods they receive.  
1.1.3 Finding Theory

When I began my research, I had not decided on a theoretical framework that would organize the data I would collect. In fact, I finished, transcribed and even coded my interviews before I had found a theory that helped me to examine my data. Through extensive reading of research related to alternative food networks and agro-food systems, I found convention theory (CT) to be the most useful in describing and understanding my data. There is a growing body of agro-food network literature “that explicitly engages with convention theory either in terms of theoretical debate or review, or as applied empirically to understand specific sectors, regions, and case studies” (for a review of the literature see Ponte 2016, 16). In many cases the theory has been applied to “the ‘quality turn’ in agro-food studies, and more specifically in debates on the emergence of so-called ‘alternative agro-food networks’” (17). Its application and prevalence in related research provided insight into how the theoretical framework has been applied and in what ways my research could join ongoing discussions regarding my topic.

During my participant observation and my interviews, I found that the people I spoke with spent a fair amount of time discussing the aspects that they liked or did not like about the Cooperative and the goods it provides. The aspects that were mentioned and the ways in which they were described and evaluated seemed innumerable. What was perceived as good or positive to some was never mentioned by others. Inconveniences to some people, were creative challenges or learning opportunities for others. This made it difficult to organize my information. However, convention theory explains that “quality” is not an attribute of a product or an organization but a characterization that is evaluated in different ways based on varying criteria in a given situation (Boltanski and Thévenot 2000, 1999). “Quality” is not an innate trait of something, but is observed and defined differently and is therefore open to contestation. Importantly, convention theory escapes “having to choose between a formal universalism and…unlimited pluralism” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 365) by providing “orders of worth”, or constructed groupings of “forms of valuation that refer to particular views of the common good” with “different principles of qualification” (Ponte 2016, 13). Boltanski and Thévenot (1999) constructed six ‘orders’ based on influential political philosophy works that they argue clarify “the grounds of reasoning, which are most of the time
encapsulated in an implicit form in the arguments exchanged during the course of action” (366). In other words, the political philosophies they used to construct the ‘orders’ - and group the conventions the ‘orders’ are substantiated by - have become embedded in society and remain relevant today. This does not mean that the ‘orders’ are static. They are based on social conventions that are, by nature, socially constructed and therefore reinforced and/or transformed in day-to-day interactions and liable to change. From this theoretical perspective, individuals are agentive and use specific criteria to inform their decisions, but the criteria they use to determine the best course of action depends on the situation. Individuals do not inhabit one ‘order’ but instead move through all of them depending on different situations (367). That is to say that the same individual may offer a justification based on one ‘order’ in one situation and then call upon a different ‘order’ to justify action in another situation.

In relation to my research, it was interesting to see how the different ‘orders’, based on my interpretations, corresponded to members’ evaluations of different aspects of the Cooperative and the goods it provides. Every interview contained explanations about what people did and did not like about the Cooperative; what aspects they found most important and what aspects they felt were less important. Of course, this relates to the questions I asked and the ways in which I asked them but the interesting part was the criteria people used to discuss pros and cons. This theoretical framework has enabled me to look at my data in relation to the different ‘orders’ or “grounds of reasoning” members used as they explained their involvement in the Cooperative. By categorizing my interviewees’ explanations based on “orders of worth” I was able to find patterns within and among member groups in the use of “orders of worth”. The variation in the extent to which different ‘orders’ were important to different members generally correlated with the nature and level of member involvement. This prompted me to group the members I spoke with based on their participation within the organization which then enabled me to explore other patterns within and variations among the member groups.

This process was not easy. First, there are problems with applying a somewhat rigid framework to data that has been collected in semi-structured open-ended interviews. It was never as simple as coding for keywords. But using the theory has allowed me
to see patterns that may not have emerged otherwise and has also tied my work into the work of other researchers who have applied convention theory to agro-food studies.

I aim to demonstrate the “orders of worth” that are present in the principles of the organization and how the structure, operations, and platform that the Cooperative provides are fundamentally tied to certain conceptions of quality – of the organization itself, how it is run, the goods it supplies, and the people who participate. Varied, sometimes conflicting, conceptualizations of quality among members shapes individuals’ practices as well as processes of the organization. This affects the Cooperative’s overall form and function, and ultimately to what degree its alterity redefines relations in order to challenge inequities of the dominant food system. I found that the Cooperative must sometimes balance a multitude of ‘orders’ in order to keep the members satisfied. More generally, I found that in some cases, ‘orders’ complement other ‘orders’. In other situations, there is an inherent tension between ‘orders’ as consumers (and organizations) navigate food provisioning. Sometimes, conventions within one ‘order’ can create competition between different actors with different organizational strategies in the provisioning of “good” food. I also found that there is a possibility for an additional ‘order’ that may be particularly relevant to food studies in Norway.
1.1.4 Research Questions

As I mentioned, my interest is in local food initiatives and the people who participate in them. I decided to focus my attention on one local food initiative in Oslo, Norway - Oslo Kooperativet. After joining as a member and speaking with other members, I noticed a tendency of members to discuss the aspects of the organization and the goods it provides in various ways. For the purposes of my thesis, I have attributed the discussions of these aspects as linked to the respondents perceptions of quality – both of the organization and the goods it provides. The criteria people based their explanations on varied and convention theory provided a framework by which to organize my data. My research questions follow this trajectory.

- Why are people involved in Oslo Kooperativet?
  - What “orders of worth” do Oslo Kooperativet members employ when explaining their membership to the Cooperative?
- How do member perceptions of food and/or food systems influence the Cooperative?
  - What “orders of worth” are present when members discuss food and/or food systems and what does this reveal about the impact they have on the processes of the organization?
- How does involvement in the Cooperative influence member perceptions of food and/or food systems?
  - Does the presence of certain “orders of worth” in member explanations reflect a change in their perceptions since members began their involvement in the organization?

1.1.5 Rationale

By exploring the complex nature of food systems, the constructed nature of ‘quality’ and the role people have in shaping these, I hope to offer a descriptive look into the reciprocal relationships between people, community, and food. Food is critical to our personal wellbeing and the health of our communities. The ways in
which it is produced, distributed, consumed, and understood, has an impact on the environment and the ecological processes we depend on. It therefore is important to research food and processes related to it, in order to better inform policy and collective action for the future.

1.1.6 Shortcomings of My Research

My research method, though ethnographically inspired, is not ethnography. It was not possible to insert myself into the “life” of the Cooperative and its members. The organization does not have a physical headquarters and by design, operates with the help of multiple working groups with different jobs carried out in different locations at different times of the day, week and month. I adopted and modified ethnographic techniques to serve my purposes and combined observant participation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to conduct my research.

My research focuses on one organization and though it may not be indicative of the overall manifestation of alternative food in Oslo, it certainly is an example of how and why people engage in alternative food networks in a given time and space. My findings are limited to the context in which they have been studied but still provide some insight into how and why new food networks are formed and how these networks can affect perceptions of food, community, and the common good.

Though I tried to account for my personal bias during my research, it was and is likely still present. I have done my best to remain true to the intent of respondents and those I interacted with in the course of my research.

Though I spoke with many members throughout my research, my interview sample is small (16) and my focus on one organization in Oslo, Norway, limits the reach of my findings and what they can contribute to overall discussions of AFNs, their affiliated critiques and possibilities for ways forward. My sample size is not only small but I also employed the snowball method to find willing interviewees. This resulted in many interviewees who knew one another, some of whom spent a great deal of time together, suggesting that they may have common views that are not necessarily representative of all the members in the Cooperative.
Despite my focus on one organization, limited sample size, and the potential bias of my respondents, my research does contribute to larger discussions pertaining to food, perceptions of quality, and the impact this can have on alternative food networks.

1.1.7 Thesis Outline

I will start by giving an overview of my topic, followed by my research questions and an outline of the thesis. I will begin by presenting literature about alternative food networks, the “quality ‘turn’”, embeddedness and the application of convention theory to alternative agro-food networks. This is followed by an explanation of my analytical framework. I then discuss my methodology to give the reader a clear idea of how and why I pursued my research as I did. The first sections set the stage for the following chapters in which I delve into my data both descriptively and analytically, to discuss some of the patterns I found during my research. My thesis concludes with some final thoughts on the implications of my research and suggestions for further research.
2 Literature Review

There is nothing simple or straightforward about the food system. It is “an ever-changing web of industrial, technological, economic, social, and political factors that impact on the journey food takes from its production on the farm to the eventual consumers” (Millstone and Lang 2008, 9). The food system has grown in complexity as it increasingly incorporates more actors, goods, and regions into vast networks. The standardized, industrialized and globalized nature of the expanding food system has enabled more food production. However, it is argued that enough food is produced today to feed the world. Yet, not everyone has access to food. This phenomenon presents one of the glaring errors in the logics that underpin the globalized food system. Increasing food production does not necessarily ameliorate world hunger. Given the inequities that persist, it would seem the complexity of the food system and its shortcomings demand complex solutions. Solutions that account for the “industrial, technological, economic, social, and political factors” that have an impact on the availability and accessibility of goods.

Inequities of the existing food system are not limited to discussions of malnourished and undernourished populations. The production methods, distribution networks and consumption practices that are the crux of the global food system are denuding the environment. Degradation of soils, waterways and air is disrupting the balance of the ecological systems we rely upon for our food production. This destruction is affecting the climate in ways that we do not fully understand. Discussions about climate change, our role in it, and ways forward inform political agendas at the community, national, and international levels. As climate change takes center stage on policy agendas, television news, and enters into classroom discussions, more actors are called upon to address it.

At the global policy level, there is growing support for agendas that intertwine both social and environmental pursuits toward sustainability. The Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 serve as a relevant and timely example. Though there is not a consensus about what sustainability is or how we move towards it, the SDGs provide a framework for countries to set goals and measure achievement (however vague those measurements may be). These
multifaceted goals aim to address social and environmental issues from diverse angles, and one entry point is food, its production, distribution, and consumption: fighting poverty (SDG 1), reducing hunger (SDG 2), supporting good health (SDG 3), assuring clean water (SDG 6), pursuing sustainable cities (SDG 11), encouraging responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). All of these goals are linked to food in one or many ways. At the policy level, it would seem that food is both a means and an end to addressing environmental and social injustice.

From an individual perspective, food is something that we all rely upon for our own health and wellbeing. If we are fortunate, we consume it several times a day often with other people. Eating is social and the meals we prepare reflect our sociocultural surroundings. We celebrate with food and food preparation – “pan de muerte” on Day of the Dead in Mexico, roast turkeys for Thanksgiving in the USA, kjøttboller and surkål for Christmas in certain regions of Norway. Anthony Winson (1993) deemed food an “intimate commodity” in that we take it into our body daily and it connects us to one another and to the environment. “It is a meaningful and sustained arena of action and interaction, one that connects us to others on deeply significant terms” (Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal 2013, 2). The way we eat food and why we eat it has a significant impact on the lives of others whether we are aware of it or not. Food connects us to one another and the environment and in so doing, can become an entity around which people engage in social and environmental movements. Guptill, Copelton and Lucal (2013) argue that food is “emotionally resonant; it is a symbol of our deepest social ties and a powerful marker of identity” and because it is “accessible to ordinary, concerned people”, food is one way individuals feel they can “make a difference, however small.”

“We cannot individually change the built environment to reduce our need for cars or eliminate structural poverty, for example, but we can change our cities, plant a garden, or start a food pantry” (Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal 2013, 162)

People can engage with food – the production, distribution and consumption of it – whether on the global, national, community or individual level. The potential transformation of the food system depends on the involvement of many actors at every level. Whether the approach is from a macro or micro level, goals must be set. How these goals are developed and supported and by who is just as critical to
the goals themselves. Transformation is dependent on cooperation, especially among parties that seem disparate; flexibility, as new information surfaces and resource availability changes; and creativity, to develop strategies that address new challenges. Regarding the food system, activists, researchers, politicians, and citizens must think about what it means to eat and ‘know’ food (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014).

2.1 Consumers as Social Actors

Food chain policy agendas that once focused on technocratic fixes and boosting efficiency are now complemented (or sometimes replaced) by policies that focus on household and individual consumption (Evans 2011). Due to the changing power dynamics at the global level, responsibility that was assumed as the nation-state’s is now shared between state and non-state actors. This has resulted in “(new) sites of sustainable consumption politics and power”, with a focus on behavior change of the individual – both as a consumer and as a citizen (Spaargaren and Mol 2008, 358).

This thesis recognizes consumers as social actors carrying out social roles in daily practices. Consumers make consumption choices informed by the material world, social and cultural norms, and their own conscious decisions.

“There is an ongoing “entanglement” (Callon 1998) between economic and social relations, ensuring that “even if economic agents in a market economy appear to confront each other as ‘bare individuals’, they still remain always-already social actors” (Jessop 1999, 5). This complex interplay between the economic and the social poses problems for the construction and stabilization of purely economic (or fully commoditized) relationships” (Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000, 115)

Though the constructed “rational consumer” is still valuable in economic theory, the social roles people inhabit inform their decisions in day-to-day life. This is not to say that consumers consciously make every purchase or to deny the commodification of some relationships. But, whether consumers are aware of the way in which they enact their social roles or not, and to what extent they do so, their social roles inform their behavior. Reciprocally, their behavior shapes social norms,
including norms in economic exchange. If we accept this as the case, it can at least partially explain why it has been posited that there are more consumers looking for alternative ways to carry out their necessary consumption practices that align with their values. As consumers carry out their consumption practices, they are acting as mothers, fathers, coworkers, peers, citizens, and friends. These social roles imply ‘care’ to a certain degree and this care can extend from immediate relationships, to care for the broader community. As more information is available regarding the damaging environmental and social effects of the existing food system, “a growing number of discerning consumers are demanding ‘quality’ products” (Torgnon et al. 1999) (Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000). The attention to “quality” by consumers, distributors, retailers, and producers is termed the “quality ‘turn’”.

2.2 The “Quality ‘Turn’”

There is growing discussion surrounding a qualitative shift in food geography (Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000, 107). Quality is arguably a new tool for shaping economic exchange and relations. Whether producers, distributors or retailers are seeking ways to differentiate products to reach new consumers, or consumers are looking for embedded values in the goods they purchase, perceptions of quality inform these pursuits. Quality, however, is not universally defined and in many cases is not specifically tied to the physical attributes of a good. Quality can be related to the health and safety of goods and can also include the “broader social and environmental impact of the interlinked set of structured processes through which a particular product is produced and delivered to customers” (Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal 2013, 162). There is a growing number of certifications, quality assurance schemes, labels, and discourses around the quality of food and food networks. This phenomenon has been termed the “quality ‘turn’” (Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000, Goodman 2003, Ponte 2016) in which focus has shifted from the quantity of goods towards focus on quality and product differentiation. Quality can include ideas about health, safety, naturalness, localness, justice, and sustainability (Barham 2002, Evans 2011, Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000).

In the agro-food literature, it is suggested that this “turn” is a result of mounting evidence of the destructive practices associated with industrialized farming methods.
and the food scares linked to these methods. As the food system has expanded, relying on production and distribution methods that require foods to last longer and meet certain standards, food itself has changed. Attention has been drawn to the presence of “pesticide residuals in fruits and vegetables, food coloring and other additives in processed foods, hormones in beef and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)” (Berg et al. 2005, 103, see also Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000) and how these present health, safety, and ethical issues. It would seem that mounting evidence of the ecologically destructive practices of industrialized and globalized food systems and related health concerns has contributed to the increase in reflective and increasingly concerned consumers (Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000, 110) seeking quality products.

Government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the United States and European Food Safety Authority in Europe (http://www.efsa.europa.eu/) decide what goods, provided by the global food system, are safe for their citizens. NGOs and private agencies have been key in developing certifications and labeling that communicate concern for the environment and people. Consumers can support “sustainable livelihoods…building stronger forests and healthy communities” (http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/about) or purchase goods that contribute to “a powerful way to reduce poverty through their everyday shopping” (https://www.fairtrade.net/about-fairtrade/what-is-fairtrade.html). Whether consumer concerns are personal or extend to the globe, many designations inform consumers on quality and encourage them to support qualities they value. Popular literature has taken environmental and social justice debates regarding food into private homes. Authors such as Barbara Kingsolver, Gary Nabhan, Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser, Alice Waters and Jonathon Safran Foer2 inspire consumers to change their relationship to food, often by encouraging specific production methods, particular diets, or encouraging participation in alternative provisioning models. These authors have carried food justice discussions into households by communicating which qualities of food or food supply chains are best to support. What these qualities are and whether they reflect sustainability, social justice, or other “noble” causes, has an impact on the readers and their perceptions of food, the

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2 See Appendix 1 for list of books written by these authors
food system, and their role as consumers. Both at the global level and the household level, consumers are encouraged to frame their consumption practices around ecological and social considerations for the common good. Ethics of care (Dowler et al. 2009, 216) are increasingly woven into consumers everyday consumption of quality products.

2.2.1 Alternative Food Networks

The basis of the “quality ‘turn’” is that there is an increasingly reflective consumer base that seeks to make political and social statements through consumption practices. Some of this consumption is taking place via alternative food networks (AFNs). Many of these networks attempt to connect consumers and producers in ways in which civic values are incorporated into food production, provisioning and consumption. According to Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman (2014) “Alternative food networks and the fair trade movement have emerged in response to the glaring and multifaceted contradictions of the unsustainable industrial food system” (4). The seemingly paradoxical prevalence of food insecurity and obesity, constraints of global resources on resource intensive agriculture, replacement of livelihoods by technology and industrialization – make alternatives all the more attractive and necessary.

AFNs have the reputation of being one of the keys to challenging the hegemonic corporate food system. This binary relationship between conventional and alternative networks likely stems from the fact that many AFNs have emerged in opposition to destructive aspects of the conventional food system. However, researchers and activists alike have challenged this. As AFNs evolve alongside the hegemonic food system and its affiliated logics, there is overlap and influence between the networks and each has the potential to reproduce or transform aspects from the other. There is therefore not one “alternative” nor one “conventional”, not one “good” nor one “bad” food network but ongoing reproduction and transformation of food systems through the interplay of many networks based on various logics involving innumerable actors.

Alternative food networks have been characterized by the way in which they define and include values based on “embeddedness”, “trust” and “place” (Goodman 2003)
and these aspects are referred to in much of the agro-food literature. The socially constructed nature of “embeddedness”, or the “re-placement of food within its social, cultural, economic, geographical, and environmental context” (Goodman and Goodman 2009, 208) means these terms are in constant development and perceived in different ways depending on the context and those involved. How trust is established is dependent on differentials in power and agency between actors. Place shapes the values that are embedded, how they are embedded and for who. The socially and materially constructed nature of embeddedness, trust, and place and how they contribute to the alterity of food systems has opened up discussions around the legitimacy of AFNs and their transformative potential of the destructive logics that guide the globalized food system.

**AFNs and Neoliberal Influence**

In the past couple decades, it has been suggested that AFNs have been shaped by the ‘neo-liberal revolution’ that dominates the political economy today. Instead of focusing on rights and entitlements of human beings and working to change political structures to incorporate justice into the food systems, AFNs often follow market logics and neo-liberal narratives.

“In the context of the neoliberal, market-based capitalism that governs so much of what we do and how we do it, it can be argued that the fundamental forces shaping contemporary food ethics are profit, taste, choice, and consumer-focused ‘cheapness’”…Given this current political economic context, even in alternative food networks and their bid to become what defines the new ‘good’ food, the ethics of profit, taste, choice, and cheapness work heavily to structure how alternative foods get done and/or are consumed.” (Goodman, Maye, and Holloway 2010, 1784)

Prioritizing profit, variety, choice, and affordability may be the ‘survival’ mechanisms that AFNs adopt to try to keep pace with the competitive strategies of the dominant economy. However, this approach folds AFNs into the logics of today’s capitalism instead of working to address structural inequities inherent in the current economic system. “The collective oppositional politics of social justice has been displaced by locally-focused programs to create entrepreneurial opportunities to enhance the economic reproduction of small farmers” (Goodman, DuPuis, and
Goodman 2014, 137). Instead of confronting the questions of who has access to what kinds of foods and how, many alternative food networks have been swept into the ‘political culture of entrepreneurialism’ (Allen et al. 2003, 65) in which producers and distributors carve out their niche in the market and cater to specific, often privileged consumers. The individual’s rights as a consumer supersede their roles as citizens, and producers’ interest in creating and maintaining a niche market, supersede concerns for the common good. AFNs that adopt these strategies are therefore developed “within the overall structure of the current agrifood system rather than working to reshape its architecture” (Allen et al. 2003, 71). Not only can this reinforce dominant market logics but also may reinforce the neo-liberal inspired narrative of consumers as the critical actors responsible for change.

“Indeed one of the most contentious academic debates surrounding good food and ‘good’ consumption more broadly is that around the role of these alternative commodities in responsibilising consumers in solving the health, ecological, and social problems facing contemporary societies.” (Goodman, Maye, and Holloway 2010, 1785).

In one sense, the propensity for AFNs to try and squeeze into the fringes of the existing system based on dominant logics allows them to persist but moves the focus of AFNs from rights and entitlements of all citizens to “the rights of consumers to choose alternatives, rather than their rights as citizens”(Allen et al. 2003, 68). This presents a number of dilemmas within the ‘alternative’ trajectory these networks pursue.

**Responsible Consumers, “Politics of Perfection”, and Exclusion**

Producers, distributors, and/or branders provide products that communicate embedded values such as sustainability (e.g. organic) or social justice (e.g. fair trade). Two clear drawbacks with this are 1. The “responsibilising” of consumers to fix problems beyond their control, and 2. The degree to which environmental and social justice can be embedded into goods and supply chains. As quality becomes the focus, particularly in relation to civic values, consumers have the responsibility to remain informed and base their consumption practices with the common good in mind. It therefore becomes the duty of consumers to consider their values when making purchases and it is through consumption that they “should” fix the
inequities of the food system. Ethical consumption is then based on, in many cases, the “moral imaginary” of food which encompasses ecological sustainability, social justice, cultural integrity, and animal welfare” (Goodman and Goodman 2009, 210-211). Not only does this perspective ignore the power dynamics of dominant actors in the food system, there is also uncertainty about the extent to which these “imaginaries” of justice are truly present in foods provisioned via vast networks. In very large networks, the extent to which a product or supply chain is sustainable, socially just, or humane is difficult to assess. Firstly, because these concepts are socially constructed and likely mean different things to different people. Second, though there are certifications that can help to communicate some of these qualities to consumers, there are now so many as to make it confusing for the consumer. Not the least to say that some of the certifications have fairly watered down standards and likely do not meet many people’s perception of sustainable, ethical, etc. The marketing of embedded values, from an economic perspective, supersedes whether values are truly incorporated into a food product or supply chain. Vast networks also hide how certain values are chosen and by whom (Barham 2002). It is merely the amount to which values are communicated as being embedded in a product that “enables” consumers to “do their part”, though they may not be contributing in the way they believe.

Another drawback stemming from this marketization of “quality” goods and supply chains is that while consumers may feel this empowers them to make a difference in a personal yet democratic way, it is the wealthier consumers who have more of a voice when it comes to “ethical” consumption. This has likely fueled the debates about the exclusionary nature of many AFNs and how their agendas are shaped by privileged populations (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014, Allen et al. 2003). As consumers shoulder the responsibility of fixing global issues, there is a tendency for a “politics of perfection” to take root. Those consumers, who have the money, time, and educational background to make “right” decisions, are then responsible to do so. As they become the bearers of what is “right” or “responsible”, those who do not make these choices are dismissed as irresponsible, selfish or shortsighted. As Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman say, “once food politics is caught in the maze of competing definitions of the ‘real’, the ‘authentic’, or the ‘local’ the game is already lost” (2014, 6). The tendency toward self-righteous consumption based on
exclusionary conceptualizations of the “right” way to eat “quality” goods or how to properly “know food” creates barriers between people, often based on socioeconomic, cultural, and political divisions (Goodman and Goodman 2009).

**Marketization of Social Movements – The Watering Down of Values**

In the past decades, alternative food and food networks pay more attention to being incorporated into the market and less attention to addressing structural issues at the policy level (Allen et al. 2003). Though these alternatives are seeking ways to insert morality into goods and supply chains, offering a way for consumers to speak with their money, the ways in which morality is inserted and by who are fundamental to understanding how alternative these AFNs are and what logics they are based on. Likely, the most cited example of a social movement being distilled into market standards is the organic movement in the United States. What started as a social movement with strong ethics of care for the environment and social equality is now simplified into “allowable inputs”. These “allowable inputs” are based on standards devised by the USDA that have allowed for the “entry of large-scale specialized growers, facilitating monocrop production and integration in mainstream processing and distribution networks controlled by powerful corporate actors” (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014, 131). Organic in the USA, in many ways, no longer aligns with the social movement it was once based on and instead is fodder that corporations have capitalized on and profited from. It could be argued that this cooptation has resulted in more availability of organic goods enabling more people to support environmental and social ethics while shopping. More consumers are “empowered” to use their everyday consumption as a way to support change. However, the fact that organic goods can be grown in ways that are resource intensive and distributed via vast networks with unequal power differentials means that organic goods are not necessarily produced with environmental sustainability nor social justice in mind. This example demonstrates that social movements can be translated into the larger market, but with that translation, some meaning behind the movement can be lost to dominant market logics, making it feasible for powerful actors to coopt and commodify the social movement.

This shift from politically driven demands for structural change based on notions of the common good to more market-focused alternatives means that if consumers
truly seek to use their consumption practices as a way to communicate their broader values, which values are embedded and to what extent, requires more scrutiny (Barham 2002). Value-based labeling requires actors to determine what values are important. If these are determined based on potentially marketable qualities that can be easily communicated and implemented in existing production and distribution networks, then “quality” is not necessarily challenging the existing food system, but is merely incorporated into it.

**The Fallacy of “Good” Food**

The search for “good” food has unfortunately not always remedied some of the issues the alternative food networks may have set out to address. In fact, there are many discussions around how alternative food and qualities that are often perceived as inherent in alternative food reproduce the injustices that the alternatives claim to address. “The relationally performative ethics of alternative foods reproduce an overt and rather disturbing inequality that is greatly in need of exposure and, perhaps, dismantling” (Goodman, Maye, and Holloway 2010, 1785). When AFNs adopt the logics of the dominant food systems, they can recreate and reinforce power inequalities and injustices. Seyfang (2006) argues,

> “ecological citizenship bridges the divide between individual and collective action. It motivates private consumption choices, but at the same time speaks to a need for collective action to build new social infrastructure” (394).

AFNs contribute to this “new social infrastructure” but the trajectory of this development is informed by the logics within the networks. When the focus of AFNs is to fill a niche to gain footing within the dominant market, and to increase choice for consumers, ecological citizenship may be far from effective. This attitude, no matter how well intentioned it may seem (empowering consumers to make the change they wish to see in the world through their consumption), further divides people along socio-economic lines which can have serious societal repercussions. However, if new social infrastructure is developed in an inclusive and democratic way, then there is potential for AFNs to contribute to the transformative potential of alternatives that focus on social (and political) change beyond just the “rights of consumers”. 
“Alterity” in Governance and Participation

The pursuit of “quality” goods and embedded values can be coopted by powerful actors in the existing food system. But the contested nature of quality and its manifestations in both large and small food networks, has opened up the possibility for consumers and AFNs to make change through collective action. If nothing else, the momentum behind “quality” and AFNs infuses alternative logics into the food system, if only from the fringe. Based on my research, it would seem that the transformative potential of AFNs does not necessarily lie in the embedded qualities in the goods they provide, but in the logics they use to govern themselves and the participation of people. Though the political economy has a powerful influence on the form and function of AFNs, these networks can be designed to encourage new ways of engaging in and interacting with people and goods.

“It is the fact that alternative foods are relationally performative by design to be ‘more’ ethical that they attempt to work in and on the ethical foodscape in different ways to conventional food systems that ‘don’t cost the Earth’ and/or don’t cost the lives of Others (e.g. animals or peasants).” (Goodman, Maye, and Holloway 2010, 1784).

The way in which values are embedded into alternative production, provisioning, and consumption are what defines AFNs as “alternative” but, I suggest, their transformative potential lies in the everyday processes and interactions that constitute the network and what it stands for. The way in which AFNs are developed, maintained and operated and what logics they adhere to, defines to what extent they are successful in providing a critique of the hegemonic food system.

“the collective action of these social movements is directed primarily toward the market. With the ‘economization’ of the political and the accompanying morality (Shamir 2008, see also Fourcade and Healy 2007), consumers have become significant agents of change in the social and ecological relations of production, and the pace of this transformation depends on entrenching alternative values ever more deeply in everyday practices of food provisioning and global trade circuits” (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014, 4-5).

The degree to which alternative values are “entrenched” depends upon interacting with people and food in new ways – ways that encourage community involvement, where personal relations are prioritized before price or convenience. Where concern
for the environment and well-being of others is considered before the “rights of consumers”. To do this, relational, performative and interactive platforms of engagement are necessary.

**The Transformative Potential of “Quality”**

From the literature it is clear that the “quality ‘turn’ is not singular or monolithic, with a unique set of constitutive elements, meanings and politics.” (Goodman 2003, 2-3). In other words, quality is contested and communicated in many ways, because the analytical categories that are often ascribed to the quality such as *embeddedness* and *local*, carry various connotations that mean different things to different actors in various places.

“Indeed, it is precisely the difficulty of deciphering these meanings and their complex expression in social behavior, organizational forms, discourse and power relations that defines the theoretical and empirical challenge presented by the ‘turn’ to quality in food practices” (Goodman 2003, 2)

The “quality ‘turn’” literature suggests that there is a growing number of reflective consumers seeking to communicate their ethical values via consumption practices. However, so much of what is “alternative” and what is “quality” is contested and variably defined based on economic, political, social and cultural influences, making it difficult to assess what is or is not “quality”. However, larger networks have been able to capitalize on this dynamic nature of quality, especially when ascribed to a product. “Quality” products are then sold via existing systems that can exacerbate inequality and environmental degradation (ie organic example above).

Despite the trend of cooptation, local food movements are now attempting to “escape corporate framing by building networks of civic agriculture based on direct marketing and open, deliberative processes of governance” (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014, 131). In the corporate global economy, ascribing ethical “qualities” to food *products* is more easily done than coopting or hijacking alternative organizational/governance forms.

Though AFNs are on the fringe they provide critical insight into some of the ways people and networks have attempted to transform destructive elements within the food system. Hassanein (2003) argues that pragmatic, incremental steps are needed
to transform the food system and to achieve this, democratic processes are crucial in the development of just food.

“Food democracy is necessary because achieving sustainability involves conflicts over values, and there is no independent authority, such as science or religion, to which we can appeal for resolution of these conflicts. Therefore, sustainability must be defined socially and politically, and our collective understanding of it will evolve over time as conditions change” (85).

The very contested nature of quality is both where the challenges and the successes for alternative food networks lie. If democratic processes are folded into the governance models of AFNs so that diverse actors can come together to reflect on the trajectory of the network and the values the network seeks to incorporate, then AFNs can challenge “politics of perfection”, corporate cooption, and the watering down of social movements by market pressures. Their alterity is rooted in the process, not necessarily the goods themselves.

“The consequences of collective action are not only the product of strategic interactions between movements and their targets…the outcomes are also a product of movement actors’ negotiations with one another and their integration of aims, beliefs, and strategic decisions” (Hassanein 2003, 85).

Alternative governance strategies in AFNs may enable networks to offer legitimate alternatives - based on inclusion, flexibility, reflexivity - that challenge the logics that guide destructive food systems. It is the way in which various actors negotiate, engage with one another, and seek to embed quality in AFNs and affiliated goods that determines the kind of alterity that is manifested in alternative food.

2.3 Quality and Convention Theory (CT)

“Convention theory indicates that – over time – markets come to embody a succession of different criteria under which goods become qualified for trade, and according to which trade is subsequently managed. Along with the ‘quality turn’ and alternative food network literatures (Goodman and Watts 1997, Goodman 2004, Goodman and Sage 2014), one of the main tenets of CT is the observation that until the 1970s, quanitification was the main criteria for arbitrating exchange
of relatively homogenous products, while the current economic dynamic is based on ‘an obsession with quality’” (Ponte 2016, 14).

This “obsession with quality” has brought significant focus to the establishment and negotiation of quality, what it means, to who, how it is embodied in goods and supply chains, and how it reinforces or challenges dynamics of power in food systems. Criteria that informs ‘quality’ are subject to change and develop as social norms shift, new information surfaces, power dynamics swing, or perceptions change. Convention theory (CT), though not specifically designed to be applied to food studies, enables a novel entry point from which to examine the conventions that guide coordination within the food system. It provides a framework from which to analyze criteria that inform decisions, at the situational level. Researchers have explored the qualities of goods and supply chains, and how these criteria inform different strategies of coordination in exchange at a given time, or over time.³


A very interesting and relevant application of CT was done by Andersen (2011) in which she discusses how consumers use different strategies to navigate the moral complexity of purchasing organic foods. She argues that there is a “plurality of competing moralities, understood as principles for determining what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ food” (440). She uses CT to demonstrate that “arguments for or against buying organic food may be seen as moral depending on particular orders of moral evaluation” (447). She convincingly uses the theory to demonstrate that pursuing sustainability through consumption (in this case, organic goods) is not inherently “moral” because morality can be based on competing criteria. She is therefore skeptical that more information regarding organic goods will indeed lead to sustainable practices because of the inherent

³ For a comprehensive review of convention theory and agro-food literature, see “Convention theory in the Anglophone agro-food literature: Past, present and future” (Ponte 2016)

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moral complexity of provisioning. Similar to Andersen’s analysis, Evans (2011) explores “competing demands of day to day living and the ways in which cultural conventions work—or not—to legitimate practices of sustainable consumption” (109). For example, consumers may explain their behavior drawing on certain cultural conventions to explain why they do and do not purchase organic goods in order to be a good parent. They may purchase organic products to maintain a healthy environment for their child’s future. Or they do not, because organic is too expensive and it is more important that their child has enough to eat than it is to make sure it is organic every time. Evans discusses how this demonstrates how there can be tensions between being a good father and being a good citizen. Evan’s research suggests that even for those who self-select as moving toward sustainable consumption practices, it is difficult to incorporate ecological sustainability into their everyday lives. He argues that “prevailing standards of appropriate conduct within social practices are not conducive to the pursuit of sustainable consumption” (114-115). Both Andersen and Evans explain that the pursuit of sustainability, on moral grounds, is complicated and sometimes contradictory to other strong social norms that guide consumer behavior.

CT has also been applied to certification schemes in the food system to explore how quality is defined and implemented by networks and actors. Barham (2002) researched the decision-making processes of value-based labeling groups and consumer decision making processes as instances of “politics of ethical judgement” (349). She interprets the judgements of values-based labeling groups based on the analytical framework of CT (“orders of worth”) in order to develop “a deeper understanding of the extent of commitment” of these groups. She posits that convention theory helps to “refocus our attention on the very human qualities of reflection and judgement” (357-358) and argues that studying labeling “as a social movement” (358) is particularly relevant in a time when economic organization is organized around “quality” traits and embedded values. Certifications and designations of products are popular strategies among producers, distributors and retailers, because it helps to differentiate products for different consumer bases. This strategy attempts to convey embedded values with the goal of an increase in market share under the guise of social and environmental responsibility. Scrutiny of the processes behind these certifications are therefore particularly important to
research in order to better understand the intentions behind them and the transformation potential they provide to inequities in the existing food systems. Along a similar vein, Busch (2000) argues that standards and grades are part of the moral economy, not just convenient technologies for organizing and regulating markets to reduce transaction costs. Grades and standards set norms for behavior and standardize many actors and aspects of market interaction. He suggests that “who participates in setting standards, the processes by which standards are set and what the consequences of setting the standards are have considerable impact on fundamental questions about who we are and how we shall live” (Busch 2000, 273). Barham explores how the market is shaped by standards, who develops and implements them, and how sustainability and equity are incorporated. Busch highlights the implications standards have on social norms.

Convention theory has been expanded upon by Storper and Salais (1997) who developed a framework to discuss “worlds of production”. Influenced by the “orders of worth”, they argue that there are four worlds of production (1. Industrial world, 2. Network market world, 3. Marshallian market world, 4. World of innovation) that are determined along a spectrum based on two dimensions. One dimension is the “available supply of technology, information and skills at the production level, and whether these are restricted to a community of specialists or not”; the other dimension relates to demand and whether it is “anonymous and uniform or not” (Ponte 2016, 15). The authors discuss how these worlds are defined by either quality conventions of production or by conventions that define practices and resource use. One could theoretically locate products along this spectrum and discuss how organizations negotiate supply and demand and what conventions are used. The “worlds of production” have been applied to the “worlds of food” literature which has significantly impacted agro-food studies generally (Ponte 2016).

Svein Ole Borgen (2009) uses the “worlds of production” framework, developed by Storper and Salais (1997), to discuss how the “quality ‘turn’” is not necessarily a shift from one “world of production” to another, but that there are changes within the “worlds”. Borgen explores how big branders in Norway seek to incorporate and communicate quality and his findings contradict the claim that economic
organization is moving from the “industrial world” to the “domestic world”. He argues that “the hegemony of the standard product quality-convention appears to be very strong” (10). In the Norwegian context, healthier food may compete with the standard product quality but he emphasizes the role of government institutions in shaping this. Labels such as the green “keyhole” or “Nyt Norge” communicate the general healthiness or origin, respectively, of goods sold in grocery stores. These trends have affected the consumer perceptions of standard goods, with many believing most food in the grocery stores is “good enough”, slowing the potential momentum of organic in Norway.

Murdoch, Marsden and Banks (2000) explore the degree of embeddedness of various conventions in commodities and commodity chains. Convention theory, they suggest, helps to assess the natural and social characteristics of food. Food chains “combine embeddedness and disembeddedness in rather complicated ways” (119), when seeking to communicate quality in the general market beyond the immediate locality where it is produced.

“Forms of embeddedness require critical evaluation. We need to assess how food quality can be asserted in ways which substantially challenge the conventional, industrialized chains that drive processes of globalization and which bring so much environmental and medical harm in their wake. In this endeavor we should not be fooled into thinking of localness, naturalness, and embeddedness as sufficient in themselves; rather, we must show how these qualities come to be asserted and negotiated in food supply chains” (122).

Their work brings attention to the need to better understand the socially and environmentally constructed dimensions of food in order to understand how “global processes are mediated and sometimes refracted by regional and local specificities” (110).

CT has also been used to highlight how AFNs are innately hybrid because they are “relational to and shaped by the prevailing food system” (Forssell and Lankoski 2016, 1). Forssell and Lankoski argue that AFN survival is dependent on juggling their own moral aims and the expectations of consumers. Discussing the interplay between conventional markets and AFNs, they suggest that “convention theory holds that AFN actors have the capacity to challenge and shape these expectations.
Thus, AFNs operate in constant dialogue between different parties and it is the general direction of this dialogue that is likely to shape what AFNs might be or become.” (Forssell and Lankoski 2016, 14). Their research suggests that AFNs can influence the expectations of consumers by providing goods with embedded values and discussing the worth behind environmental and social considerations.

These examples of how convention theory has been applied to AFNs and alternative agro-food networks illustrate that this framework can usefully be employed to shed insight on how conventions shape coordination in the “quality ‘turn’”.

3 Analytical Framework

Convention theory provides a framework through which to explore and discuss how different criteria inform people’s actions and perceptions. Convention theory was not originally developed within food studies. However, in the past couple of decades it has been applied to the study of food and has opened new doors from which to view production, distribution and consumption, particularly around discussions of quality. The theory moves “towards a pluralistic (and more sociological) understanding of ‘quality’ as a tool for structuring production, exchange and distribution” (Ponte 2016, 21). My research looks at how an AFN and its members perceive quality in food and it processes related to it and how this influences the form and function of the organization and the consumption decisions of the members. Therefore, this theory not only provides an interesting and relevant framework through which to analyze my data but also integrates my research into ongoing discussions about agro-food networks and the findings affiliated with the use of convention theory.

I summarize below a fairly complex theory to the best of my ability, acknowledging that there is more dimension to it than is presented here. I have included the elements I believe are necessary to clarify to the reader what the theory is constituted by and how I have applied it. The framework it provides is useful in analyzing member explanations of what aspects of food and food provisioning they find important. Many respondents discussed aspects of the organization and the food it provided in ways that suggested their perceptions of quality were based on criteria that were not necessarily shared by all members or consumers. This was interesting because the organization is, literally, the members; and their perceptions and expectations inform the form and function of the Cooperative. Various perceptions of quality therefore creates a rather complex reciprocal relationship between the members and the organization. First, I will briefly present convention theory, its development, characteristics and the framework it provides.
3.1 Convention Theory

Convention theory was developed in the 1970’s in the pragmatic arm of French sociology to “challenge prevailing theories of economic behavior” (Forssell and Lankoski 2016, 3). In the pragmatist school of thought, ideas must be tested in real human experiences in order to establish whether the theories and/or ideas are practically applicable, explanatory and relevant. Two French scholars within the pragmatist school of sociology published an article titled “The Sociology of Critical Capacity” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999). In it, they argue that there are moments in everyday life, called “critical moments”, in which individuals provide justifications or explanations for their actions. Many of our actions are built into the routines of our lives and do not require reflection nor an explanation. Nevertheless, there are moments when actions we have taken require us to reflect on why we chose to do something. This often happens when we are in disagreement with someone or when something does not work as we expected it to. These moments are referred to as “critical moments”, or moments when we engage our more critical mind to reflect on our reasons behind our actions. Much of the time, our reflections are then shared with others in the form of explanations to describe why we did what we did. This helps us to navigate disputes and contributes to the reproduction and/or transformation of social norms.

The authors argue that there is a common tendency for individuals to base their justifications on ideas of justice that “follow rules of acceptability” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 360) in order to move from a disagreement toward a state of agreement. In other words, “in situations of dispute there exists an imperative to justify stances and actions” (Evans 2011, 110). However, Boltanski and Thévenot contend that there is not one “universal set of conventions and instead argue that there exists a plurality of orders of worth that can be drawn upon to justify stances and actions” (Evans 2011, 110). To better understand how individuals justify their actions, the authors developed a framework in order to “build a research strategy in the sociological field…that might enable us to escape having to choose between a formal universalism and the kind of unlimited pluralism” that defines many social
sciences (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 365). Their model is based on six “orders of worth”, or frames of analysis that are constructed from extensive fieldwork combined with historical works in political philosophy. The authors admit that these ‘orders’ “can be seen as utopias when confronted with the diversity of the situations in which members of a complex society are involved” (365) but are nonetheless “sufficient to describe justifications performed in the majority of ordinary situations” (369).

The authors constructed this theory in order to better explain the wider social phenomenon of coordination involving justification, disagreement, and agreement. It is has been applied to food studies because food – its production, distribution, exchange, consumption, preparation – requires coordination between two or more actors. There are six “orders of worth” that Boltanski and Thévenot identify. Not all of these ‘orders’ have been equally represented in the agro-food literature but I present all six of them because I found that though some seemed to be referenced more than others, all ‘orders’ are present in my data. The ‘orders’ are inspired, domestic, civic, opinion, market and industrial. Below, I have included a table of the six ‘orders’, the way in which worth is assessed (mode of evaluation), the ways in which worth can be communicated (format of relevant information), the basic way individuals establish relations between one another (elementary relation), and the worth as ascribed to an individual (human qualification).

The authors argue that not every moment is a “critical moment” because at some time in the past an agreement has been made or understood that allows us to live our lives in a way that we do not have to critically assess every action we take. Individuals move through “regimes of coordination” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, Truninger 2011). For example, when we are in the “regime of familiarity”, our actions are embodied and informed by our surroundings (Truninger 2011, 42). In the “regime of regular planned action” actions are taken according to instructions (42). The “regime of justification” is of most interest in my research because the

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4 Boltanski and Thevenot originally described the ‘orders’ as “cité” but it was translated from French to English into ‘worlds’. However much of the Anglophone literature refers to the ‘worlds’ as ‘orders’ and this seemed the clearest description given that the authors state there is not one social order, but several orders, that society relies upon.
data I have gathered consists of interviews in which respondents explain (or justify) their involvement in an alternative food network (AFN).

Table 1: “Orders of worth” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Orders of worth’</th>
<th>Inspired</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Civic</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mode of evaluation</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Esteem</td>
<td>Renown</td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Productivity Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format of relevant information</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Oral Exemplary Anecdotal</td>
<td>Formal Official</td>
<td>Semiotic</td>
<td>Monetary</td>
<td>Measurable criteria Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary relation</td>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>Functional links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human qualification</td>
<td>Creativity Ingenuity</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>Desire Purchasing power</td>
<td>Professional competency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to move from the regime of justification to another regime, the critical moment must be dealt with through an establishment of equivalence. In order to establish equivalence individuals must “bring together sets of people and objects and make connections between them” in order to form generalizations that can be “justified with reference to a principle of equivalence that clarifies what they have in common” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 361). In order to do this, individuals must move beyond their particularity and singularity and “converge towards a form of generality transcending persons and the situations in which they interrelate” (361) to find an agreement based on generally accepted principles. This is best clarified by the authors themselves in which they explain common actions which are not “critical moments” and how certain frames of analysis are encapsulated:

“In the ordinary course of common action, in contrast, equivalencies are not subjected to deliberate reflection. Instead, equivalencies which maintain the coordination of actions may be, for example, encapsulated in objects or by objectified rules. The most often quoted example probably is the standardization of time and schedules”(362).

I have expanded on the “orders of worth” below to further illustrate their meaning and how I have applied them to my data. Applying the theory to my data was not always easy. In fact, it was quite difficult to categorize explanations under one
‘order’ or another. However, based on my interaction with the respondent, the words they chose, and a certain level of necessary and unavoidable interpretation, I was able to apply the framework. The information below draws heavily from the article by Boltanski and Thévenot (1999). I conclude each section with topics and/or keywords from my data that I felt referenced the respective ‘order’.

3.1.1 The Inspired Order

Within this ‘order’, worth is linked to creativity, artistic sensibility, and the use of one’s imagination. Others’ recognition of this worth is irrelevant. For instance,

“Artists do not necessarily reject public remarks of reputation or financial recognition, but they must, in order to be allowed to accept them, make a compromise, which is always difficult to reach, with another kind of worth, say, for example, with that of opinion or market. Even when they attain recognition, they never see in their success the very basis of their work’s value or of their own.” (370)

Value is present regardless of other’s interpretations. Relations between people are often based on emotion and passion. Worth is “viewed as an immediate relationship to an external source from which all possible worth flows” (370). In my thesis, this ‘order’ includes references to passion, inspiration, and creativity.

3.1.2 The Domestic Order

In the domestic order, “people’s worth depends on a hierarchy of trust based on a chain of personal dependencies” (370). Worth in this ‘order’ is defined by the relations between people. “The political link between beings is seen as a generalization of kinship and is based on face-to-face relationships and on respect for tradition” (370). In my thesis this ‘order’ refers to discussions about relations between actors built on trust and personal connections, the building of community and reconnecting people to each other, the environment, and memories they have associated with home or belonging.
3.1.3 The Order of Renown (Opinion)

Worth in this order is based on “nothing but the result of people’s opinion”. Therefore, “the measurement of people’s worth depends on nothing other than the number of individuals who grant their recognition” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 371) to that person. Examples of worthy people within this ‘order’ are celebrities, opinion leaders, journalists, etc. They are worthy when they are famous, recognized, successful or convincing. Objects that are affiliated with this order are trademarks, certifications, press releases, etc. In my thesis, this ‘order’ relates to the reputation of the Cooperative and its popularity. This ‘order’ also pertains to organic and biodynamic designations.

3.1.4 The Civic Order

Worth is defined by “the convergence of human wills, as citizens give up their particular interests and direct themselves exclusively toward the common good” (371). Therefore, the civic order attends to “beings who are not individual beings but collective ones...this includes federations, public communities, representatives, or delegates” (372). Codes, rules, laws, and procedures are worthy in the order. In my thesis, this relates to concern for environmental sustainability, broader senses of justice, concerns for the common good and perceived political dimensions of the Cooperative.

3.1.5 The Market Order

This order coordinates individuals “through the mediation of scarce goods, the acquisition of which is pursued by everyone.” However,

“...the market order must not be mixed up with the sphere of economic relations...on the contrary, economic actions are based on, at least, two main forms of coordination, one being the market, the other by an industrial order” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 372).

Important people in this order are buyers and sellers who are worthy when they are rich. “Their main qualities are to be opportunistic in spotting and seizing opportunities of the market, to be unhampered by any personal link and to be emotionally under control. They connect to one another through competitive
relationships” (372). In my thesis, this ‘order’ is related to the discussions of price and affordability.

### 3.1.6 The Industrial Order

Worth in this order is based on efficiency, “connected to the production of material goods, industrial worth is upheld by way of organizational devices directed towards future planning and investment” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 372). In this world, experts are worthy and are efficient, productive, and operational. “They implement tools, methods, criteria, plans, figures, graphs, etc. and their relationships are harmonious when they are organized, measurable, functional, standardized.” (373). In my thesis, this ‘order’ relates to participants’ expectations of convenience and simple solutions.

### 3.1.7 General Characteristics of the ‘Orders’

All of the orders share several characteristics that define their relationship to one another and to their application in real life scenarios.

**Encapsulated but not static**

As mentioned previously, the “orders of worth” are based on political philosophies, which are “embodied in the objectified devices that make up daily situations. They are now encapsulated in the core of a large number of ordinary institutions and social devices such as polling stations, shop-floors, media, artistic shows and family ceremonies” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 366). The six ‘orders’ are variously integrated into our everyday lives through objects, institutions, and social norms. The ‘orders’ themselves are, however, not static but are comprised of conventions that are often contested in real-life situations and are therefore subject to change and transformation. Even though the ‘orders’ are embodied in institutions, the conventions that define the ‘orders’ are dynamic and can shift, much as social norms change over time, especially in moments of disagreement or ongoing processes of contestation.
No hierarchy between orders

There is no inherent hierarchy to the “orders of worth”, meaning that each order can come to the fore at various times in various circumstances. This agnostic overview of the ‘orders’ avoids conclusions about what is right. Discussions here are therefore outside of moral philosophical debates. What is right is modelled from the “order of worth” or competing “worths” that are employed in a given situation.

Situational

All six ‘orders’ exist within the same social space yet individuals use one of the six ‘orders’ and affiliated conventions to justify actions in a given situation.

“It follows that a person must – in order to act in a normal way – be able to shift, during the space of one day or even one hour, between situations which are relevant in relation to different forms of equivalence. The different forms of equivalence are incompatible with one another, since each of them is recognized in the situation in which its validity is established as universal. It follows that the persons must have the ability to ignore or to forget, when they are in a given situation, the principles on which they have grounded their justifications in other situations in which they have been involved” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 365).

Within the realm of justification, the necessity of explanation makes it possible to examine the expectations, evaluations of worth, and people’s perceptions, moving the focus toward situations, “rather than actors’ innate characteristics, rejecting the view that actors have fixed dispositions.” (Forssell and Lankoski 2016, 5). It is during social interactions that various conventions are employed and one can see “how actors engage with plural conventions, or shared rules and norms, in coordinating… exchange” (3).

Summary

The “orders of worth” are inspired, domestic, civic, opinion, industrial, and market and all inhabit the same social space. There is no hierarchy between the ‘orders’ as they are employed in different situations and are therefore situationally dependent. All of the ‘orders’ are encapsulated in institutions and social norms and are based on criteria that are generally accepted as worthwhile. These criteria, however are
socially constructed and are therefore open to contestation and can change over time.

As I have mentioned before, I have applied this framework in two ways:

1) To the principles of the organization, because it is these that justify the existence of the organization.

2) To the explanations offered by respondents in which they explained what aspects of the Cooperative (and the goods it provides) they value and why they do or do not remain involved with the organization.
4 Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Case Study

My initial interest was in understanding how “alternative” food had manifested in Oslo, Norway and why people participate in alternative food networks in this context. In the past, I have been involved in many different capacities in various alternative food networks in several regions of the world (Arizona, USA; Illinois, USA; California, USA; more than half a dozen cities and towns in Australia). However, I have never endeavored to study it from the perspective of a student at an academic research center concerned with culture, environment and development. Learning about food and interacting with it in new ways was not necessarily new for me but the way in which I explore it here, was and still is.

My work began with a keen interest in learning how alternative food had manifested itself in the Norwegian context and I wanted to learn this through the experiences of others. To do this, I began speaking with participants (members, in this case) of an AFN (Oslo Kooperativet) I was already involved in. I did not set out with a theory in mind, a specific objective, nor a hypothesis I wanted to test. Instead, I sought to explore and learn about alternative food through the perceptions and experiences of others. This type of enquiry made qualitative research the best fit for my thesis.

Starting with no theory in mind, I hoped to collect data surrounding a certain phenomenon in order to explore larger concepts or issues. A case study, when looked at through grounded theory, becomes “a case [that] looks beyond the object immediately at hand. As a case of something, it bows before theory and seeks to move from a purely empirical level of exposition to a level of general statements.” (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 143). The insights I have gained definitely pertain to alternative food in Oslo, Norway, but may have limited reach when considering manifestations of alternative food in other regions or eras. There may be similarities between people’s perceptions of food, consumption of food, and interactions based around food in Oslo, to people in other cities or countries, but this is not where the intended value in my research lies. The value, hopefully lies in the descriptive
exploration of why people participate (or not) in an alternative food network in a given time and space. This is therefore a case study of the reciprocal and performative nature of networks and their participants which ultimately demonstrates the inherent moral complexity of everyday practices.

It is pertinent to mention that my academic background is in anthropology. This background informed my methods and though I used ethnography as an inspiration and employed some ethnographic techniques, I did not fully immerse myself in the community in a way that would suggest ethnographic research. Immersion was not possible because the Cooperative does not have a physical space from which it operates. All of the working groups have different functions that are performed at different times. It therefore seemed most practical to join one of the working groups, attend meetings, and participate in “shifts” in order to learn about how the organization is operated and how members interact with one another.

This approach has both positive and negative impacts on my research. It has benefitted my research because it encouraged me to adopt a level of participation in which I could interact with many members of the organization and participate in operations of the organization. Due to this participation, I was able to gather a great deal of information regarding the organization, its operations, principles-in-practice, and its members. However, I did not immerse myself into the organization or the lives of its members to the extent that I can claim I understand the full breadth and depth of all the constituent parts. Instead, I participated in many different activities, with many different members, throughout several months of research. In order to increase the breadth of my data and to gain a fuller picture of the subject and context, I complemented my participation with other methods of data collection, namely, semi-structured qualitative interviews and document analysis.

### 4.1.1 Observant Participation

I joined the Cooperative as a member in January 2016 and have been active in the Logistics group, one of five working groups of the organization, since September 2016. As a member of the Logistics group, I attend meetings, assist with and take responsibility for various processes, and engage in communication among members. By doing so, I have learned how the organization is organized and
operates, in *practice*. This level of interaction has allowed me to build my network of contacts and broadened my insight into how branches of the organization operate and how the responsibilities of the organization are distributed and carried out amongst members. This observant participation and accompanying interactions have given me the opportunity to learn some of the values, interests, motivations, and thoughts of members. This component of my research is important because there is often a gap between the intentions or stated principles of an organization and what actually happens on the ground. Observant participation allows me to see how intentions and principles are manifested in practice and to what extent practices uphold the organization’s principles. I also witnessed how members’ thoughts and actions are influenced by participation in the Cooperative and how this affects the way they make choices regarding food consumption more generally.

### 4.1.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Not knowing specifically what information I was hoping to gather, I drew up an interview guide consisting of topics I wanted to cover. However, I wanted the interviews to be fluid and to move between and among topics as the members saw fit. This was a practical decision. The people I spoke with all had varying levels of knowledge and experience with the Cooperative and I wanted to learn as much as I could from each one. Each person’s perspective offered a new angle from which to view the Cooperative. Over the course of my research, I conducted 16 interviews with people who are or have been involved with the organization. This includes core members, consumer members, ex-members (see Table 3), and one expert interview with someone who had extensive knowledge about the context in which the organization was originally founded.

Respondents\(^5\) choose where they would like to meet and for how long they would be interviewed. I had an interview guide that I memorized before the interviews in

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\(^5\) **Member**: one who has paid their annual membership fee, orders food bags from the Cooperative (regularly, or irregularly), and may or may not participate in the specified eight hours of volunteer work with the organization.  
**Informant**: a member who I did not have a formal interview with but with whom I spoke with about their thoughts and perspectives relating to my topic.  
**Respondent**: a member who participated in an interview with me.
order to touch on subjects relevant to my topic but allowed a natural flow of conversation. At the beginning of each of the interviews, respondents were told that their names and the information they provided would remain anonymous. Every respondent gave verbal consent to being interviewed.

The length of interviews depended on the interviewees. Interviews ranged from 25 minutes to over 90 minutes in length. The shorter interviews were quite short because respondents were only able to meet with me during their lunch break which only provided a 30 minute window of opportunity to talk. Twelve of the sixteen interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. During and after the interviews, I took notes to be sure to write down things that happened or thoughts that arose that could not be captured on the recording.

One of the ongoing challenges of my research was that I do not speak Norwegian fluently. All of my respondents were willing to be interviewed in English but this may have influenced their responses. Several mentioned that they did not have the vocabulary breadth that they would have had if I had conducted the interviews in their native language. This was likely true for most, if not all, of my respondents. Also, when I was interacting with people during my observant participation, I would often speak both Norwegian and English, depending on the situation. There is a high likelihood that there were moments of miscommunication or misunderstanding. However, I did my best to try to make communication as clear as possible during my interactions.

**Snowball Sampling**

Initially, I sent an email to the board members asking if I could use their channels of communication to ask members to participate in interviews. This request was denied because the board felt that members may believe my research was on behalf of the Cooperative. To avoid confusion, I sent individual emails to the members I was already acquainted with to ask for interviews. Four interviewees came from this initial round of requests. From the four I interviewed, I asked if they knew of anyone who would be interested in speaking with me. At this point, I employed the snowball method. I contacted the people that had been recommended by my initial interviewees via Facebook messenger. Of over 25 messages that were sent, I
received 4 more willing respondents. The remaining interviews were organized through friends-of-friends or friends-of-acquaintances.

This method of finding respondents means that in many cases I have interviewed people who may share similar ideas and perspectives regarding the Cooperative. Two of my interviewees share a residence. Based on their proximity both personally and spatially, I acknowledge that some of the information I gleaned from interviewees was likely similar. My sample is therefore not random and may not be representative of all of the members or all viewpoints of the Cooperative. Also, many of the people I interviewed were positive about the Cooperative and enjoyed speaking with me about it. This may imply that my data is biased with more examples of positive perceptions of Cooperative than is likely the actual case if I had interviewed a random sample of members.

Sample

I interviewed sixteen individuals. Three of the interviewees are core members, seven of the interviewees are consumer members, five interviewees are ex-members, and one interviewee was someone who worked extensively with organic and biodynamic food production in Oslo but was never a member of the Cooperative, though he was involved in the initial discussions as the Cooperative was being developed. In some form or another, all of the interviewees were or are involved in the Cooperative.

4.1.3 Desk work

Document Collection

Based on total transparency as a member-owned organization, the Cooperative has shared documents pertaining to meetings, agendas, and notes. Many of these documents are actually archived online and available to anyone who is interested in reading them. The online documents, as well as those that were shared with me, gave me an overall impression of the organizational structure, its aims, and the expectations of members. One of the first documents I read was a survey that had
been distributed by the Cooperative to its members in 2015. This was particularly informative and shaped many of my interview questions. I discuss this more below.

I have also read legislative documents and governmental reports that gave me an impression of the political context in which the organization has developed and the general attitude of Norwegians toward food.

Last but certainly not least, I have read countless articles and several books relevant to AFNs and their affiliated critiques in order to better understand how other researchers explore similar topics. After extensive reading, I found that other researchers discussed similar topics in relation to the “quality ‘turn’”. Research surrounding the “quality ‘turn’” and alternative food heavily influenced the trajectory I pursued and the analytical framework I adopted. I reflected on my data I obtained from my interviews and realized that though most of the members hardly ever say the word “quality”, it is, by my interpretation, what most of them spend their time discussing.

4.1.4 Analysis

Survey Analysis

The Cooperative distributed a survey via their email listserv in 2015 to get feedback from the members regarding member satisfaction with the goods, communications, and processes of the Cooperative. 227 members responded. The survey was a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer. I used this data in the beginning of my research to get a broad overview of what the members expected from the organization and whether their expectations had been fulfilled. This document, for my purposes, was an overview of member expectations and involvement. By reading the survey, I learned that out of nearly 2000 members, over 10% replied. Of the responses, I learned that members do not interpret the principles of the organization in the same way. For instance, some members asked for avocado though the Cooperative only sources goods from within the Oslo region and avocados are not grown in this region. I also learned that sustainability means different things to different members – one member specifically stated that tomatoes should not be included because tomato production in Norway is not
“sustainable”. Alternatively, there were members who asked specifically for more tomatoes during the summer season in order to have more variation in the food bags – showing that members’ expectations are sometimes not only different but at odds with one another. I also learned that of the 227 that filled out the survey, the vast majority of the respondents were very pleased with the Cooperative, the goods it provides, and the community it fosters. Armed with this information, I set out developing questions that would help me to better understand the members I would speak to: What about the Cooperative did they find valuable? What did sustainability mean to them? What aspects of the Cooperative met their expectations? Which aspects did not? How involved were they? What were their thoughts about local food? What was their main reason for joining?

Analyzing Interview Data

It is relevant to remind the reader that my background is anthropology but the analytical framework I eventually chose is not based in anthropology. After I had transcribed my interviews, I used the analysis program NVivo to code the data into what seemed to be relevant categories based on topics I was noticing in the data. Topics that were repeated in interviews informed my data groupings (e.g. animal welfare, sustainability, politics, creativity, health, trust, convenience, cost, organic, biodynamic). If I had continued along this trajectory, I theoretically could have then grouped the initial groupings into larger themes. It is possible that I would have come up with similar groupings to that of convention theory (CT). After I had decided to use convention theory, I went back through my data and recoded it from scratch. However, in hindsight, I could have taken the topics I had already coded and categorized them based on the “orders of worth” framework. For instance, animal welfare, organic, and sustainability could have been sub topics under the civic ‘order’. Trust, community, and new relations could have been subtopics under the domestic ‘order’. I draw attention to this because I think it speaks to the “encapsulated” aspect of the ‘orders’ that Boltanski and Thévenot developed. Though I likely would have developed different terms for my larger themes, and may have had more or fewer, generally, the ‘orders’ provided by CT seemed to offer a framework that was socially and culturally relevant to my data and my analytical process.
Using CT also enabled me to link my findings to others’ research. Several of the articles I think have particularly interesting findings used convention theory to analyze their data. The theory provides a helpful framework of categorization that enables me to not only look at my data in an interesting way but also join my research to other discussions in the agro-food literature. As I mentioned above, once I decided to apply CT, and the ‘orders’ that are provided as a framework, I went back through my data to re-code it according to the six “orders of worth”. This was challenging. In many cases, respondents discussed multiple aspects of the Cooperative (or the goods) at once. Due to this inherent complexity of my data, it took time to notice patterns among the members. However, I started to notice that the nature and level of the member’s involvement influenced what they spoke about and how. Therefore, in my Results section I have categorized the members based on their level of involvement in the organization (see Table 3).

As I present members’ explanations, I provide context before and after quotes to give the reader a sense of the entire dialogue. My interpretations of what ‘orders’ are present and how this relates to member’s perceptions are also in this section, rendering my “Results” chapter both descriptive and analytical. It is worth reiterating that much of my analysis refers back to “quality”. Again, though most members do not use this word, it was my interpretation that their discussions referred to notions of quality – largely informed by my research into the “quality ‘turn’” and the innate complexity of “quality”.

**Methodological Challenges**

My language abilities likely affected my research. I do not fluently speak Norwegian and though I have taken several Norwegian language courses over my two years of living in Oslo, my proficiency is less than adequate to carry on an unencumbered conversation. Many of the members I have interacted with were willing to talk with me in English though in some cases, we spoke Norwegian. In either case, the natural flow of conversation was likely disrupted and may have affected the length of responses from respondents and informants. As my Norwegian language skills have progressed over the past eight months, my understanding and ability to absorb more of the milieu of the Cooperative has increased during my observant participation.
I approached the Cooperative openly and honestly about my research. From the beginning, I was ‘the student studying the Cooperative’ and this likely affected the way in which other members interacted with me. Members were curious about my interest in the organization and my interest in them. This may indicate that my interaction with members was not necessarily similar to interactions between other members.

I acknowledge that I am an individual with my own background and bias that informs the way in which I understand the world. Due to my involvement in food in the past and my personal affinity for specific foods and production methods, my bias is likely present in my research. Though I have done my best to observe and report as accurately as I can, undertones of my bias are likely present throughout my thesis.

Due to the evolving nature of my project, I did not know exactly what I was looking for when I began speaking with people about my research. This resulted in interviews that were not specifically designed to be analyzed with the theoretical framework I chose to use. As I have mentioned, this created some challenges, not the least that I needed more time to digest my data and tie it into ongoing academic discussions.

**Ethical Considerations**

All participants were informed, at the time of the interview, that the source of the information they provided would remain confidential. The information I was seeking was neither particularly sensitive nor incriminating but the promise of anonymity may have enabled more direct and candid interactions.
5 Results

To discover “alternative” food in the Oslo context, I focused my attention on the member-owned and operated Oslo Kooperativet. Because this organization is essentially its members, I began by speaking with the members more pointedly about their motivations for being involved. As I spoke with them, it became apparent that there were a diversity of reasons for member involvement and that much of their explanations referred to the quality of the food and/or the processes relating to it. Most of the members did not use the term “quality” and likely do not perceive the term to be as ambiguous, complex, and important as research surrounding the “quality ‘turn’” suggests. However, I have used this term throughout my analysis because I interpreted members’ discussions as evaluations of the goods and the organization which reflect their conceptualizations of quality.

As my research continued and my interaction with members increased, I found that there was considerable variation in the responses members gave to my questions. So, I decided to look more closely at the written principles of the organization to get a sense of the values that underpin the work of the organization. Using CT, the six “orders of worth” provided a way of organizing and interpreting my data. Therefore, I mapped the ten principles of the Cooperative onto the six “orders of worth” and in doing so, I found that there are some tensions between the principles themselves. In this chapter, I present this section first. Then, I present the views of the members.

While reviewing the members’ interviews, I found some variation between core members, members, and ex-members that seemed significant so I chose to distinguish these three member groups. Generally, the views of the core members are fairly similar and very much reflect the ten principles. During the course of my conversations with core members, I learned of the processes that have developed over time that seem to reduce some of the fundamental tensions I interpreted as being present among the principles. When I reviewed the interviews with the people I categorized as the consumer members, I found that similar conventions are present in their interviews as are present in the ten principles. However, the way in which these members speak about the Cooperative and the goods was different than the
core members. Their responses, based on my analysis, referred to a wider range of ‘orders’. This range of ‘orders’ expands even further in relation to my analysis of the ex-members. In view of this diversity, I chose to discuss each of the individuals in the consumer and ex-member groups individually in the following sections.

5.1 The Cooperative

The Cooperative was founded by a group of individuals who were struck by the inequities of the existing food supply chain in Norway. According to one of the founders, “the producers and the consumers were the losers” (Nora) in the larger supply chain with retailers holding much of the power. These individuals decided to address this concentration of power in the supply chain in Norway by bypassing much of the existing chain entirely. In 2013, they formed Oslo Kooperativet (the Cooperative) as a “member-owned and operated cooperative for direct sales of local organic and biodynamically produced raw materials with prices that benefit both the farmer and the members” (Kooperativet.no). The organization was a success from the beginning and grew rapidly over the first few years with nearly 2000 members and a waiting list upwards of 300 members.

5.1.1 The Cooperative’s Structure

The Cooperative includes a board, five working groups, a coordinator, members, and producers. The following descriptions of each are based on the website descriptions (http://kooperativet.no/arbeidsgruppene/).

The Board

The board is the coordinating body of the Cooperative. It consists of active members from the working groups who meet once a month to discuss formalities (such as communications with the Food Safety Authority, Cultura Bank, or Brønnøysund Register) and to plan annual meetings and member meetings. The board also contacts and follows up with new cooperatives and addresses general inquiries via the Cooperative’s email. Based on my interviews, it became apparent that the board is a “working board” in that they are often involved in the day-to-day
decisions and contribute quite a bit of time to supporting the Cooperative’s operations.

The Working Groups

The working groups manage the daily operations of the Cooperative. The groups consist of Communications, Vegetable Procurement, Meat and Dairy Procurement, Arrangements, and the Logistics group. The working groups “make decisions based on consensus. This means that we work on current issues until we have come up with a joint solution. It does not mean that everyone will agree, but to find a solution that can work for everyone” (http://kooperativet.no/om-ko/organisasjonen/). Each group has various roles and they cooperate with one another to varying degrees.

The Communications group is in charge of providing content for the website, newsletter and the social media and has responsibility for building and sharing knowledge among members. They make sure that members receive relevant information regarding their membership, the organization, the delivery of goods, and the goods themselves. This group is in charge of building and maintaining the reputation of the organization. They develop three projects every six months which are updated in the blog, communicating information regarding the farms, members, workshops, or events that the organization organizes.

The Vegetable Procurement group is in charge of connecting farmers to the Cooperative, communicating what goods are needed and negotiating prices and discussing the delivery of the goods. They decide what goods, in what amounts, will be in the members’ bags every other week. This group has responsibility for ensuring the quality and variety in the bag and maintains cooperation with the farmers. Each member of this group is partnered with a specific farmer whom they work closely with and order goods from every three months. A group leader maintains the coordination of the other working group members. The roles within this group often require a couple of hours each week from each member.

The Meat and Dairy Procurement group do the same job as the group aforementioned but have different protocols that they follow in order to ensure that
the goods are delivered and remain at low enough temperatures to follow safety guidelines. Again, this demands a couple of hours each week for negotiations, discussions, logistics, and communication.

The Arrangements group is responsible for planning various activities such as social gatherings, courses, parties and farm trips. It is this group’s responsibility to strengthen the Cooperative’s sense of community and fellowship and to encourage active participation from the members. It is in charge of raising awareness about the organization, the goods it provides, and the values of the Cooperative by organizing events in which members can interact with one another and the producers. Members in this group plan events based on the budget of the organization following priorities set by the annual meeting. They are required to plan at least one event per year.

The Logistics group is responsible for all of the practicalities surrounding the delivery of bags. On each delivery day, a member of the logistics team is present at the pick-up locations to coordinate the packing and distribution of bags. They have an overview of the routines related to delivery, packing and retrieval, temperature measurement, cleaning, and keeping stock of goods. They assign tasks, communicate with the pick-up venue, follow up on deliveries and answer questions. Afterward, they send a summary and feedback regarding the packing and delivering of goods. This group also works to develop and maintain pickup-day routines critical to smooth operations. The group meets once every two months and each member of the group is expected to take responsibility for one pickup-day every two months.

**The Coordinator**

The coordinator is the only paid position in the Cooperative. It is his/her job to keep all of the working groups informed of one another’s ongoing tasks. The money that pays the coordinator comes from the annual member fee – the amount of time the coordinator works is based on the number of members there are each year and how much money the Cooperative has to pay this position. Each group has different responsibilities and the coordinator helps to synchronize these efforts. The
coordinator is in charge of the administration, coordination, and development of the Cooperative’s activities. The coordinator works closely with the board.

**The Members**

Individuals join the Cooperative by paying an annual fee ($250; $32), which covers the organization’s coordinator costs and gives the consumer member access to the ordering platform where they can purchase a produce bag ($210), a meat bag ($525) and/or a dairy bag ($420) every two weeks. As a member, they are expected to give some of their time assisting the organization with operations. This typically means that they participate in two ‘shifts’ each year, which amounts to 5-10 hours per year.

**The Producers**

The producers qualify for participation in the Cooperative based on the alignment of their production methods with the principles of the organization, which include organic, biodynamic, and fair trade. They must also be geographically proximate to Oslo in order to fit the requirements of “local” defined by the organization. Producers are not members, in that they do not pay an annual fee to be part of the organization and therefore they do not have formal voting rights within the organization. The following page has a map of where the farmers are located in relation to Oslo.

The ongoing operations of the organization rely on all of these actors to make the Cooperative successful.
Figure 6: Map of farms that work with Oslo Kooperativet

Here is a map of where the farmers are located in relation to Oslo. This map was taken from the Kooperativet Årsmelding 2016. Photo Credit: Mariann Freij
5.1.2 The Cooperative’s Principles

The Cooperative was founded on principles that are meant to foster new relations between consumers and producers in which they can know more about the other in order to nurture a sense of community from which respect and consideration of others and for the environment are embedded in the values of the organization and the goods. Below, I have included the principles of the organization, in full, translated from the website (http://kooperativet.no/om-o-k/10-grundprinsipper/).

“Our range of foods must be…

1. Grown and produced by organic and biodynamic principles: all the goods we offer are grown according to organic and/or biodynamic principles. This includes production methods that do not harm the soil or increase the amount of synthetic chemicals, fertilizers, or pesticides in our soil and our environment. The production methods are based on the desire for healthy and sustainable agriculture, fresh water, biodiversity and animal welfare.

2. Grown as locally as possible: the distance between the farm and the table is of crucial importance to the freshness, taste, and nutritional value of the food. The shorter the distance between where vegetables are grown and where they are eaten, the greater the environmental gain. By supporting local food production, we also support the conservation of knowledge and culture that is distinctive for the production of food in our local climate.

3. Seasonally based: our food offerings are determined by the season

Our food should be distributed in such a manner that…

4. Supports fair trade and direct sale: many farmers and food producers are hard pressed by prices which affects their income. This leads to negative social and environmental consequences both locally and globally. We ensure that there is as direct a relationship as possible between the Cooperative and the producers by creating direct personal contact.

5. Is environmentally friendly: we decrease our CO2 footprint by using resources with care; we reduce food waste, and reuse environmentally friendly materials.

6. Communicates and promotes knowledge about organic and biodynamic food: we make Oslo citizens more aware of how foods they eat reach their dinner table. We believe that increased knowledge of sustainable food production in the population will not only increase
support for the Cooperative but also will lead to increased awareness about making the right sustainable choices for the future. An important part is also sharing our experience with starting and operating the Cooperative to inspire other cities and communities to start similar initiatives.

7. Is economically sustainable and independent: in order for the Cooperative to have the best opportunities to grow and become a part of a sustainable future, we must be able to exist without external support. We thus become less vulnerable to changing priorities from public and private bodies. This means that we always cover our operating expenses through membership quotas, own income, and voluntary labor.

8. Is transparent and promotes trust in all points of production and distribution: we are open and honest about all our financial transactions and the choices we make in relation to our offer. This applies both to the producers who supply foods, all the members, and how we use our profits.

9. Is close and accessible: e work for organic and biodynamic foods not to be a gourmet luxury but a permanent and natural part of our everyday lives. Therefore, the Cooperative should be close and accessible to our members. We will make organic and biodynamic agricultural products available at a fair price, both for members and the farmers, and will always prioritize quality and sustainability before price.

10. Powered by a local working community: the Cooperative will maintain and encourage more than just the delivery of sustainable food. We work for the cooperative to be a platform where members can cooperate on positive initiatives based in their community. Such a platform can enable members to organize themselves around common needs, goals, and interests, to make the local community flourish.

5.1.3 The Principles and ‘Orders of Worth’

The principles serve as explanations for the existence of the Cooperative, why it is important and the values that underpin the work of the organization. Below I have provided a brief discussion of each principle and how, based on my interpretations, it relates to – or “maps onto” – one or more “order(s) of worth”. Based on my interpretation, the embedded values align mostly with the domestic and civic “orders of worth” which I will discuss more below. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

1. Organic and Biodynamic – all of the goods are grown by organic or biodynamic principles with embedded ideas of caring for the soil (exclusion
of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers), waterways, biodiversity and animal welfare. These considerations extend beyond society to include all life forms as well as an expanded conceptualization of fairness, which includes future inhabitants of the earth. This principle is based on concern for the “common good” and from a convention theory perspective, aligns with the civic ‘order’. This principle also relates to the renown ‘order’ in that producers are expected to be certified organic or biodynamic, or in the process of certification, in order to participate with the Cooperative.

2. Local food – this principle mentions that the less distance the goods travel, the smaller the environmental footprint, another consideration for the common good (civic). Tradition is also respected, with a statement that implies that supporting local producers, local knowledge and practices regarding food and production methods specific to the region can be preserved. These concepts align with the domestic ‘order’ with emphasis on tradition, trust, and learning from one another.

3. Seasonality – the food is determined by what can be grown seasonally in the region, with the implication that eating out of season is not “sustainable” by environmental standards (civic). The emphasis on seasonality is one of the educational aspects of the Cooperative in that people learn about the food they receive and the limitations of the region in order to make “sustainable” choices. Though not stated explicitly, the seasonality of goods encourages members to creatively use the seasonally available goods in new and interesting ways (inspired).

4. Supports fair and direct trade – this principle explains that farmers and food producers are disadvantaged by the existing systems of provision that do not provide livable wages and instead reproduce social and economic inequalities at the local and global level. The principle states that shortening the supply chain allows for direct contact between the producers and consumers, fostering new relations between actors (domestic). This also decreases the supply chain distance between producers and consumers, increasing the money that can go directly from the consumers pocket to the
producers. This is an alternative market strategy (market), recognizing that fair wages are an important aspect of local and global justice (civic).

5. Environmentally friendly – the conscious use of resources such as reducing food waste and (re)using environmentally friendly packaging materials reduces the CO2 footprint of the organization. This principle includes concerns for the common good and environmental wellbeing (civic).

6. Communication – the organization endeavors to communicate knowledge related to food, ecology, and biodynamic/organic production methods. Via their website, social media pages, and interaction of members, individuals gain access to information regarding how foods are produced, distributed, and consumed. The idea is that as more people learn about these topics, the more engaged they become thus leading to knew practices that support sustainable production and consumption (civic). They also hope to inspire other communities and towns to launch similar initiatives based on the successful model of the Cooperative (renown). The Cooperative promotes the spread of sustainable ideas with the implication that knowledge and platforms of interactions where ideas can be discussed brings members of the community together around new ideas and new ways of knowing and doing that encourage community development (domestic).

7. Financial independence – the organization does not rely on funding from public or private funders. This independence was established from the beginning so that the Cooperative is less vulnerable to changing priorities of public and private agencies (the operating expenses are covered by membership fees and volunteer labor). This organizational form allows the Cooperative to remain independent of outside agendas and it can carry out its operations as it sees fit. In this way, it is the members themselves that provide the financial crux based on an alternative market model. Arguably, this model is underpinned by domestic conventions with connotations of trust and interdependency among actors in the network.

8. Transparency – the organization prioritizes transparency to promote confidence around the production and distribution operations within the
organization. This includes transparency regarding meetings, operations, relationships, finances, and the production methods of producers. All actors in the network have access to information upon request (or sometimes sent out via email updates). By maintaining a high level of transparency, the organization demonstrates that they have nothing to hide from their members. This imbues trust between all actors involved and draws from conventions in the domestic ‘order’.

9. Accessibility – biodynamic and organic food should not be a gourmet luxury but a permanent and natural part of everyday life (civic). The organization endeavors to provide fair prices for both consumers and producers through direct communication and distribution. Their priorities lie in sustainability and quality, not in cheap prices. Practices of negotiation between core members and producers, and open channels of communication for consumer members, contribute to the organization’s inclusivity and accessibility (domestic).

10. Run by community – the Cooperative is meant to act as a platform of exchange of both goods and ideas. As a platform for collaboration dependent on the involvement of members, the organization can remain responsive and reflexive to changing needs and interests of its community. Members can collaborate on related projects based on common needs, goals, and interests which in turn nurture the community. This aligns with conventions in the civic ‘order’ – the common good – and the domestic ‘order’ – building building community.
Table 2: Principles mapped onto the “orders of worth”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>‘orders of worth’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Organic and Biodynamic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Local food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Seasonality</td>
<td>(x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fair and direct trade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Environmentally friendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Communicate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Financial independence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Transparency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Accessibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Community-run</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What clearly emerges is that for the most part, the principles align with the domestic and civic ‘orders’ and to a lesser extent draw from conventions of the renown, inspired and market ‘orders’. The ethics of care that are embedded in the organization lay the foundation of the purpose for the Cooperative with considerations for the common good including the environment, people and animals. Some of these principles, however, do present some challenges. I will address some of these challenges a priori before presenting how those that I interviewed described them.

The goal of financial independence ties the organization to its members and in so doing, becomes entirely reliant upon members to remain involved. Because the Cooperative receives no grant funding or money from outside sources, the Cooperative relies solely on the annual fee from members. To a certain degree, part of the “voice” of the members is encapsulated in the financial (and operational) structure of the organization. This means the Cooperative is free to do as it wishes without outside agendas steering the direction of the Cooperative. However, it also means that the Cooperative is dependent on member involvement, and therefore, member satisfaction. The organization is directly financially tied to the interests and needs of the members themselves, arguably, supporting a more domestic ‘order of worth’ dependent on trust and interdependency among actors in the network.
However, the Cooperative must also consider its viability by market considerations. With all of the financial support coming from members paying the annual fee (and not from producers), this principle creates a bit of a power imbalance between actors. The organization must remain relevant to its member base for the organization to survive. From a distance, it would seem that the exclusion of the producers in the payment structure of the organization could mean that the board, working, groups, etc. would perhaps focus more on the consumer members than the producers. Not all actors contribute monetarily to support the organization’s financial independence potentially leading to an unequal power distribution between actors. However, this paradox, as will become clear through later discussions, has been addressed via other processes in the organization. The producers do have channels through which they can make themselves heard and these likely offset the potential imbalance present in this principle.

There is another paradox present in principle nine. This principle states that the Cooperative places quality before price and considers both the consumer and the producer. However, it is challenging to pay the producers a livable wage and set the price of the goods low enough so that members and potential members perceive the goods as affordable. In this case, the Cooperative has to convey the quality of their goods as something more valuable than goods found in the grocery stores with prices that hide highly subsidized processes along the food chain. Though it can easily be argued that the Cooperative is not selling the same kind of goods as the grocery store, the grocery store is the frame of reference for most members. This is particularly challenging if the Cooperative wanted to actively increase accessibility of their goods to poorer households. This tension between a livable wage for the producer and a “fair” price for the consumer is not unique to the Cooperative. It is present in the existing food system today as well as other alternative food networks and is an ongoing challenge.

The Cooperative provides an alternative way for people to have access to organic and biodynamic goods. It also provides new ways of engaging in and learning about foods. It is likely these characteristics that attract members. However, members have varying perceptions of what the Cooperative is and what it does. Below I
explore the perceptions of members and demonstrate how these varying perceptions affects the form and function of the Cooperative.

Figure 7: Kooperativet bag

The reusable bags the Kooperativet packs with vegetables every two weeks. Photo credit: Kooperativet.no homepage
5.1.4 Members and “Orders of Worth”

I began each interview by simply asking members to tell me a bit about their involvement with the Cooperative. It was during the interviews that I got a sense of how much the members knew about the Cooperative, what aspects of the organization resonated with them, and to what degree they were satisfied with the organization and the goods it provides. It was through the interviews that I learned about the organization, as it is perceived by its members (and ex-members). This painted a picture of the Cooperative, not all at once with all the details filled in, but a small part here and small part there. It is only recently, after much reflection on what I have heard from others, that I am beginning to understand how the Cooperative operates in practice in space and time and how the variations of interpretations from members brings different aspects to the fore than maybe would have otherwise surfaced if I had done exclusively secondary research.

It was not until I had sifted through my data a number of times in various ways that I found convention theory to be a useful tool in finding patterns between and among members. In this section, I invite the reader to explore the thoughts of the respondents based on the “orders of worth” discussed in my “Analytical Framework” chapter.

There was a marked difference between the ways members discussed the Cooperative. Some members have been involved for years in various capacities and could easily be called experts of the Cooperative, discussing the operations, the challenges, and the processes that make it work. Other members had been members for a short while, reliably paying their member fee and enjoying the goods they received but were not fully aware of how the goods ended up in their bag. I also spoke with people who were no longer members but had been involved at some point. Their reasons for joining and for leaving provide insight into how the Cooperative does or does not meet the expectations of some people. Conversations with members, particularly the ex-members, brings to the fore the inherent complexity of navigating food systems and the role that ideas about quality play in this process. The perspectives from the different member groups are as valid and as insightful as the others. By speaking with a range of people who knew various amounts about the organization, I was able to get a sense of the breadth of
interpretations of how the Cooperative and the goods it provides redefine quality when it comes to food and community. Not only that, I was better able to understand how and why some people engage in alternative food systems.

The framework I have chosen provides a fairly clear-cut way of classifying and analyzing the data – in principle. In practice, the data was not tidy and not easy to categorize. It is not easy to classify an explanation as purely “domestic” or “inspired”; the boundaries are often fuzzy. I have done my best to remain true to what I felt the interviewee was attempting to convey. I have sought to select snippets of interviews that reflect a sense of the entire conversation. At times, this means that though the quote may not refer to something specifically, it embodies a meaning beyond just the words themselves that was conveyed in much of the interview. The audio recording of interviews allowed me to return to the conversations many times to explore the dialogue and ensure that quotes were representative of what I believe interviewees expressed. I did my best to set my innate bias aside and truly listen to the respondent but my choice of quotes and the way in which I have evaluated them comes with an entirely unavoidable level of interpretation.

The respondents have been categorized based on their level of participation in the Cooperative. These categorizations serve my purposes of discussion here, but in practice, members can move from one category to another as they take on, or leave behind, positions of responsibility.

Below is a table with a brief explanation of how I have grouped the respondents.

**Table 3: Description of member groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Core Member</strong></th>
<th><strong>Consumer Member</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ex-member</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This group consists of the board members, the coordinator, and the members who participate in the working groups.</td>
<td>The members that pay the annual fee, order food bags and contribute to a couple of “shifts” a year, I refer to as consumer members.</td>
<td>This group of respondents were members at some point but are not currently members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Core Members

In this section, I discuss the dilemmas that face those who most clearly represent the values of the organization, as specified in the principles. The views of the three members I have categorized as core members are fairly consistent to one another (as one might expect) so I have largely combined them. These members know the most about the Cooperative and were able to share a lot of information regarding the founding of the Cooperative, how it works, who is involved and the ways actors in the network interact. Most of the discussions focused on how the Cooperative and core members navigate other actors’ perceptions and how they balance these perceptions and expectations through processes of negotiation between actors. These negotiations are key to the successful operations of the Cooperative.

What I have learned is that the processes within the Cooperative are dynamic, flexible and built on relationships of respect. The core members value the time they spend interacting with one another, other members, and the producers. This is not to say that they do not find their involvement challenging or even frustrating at times. It is merely to point out that they work hard for something that feels worthwhile and meaningful to them. The ‘orders’ were not directly discussed at any point, of course, because not even I knew this would be the way I would reflect on their responses. However, I have chosen examples that illustrate how the members talk about the Cooperative and how this maps onto the “orders of worth” framework to demonstrate the extent to which the organization’s processes are aligned with similar ‘orders’ present in the principles. All of these conversations took place at different times but I have chosen to include quotes from different respondents that reinforce or refer to similar topics. Discussing what I learned in this way best illustrates how the core members navigate specific challenges based on similar approaches, guided by the principles of the Cooperative.

Marie⁶, a core member who is actively involved in the Cooperative and has been for some time explained to me the overarching goal of the Cooperative. “The reason [the Cooperative] exists is for the farmers, really. Or it’s to encourage organic food

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⁶ All names have been changed to respect the anonymity of the respondents.
production and be a channel between the farmer and the customer. We really want to support them”. The Cooperative was founded to support organic and biodynamic production methods and to do so, the Cooperative formed relationships with producers who met that criteria. As was mentioned in the principles section, this concern for the environment is rooted in conventions from the civic ‘order’. Nora, one of the founders explained that, from the beginning, it was important to create “different channels where you can encourage organic production” and she elaborates “we had quite a bit of focus on the seasonality and the organic local farmers. I think it was very important for many to support Norwegian agriculture. I’m interested in organic farms but in my heart I am interested in the farmers”. Nora indicated that it was not just concern for the environment but the founders were also concerned about Norwegian agriculture and the producers who were not incorporated into the larger distribution system in Norway. Throughout my interviews with both Marie and Nora, it became clear that their references to the farmers were not only based on more abstract concerns for the common good - supporting environmentally friendly production methods - but they also genuinely cared for the farmers. It is hard to know whether this more interpersonal concern was based on conventions of the domestic ‘order’ from the start, but that seemed to be the case during our conversations. Both of them know and interact with the farmers, albeit to different extents, and this has influenced the way in which they contribute to operations in the Cooperative. Both know that the Cooperative is important for the farmers they work with and both value the fact that the Cooperative supports these relationships.

In order to pursue the fundamental goals of providing a livelihood to these producers and supporting organic and biodynamic food production, the Cooperative founders (and core members) work to connect producers to consumers. They strive to do so in a way that redefines the binary roles of “producer” and “consumer”. As is evident by the governing model itself, the Cooperative is intended to be a platform of interaction that enables members to build relationships among all the actors involved. The Cooperative has successfully created an alternative market that moves beyond industrial and market logics (efficiency and price) that is based on common values and new relations between actors. Redefining and maintaining these relations requires a lot of time, energy and work to balance the different
expectations and needs of everyone. This approach requires that actors consider one another, not just as actors in the network, but as social beings with various perceptions about what is and is not “quality”, or “fair”, or “just”. It is, in some ways, the antithesis to the idea of *homo economicus*, the rational, self-interested consumer. The Cooperative model depends on the consideration people give to others.

For the Cooperative to persist, the core members must also consider the satisfaction of the members. Marie states that “if we’re not giving the members a good product, then it is not going to work”. Here in lies an ongoing tension between the principles the organization is based on and the reality of supporting a cooperative model. The Cooperative financially depends on consumer members for the annual fee and needs a reliable consumer base in order to support the producers. The Cooperative remains flexible and has tried different approaches to keep all the actors in the network happy. In order to satisfy the members lately, the Cooperative is trying is to be “a bit more demanding, in terms of variety and quality. Particularly at the end of the year”. At the end of the year and the beginning of the year, when not much can be grown the in Oslo region, the goods supplied to the Cooperative are those that can be stored, of which there is limited variety compared to what can be found at the grocery stores. The drop in the number of bags that are ordered during this time of year is significant (August bag orders can be upwards of 500 bags every two weeks while orders in March and April can be as low as 100 bags every two weeks). In order to address this, the Cooperative has to balance the environmental constraints that the producers face while also considering the demands of the consumer. “We don’t want anything to get wasted. We want it to get eaten but we want our members to get a good deal”. Though primarily concerned about the waste of food, Marie acknowledges the fact that members have to feel like they are getting a good deal. How this deal is perceived is variable based on the members’ perceptions. The Cooperative has an email account that all members can send feedback to. Marie admits that she appreciates and indeed encourages members to communicate but that it is nearly impossible to meet everyone’s criteria.

It is likely that members’ perceptions of a “good deal” is framed, at least to some degree, by the larger market context. There is not a reliable way to measure the
value of the goods the producers provide other than to compare them to what is offered on the general market and then to factor in that it is local, organic, biodynamic, supports a local organization, etc. Many of these cannot accurately be summed up in a price tag. One way the Cooperative attempts to communicate the value of the goods (and the value of the organization) is through the renown ‘order’, or building and maintaining the image of the Cooperative and what it stands for. This is done via the website, social media and email communications, all of which remind members of the other values wrapped up in their membership.

Both the Arrangements group and the Communication group help to reinforce the intrinsic values of the Cooperative and the goods it provides. This is done through planned group activities and ongoing updates to the social media pages and the website to remind members that the money goes straight to farmers; farmers who use production methods that are environmentally friendly and depend on the members support. However, this is not always enough. It could easily be argued that the price for a bag of goods from the Cooperative is very reasonable when compared to organic products in the store (210 nok for the produce bag, 420 nok for the dairy bag, and 525 for the meat bag). In addition, the goods are local and this is not easy (nearly impossible) to find from grocery store chains. However, the core members recognize that there are some possibilities to address member dissatisfaction while not demanding something unreasonable from the farmers. The core members have encouraged farmers to include value added products such as juice concentrate, herbed salts, dried herbs, etc. in order to try to maintain member satisfaction and to keep bag orders more consistent throughout the year.
Figure 8: Contents of a dairy bag and a vegetable bag

Here is an example of the goods that come in the Kooperativet bag. The kale, garlic, apples, potatoes, onions, and carrots are from the vegetable bag. The milk, kusmyra, feta, brown cheese, goat cheese, and block cheese are part of the dairy bag. These particular contents were from the September 21, 2017 bags. However, the contents of the bags change depending on what is seasonally available. Photo credit: Erin Dumbauld

What is interesting here is that the organization must consider the expectations and perceptions of their consumer members, which are often framed by a context that the Cooperative cannot control and they weigh this against the practical limitations of what can be provided by the farmers. From an “orders of worth” perspective this is a tension between the civic/domestic ‘orders’ of the organization and the market and industrial ‘orders’ that largely inform current economic relations which inform expectations of members (i.e. convenience, variety, price). In response to this tension, processes within the organization have emerged that enable the core members to seek an agreement between actors with different priorities. This agreement is sought through open, discursive channels of communication. The procurement group does not demand specific items but instead works to find a solution that can work for everyone. “The farmers”, Marie says, “are very much a part of the process”. Ongoing, inclusive negotiations are an essential part of the Cooperative. Not only do these processes hold the Cooperative to its principles, they also strengthen the sense of community through direct dialogue between the core members and the producers. The members that engage in these processes get
firsthand experience in the work it takes to make this model successful and though it can be exhausting, many of the core members find this important and meaningful.

For example, a core member, Magnus, who is active in the Meat and Dairy Procurement group stated that, “meeting the farmers was very touching and actually still is. Always when we have meetings with the farmers”. He was recalling the first time he met the farmers at the Cooperative’s launch event in 2013. He was struck by the speeches given by the farmers as they explained how excited they were about the Cooperative and how it could contribute to their livelihoods. This emotional aspect of the work Magnus does on the part of the Cooperative was ignited by his first encounter with the farmers and remains an important reason why he is still involved.

As one would expect, open, ongoing dialogue is not easy to maintain. Marie explained that “we try as hard as we can to be a reliable and good income stream and I think we are quite generous with prices. Farmers tend to name their prices and we tend to say, ‘ok’”. She said that sometimes this means they pay different prices to different farmers for the same product.

“We recognize that in some cases that if you are small-scale, production costs are higher and that is something we feel is a part of providing a fair price. The farmers have to deliver to Oslo and for some producers that is a bigger issue than for others. Some people pay another company to do it; some people do it themselves. We try to recognize this and support the smaller producers as well.”

This consideration of the different capabilities of the various producers requires the core members to constantly reflect on what quality means and how the processes of production and distribution affect this quality. Quality is therefore partly evaluated based on the perspectives and realities of each individual producer. Of course, this has challenges as well. Marie admits this has created some tension between the producers.

“We had a meeting with all of our farmers recently and it was brought up that producers shouldn’t be punished for being efficient. How far do we go? How much do we just say to farmers ‘name your price, we’ll go for it’”.
Fairness is not singularly defined but contested and can create some tensions between actors in the network. The remarkable aspect of the Cooperative’s approach is that the core members try to cooperatively find a compromise that can work for everyone. This does not result in rigid rules but seems to be accepted as an ongoing process of negotiation within the organization.

The core members also expressed that there was more potential in the Cooperative than just being an alternative provisioning network. Magnus, a member who has been very involved since the launch, commented on the inspiration the Cooperative can provide more broadly. “It [the Cooperative] engages people in issues and also empowers people to maybe do things about it. Not the food system necessarily but all kinds of actions”. He believes the organization can act as a springboard from which others may find avenues through which to pursue individual and collective action in the name of better care of the environment and society. Magnus expressed that the Cooperative is an example of an idea that was formed into a real entity that makes real change in real peoples’ lives.

To summarize, these members are the most familiar with the Cooperative, what it does, how it does it, and the challenges it faces and this is what they discussed. There was little mention of their personal perceptions of the goods the organization provides, suggesting that, being involved in the process (procurement/operations) of the organization influences the way in which they speak about food. Though I specifically asked each of them about their perceptions of the goods the Cooperative provides, little to no time was spent on actually discussing their personal preferences. I interpreted this to mean that for these members, the goods, and perhaps food more generally, is seen less as a product that meets or does not meet expectations, and more as a process. Perhaps this is the case because they are the process. They are deeply involved in the processes of procurement and provisioning, and by default have a clearer idea of the processes related to food. This has the potential to fundamentally shift their perceptions of food and the food supply chain more generally and can change the way in which they interact with food. For instance, if they perceive themselves as part of the process of food, potentially they no longer perceive themselves as “consumers” in the simplified sense the term is often characterized by. By extension, the farmer is not purely a
producer. In other words, being the process makes visible - and tangible - the environmental and social connections we have to one another.

From an “orders of worth” perspective, I found that when participants are involved more often and have more contact with the producers and with other members, the inspired, civic and domestic ‘orders’ come to the fore. Sometimes ‘orders’ build upon one another and add momentum to the values core members appreciate, ultimately fueling the operations of the Cooperative. Members expressed feeling energized and connected in a way that enables them to feel part of a community that pursues collective action toward the greater good. Many of the core members I spoke to consider domestic and civic ‘orders’ when purchasing goods elsewhere. This suggests that deep involvement in the organization, more deeply embeds social and environmental values into the practices of those involved.

Table 5 below shows which “orders of worth” I believe core members employed during their discussions. These results are very similar (as one would expect) to my analysis of the ten principles and how they map onto the “orders of worth”. It is likely clear at this point how domestic and civic ‘orders’ are built into the organization and how these are also present in responses from the core members. I believe that when Magnus described the emotional connection he experienced at the launch party and continues to feel when he works with producers comes from the inspired ‘order’ since relations between people in this ‘order’ are often based on emotion. Though his emotion stems from new relations with the producers, the way he described this connection was based on emotion that then fueled his desire to participate. I also felt as if Marie expressed conventions from the market and industrial ‘orders’ when she discussed how the Cooperative determines the quality of goods and that this is at least partially based on the broader market. Though she personally does not determine quality this way, she acknowledges that she must, to some extent, in order to consider the expectations of some of the members.
Table 4: List of core members and the “orders of worth” I interpreted as being present in their explanations in interviews

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<th>Inspired</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Civic</th>
<th>Renown</th>
<th>Market</th>
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<tr>
<td>Magnus</td>
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**Consumer members**

I have categorized six interviewees as consumer members. To clarify, these members pay their annual fee, order food bags, and most of them give 5-10 hours of their time per year to helping the organization. Based on my conversations with consumer members, it became clear that they were members of the Cooperative because they generally agreed with the principles and many wanted to join the organization because it provided access to goods with embedded values (organic, direct trade) and allowed people to be a part of an organization that was based on ethics of care. There is overlap between the between the core and consumer members and the “orders of worth” I interpreted as being present in their explanations. It is my interpretation that discussions from both core and consumer members were mostly underpinned by conventions in the domestic and civic ‘orders’ and both groups appreciated the role the Cooperative plays in reinforcing this. However, the way in which these members discussed their membership indicates the difference between this group of members and the core members. The consumer members tended to focus on what they received from their membership, and not on what the Cooperative does. It may seem obvious, but it is worth pointing out, that this reflects their chosen level of participation in the organization. People tend to discuss what they know and consumer members know what they get and what they like but they cannot elaborate on operations or processes they know little about. What sets these two groups apart does not seem to be to which “orders of worth” underpin their statements but the content of their explanations. For example, the core members gave examples of negotiation processes that are based on civic/domestic ‘orders’ while the consumer members discussed the same ‘orders’ but in relation to the goods they received or the relations they felt the Cooperative enabled. The difference lies in the nature and level of involvement of the members in the organization.
Many of the respondents said the organization was inspiring, educational, and meaningful. The goods themselves were described as healthy, wholesome, tasty, and natural. For some, it reminded them of home and of flavors they missed. These descriptions demonstrate what is valuable to these members and why they remain members but it also reflects their relationship with the Cooperative. Consumer members spoke more abstractly about the organization and more pointedly about the goods and the embedded values in the goods, which interestingly seemed to “map” to a wider range of “orders of worth” (than both the “mapping” of core member responses and the principles). As mentioned, the core members spoke little about the good themselves and more about the organization’s processes. In other words, the conversations I had with core members taught me a lot about the organization and about the individual I was speaking with. My conversations with the consumer members taught me a lot about the individuals and their perceptions of the Cooperative and the goods. This distinction may seem minor but it is important.

I found some patterns, or tendencies within this member group. There was a tendency for the consumer members to discuss the community aspect of the Cooperative though none of them are currently involved in positions of responsibility in the Cooperative. This is not meant to discredit the participation of these members. The bags they order support the organization and the affiliated producers and their monetary contributions are critical to the funding of the coordination of the organization. It is merely to point out that there are many ways of being a member and filling roles of responsibility is not a requisite for members to feel as if they are part of a community. Regardless of the level of their personal involvement, the governing model of the Cooperative, based on cooperation and interaction of members and actors in the network is an important aspect that most members felt was worth mentioning and in some cases, reiterating.

Many of the consumer members enjoyed the fact that the Cooperative challenged them to be creative with the goods they received. Additionally, several members felt it allowed them to make concrete change. It is impossible to measure how the membership benefits the environment in a concrete way, but it is more apparent to members that they have an impact in the lives of producers. This is communicated
via emails, the website, and through the goods, all of which reinforce the connections between members and the farmers.

In this section, I discuss each respondent individually because responses were much more diverse with regard to their motivations (i.e. which ‘orders’ were significant) than those of the core members. Though several of the respondents mention similar themes in their interviews, I chose not to organize this section by topic because reoccurring themes, or topics, were often connected to different ‘orders’ or involved a number of topics/Themes/‘orders’ as to make the combination confusing. Below, I explore how the consumer members describe their involvement in the organization and I invite the reader to once again, apply a convention theory “lens” as they read the following explanations.

Celine

Celine has been a member for several years and appreciates that the Cooperative connects her to farmers and to food through learning, connecting, and engaging. Based on our conversation, I believe the value she finds in her membership is based mostly on conventions from the domestic and civic ‘orders’ but there are times when she refers to the inspired ‘order’ as well. The Cooperative is a medium that provides social interaction, connects her to goods with embedded values she feels are important, and challenges her in ways she finds rewarding.

“More and more people are starting to value taste and also the local food, the history behind the food”. For her, “food is more than just something you throw into your body; it is something with a story. It is more than just the hipster people concerned with taste.” She cites the microbrewery trend in Oslo and says this helps to teach people “beer is not just beer, yogurt is not just yogurt”. Here, Celine is discussing how the goods themselves hold a story, and are therefore a medium through which people can explore flavors and connections to people and place. Celine said that the Cooperative encourages

“Gratefulness of eating, not taking things for granted; really being present while eating. Recognizing that this has taken effort and there are different kinds of beans and tomatoes and making us more aware of our connection to the soil through food”
The goods embody the efforts of the farmers and the logistical work of the core group members. They are the physical embodiment of labor, based on care. They also demonstrate the variety among certain crops – potatoes, tomatoes, greens, beans etc. and these varieties are chosen not for their exotickness or uniqueness, but because they can handle the climatic conditions of Norway. In this sense, they are a reflection of place and of nature and of Celine’s connection to these through the act of eating.

She commented that she especially likes “*vegetables with dirt on them. It is rustic and a close thing and I feel part of a community.*” Washing the dirt off vegetables, especially root vegetables, before sending them to the market shortens their shelf life. Therefore, the dirt is left on the vegetables for practical purposes but it also serves as a reminder to Celine that these vegetables have not travelled a long distance and do not need to comply with the esthetic standards of retailers. The dirt’s presence is a reminder of the shorter distance between Celine and the farmer, both spatially and relationally, made possible through the work of the Cooperative.

“I feel more in tune with this community and their values than I feel when I go into a store and I have no idea what happened before this produce was shipped there, washed, and plastic wrapped. It doesn’t give me that much.”

She knows the goods meet social and ecological criteria that she values and this is more difficult to know when shopping for goods elsewhere.

She joined the Cooperative for many reasons but reiterated a number of times that she was concerned for farmers and their livelihoods. She is “*really worried about Norwegian agriculture...the narrow focus on price, efficiency, and not valuing the work of the farmer*”. Here she implies that consumers generally draw from only the market and industrial ‘orders’ to inform their purchase decisions and she sees this as directly at odds with valuing the labor involved in food production. Her concern for the welfare of the farmer encourages her to buy goods as often as possible from the Cooperative despite the fact that she finds the goods to be expensive.

Because labor and ethics of care are important to her, when she receives goods from the Cooperative, she does her best to use the produce and this challenges her to find new ways of preparing the food.
“It (the membership) challenges me to be creative with my cooking. I have so many vegetables that I don’t want to waste so I end up using it because I realize this is what Norwegian farmers can offer now…and the Cooperative doesn’t care if it is a bit weird carrot as long as it is tasty and good quality.”

The appreciation she has for the labor involved in food production and the fact that she can support this through her membership makes her feel as if she is taking a political action. “I liked the idea that you pay directly to the farmers. There is nothing in between. So kind of taking the power back as a citizen”.

It is not only the goods that remind her that she is part of a larger community. When Celine fulfills her “shift” requirements as a member, she has found it to be rewarding and energizing.

“It gives me a lot of energy and it has been really nice. You find a special kind of people when you are at dugnad\(^7\). They are really engaged in food politics, and taste, and in organic agriculture in general. Like open-minded and sporty and just do things”.

For her, the Cooperative brings together people who are active, open-minded, engaged and who have a ‘we-can-do-this’ attitude. This suggests that she finds the Cooperative to be a good community in itself as well as springboard from which to engage in efforts focused on supporting the common good.

To summarize, based on our conversation, it seemed to me that Celine explained the value of her membership with the Cooperative based on conventions from domestic, civic and inspired “orders of worth”. She emphasized that she values the connection the organization provides between herself and the farmer, environment, and others. She is aware of the processes related to food and appreciates that her membership in the Cooperative makes those processes more personal.

**Ida**

When the Cooperative began, Ida was a core member, active in the logistics group. Though she is no longer a core member, she spent a fair amount of the conversation recounting the times when she was more active suggesting that she particularly

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\(^7\) Dugnad is a Norwegian term for voluntary community work.
enjoyed this aspect of “being” a member. Through her participation, she learned that other members value that the Cooperative encourages interaction between members, which contrasted with her own inclination toward efficiency – a convention of the industrial ‘order’ – and now she appreciates the value of the community aspect of the organization – corresponding to conventions of the domestic ‘order’. Her initial interest in the Cooperative was related to the originality of the idea and the energy of those who started it suggesting that ‘quality’ contains conventions from the inspired ‘order’. She also emphasizes that the Cooperative reconnects her to ‘good’ food in a way that benefits her health and reminds her of the connection she had to food production when she was growing up.

Ida commented on the first year of the Cooperative: “I really loved the way that it was young people doing it so it was really fun to be a part of it”. For her, part of the charm of the Cooperative was that it was founded and maintained by her peer group. Though I doubt she would be disappointed to know that many of the members now are older than she is, her comment speaks to the energy, momentum and excitement of being part of the Cooperative in the beginning and for her, this was one of the reasons to be a part of it. Her choice to take on a role of responsibility in the beginning was based on the appeal of the passion for the project.

She explained that when she first started helping with the Cooperative, she tried to be as efficient as possible while packing the bags.

“I’m a very efficient person…we were done an hour before we were supposed to be done and then after a while I realized that it isn’t about that. People are coming because they have these three hours of helping and they want to talk to each other and it is so fun to see them exchange phone numbers in the end of packing. It is just a thing to hang out and meet each other. It is much more about people coming together than about doing a job or being efficient.”

During her time as an active member, she learned that the members found the ‘shifts’ valuable as a social gathering (domestic) and not as a duty that had to be carried out as efficiently as possible (industrial). For her, seeing this dynamic between the other members offered a new perspective from which to approach tasks
not just within the Cooperative but also in other parts of her life. “So it was good for me to learn to let go of a bit of the control”.

She also appreciated that the Cooperative enabled her to speak with the farmers that produce her food and that it “makes it feel like a little town and I love that”. The interaction that is an innate part of the Cooperative model gave Ida the sense of being part of a more intimate community though she lives in the city.

Another reason Ida joined was related to how her childhood shaped her expectations for food. Ida’s family works on a farm in an EU country and she described her move from the farm to Norway. “When you have access to good food and then suddenly you move…it is sad. Norway is so sad. So it was really cool to have access to food like that in such an easy way”. When she came to Norway she was disappointed in the produce she found in the stores so was delighted when she found the Cooperative. For her, involvement in the Cooperative reminded her of time spent on her family’s farm. “It was really fun to start working with it and remembering the energy from being on the farm”. Here again, she references the energy she felt when she was part of something she enjoyed. The Cooperative provides her with goods that reconnect her to memories of home and the energy she draws from those memories.

Ida expressed frustration with the existing food system and appreciated that the Cooperative gave people an alternative. “It is just so cool when you can skip the whole thing. There is no talk involved, no bureaucracy…the logistics are not in place in Norway for small producers to offer their food” and she feels the Cooperative addresses this and “it works so well”. For her, the Cooperative offers a solution to issues with the food system that is “just so simple and easy”.

She has also learned how to be more resourceful when it comes to using a limited range of vegetables. “I mainly make vegetarian food so it has been fun to experiment with root vegetables from October till May. I have gotten good at making dishes I love with root vegetables, like minestrone.” She enjoys that the goods challenge her to be creative and she adapts recipes to suit the available produce.
Ida also commented that the goods provided by the Cooperative enable a healthier lifestyle. “It definitely gives me much more energy to eat well. It feels so good”. She elaborated on this by saying that she feels healthy when she eats kefir, fermented foods, fresh foods, and vegetarian meals. Quality was often informed by her body’s reaction to it.

“I can notice now that I am much more sensitive to things like coffee and alcohol. I can’t eat fast food. It goes straight through my body. It is super weird. My body just doesn’t want that. And it is nice that my body does it by itself.”

Though her explanation was specifically geared toward her personal health, I suggest that this is part of the civic ‘order’ because of the Norwegian context. Norway is a welfare state and maintaining one’s individual health can be seen as taking responsibility of one’s self for the common good.

To conclude, Ida reflected a fair amount on her time as a more active member suggesting that her level of involvement at that time was particularly rewarding. Generally, she seemed to discuss food based on the processes related to it. For instance, she commented on the energy she feels when she is part of the process, how she revaluated her proclivity for efficiency as she watched others interact in the packing “shifts”, and how her body’s reaction to food informs her food choices. The organization gave her a community through which she could connect more closely with producers, other members, and food. She also explained that the goods she receives challenges her to creatively adapt recipes so she can eat foods that she enjoys and that contribute to her health. From my perspective, Ida’s conceptualization of quality is underpinned by conventions form the inspired, domestic and civic ‘orders’.

Anna

Anna emphasized the importance of having access to organic and environmentally friendly foods that are healthy. Though she does mention that her friends are a part of the reason she is a member, she does not mention the sense of community that many of the other members discussed. It is my interpretation that most of her explanations are rooted in conventions from the civic order, with the environment being a main consideration. Though she began researching food because of personal
health problems, the main reason she continues her membership is linked to her concern for the environment and the impact food production and consumption has on the planet.

Anna heard about the Cooperative a couple of years ago and has been a member since. Anna admits that her membership is

“probably a lot about the people that I know who were a part of it when it started and they're very into food and I am very into eating food, so I like hanging out with them. But for me it’s not the biggest thing in my life and in that sense I am a more normal member of the Cooperative but because I hang out with them, these people, I kind of get their framework for free and most people don't.”

Based on conversations with her friends, Anna said she liked that the Cooperative model enabled members to trace the story of food. Moreover, the story of food is important to her because it encourages more awareness about food - what it means, where it comes from, who it effects, what types we eat, why we eat it. etc. “One of the things that made me more conscious is that it is not just about the food that we eat but also the story that we link to it”. Anna has read several popular food authors - including Pollan and Foer – and commented that these books bring a new perspective to how we, as humans, interact with food. She found that Jonathon Safran Foer convincingly criticizes the stories that society, big business, and politicians tie to food and that these stories support unsustainable and unhealthy food systems. Based on our conversation, it seemed to me that she is able to more accurately construct a narrative around the food she eats (and why) when she is more directly connected to the production of it, and this is important to her.

In our conversation, Anna told me that she had been sick for quite some time and she started to explore the possibility that it was linked to the foods she consumed. She has experimented with diets that cut out specific foods (veganism, vegetarianism, gluten-free, sugar-free) to see if that helped her to feel better. During this time, she also wanted to find foods that reduced her environmental footprint. She said that her exploration of food was initially about her health but became “mostly about environmentalism”. Now, she only buys foods that are natural and organic and the Cooperative is an important source for these foods, making it “easier to live the organic life that I lead.”
“I have been conscious about what I eat and what I buy…and then more and more I have gotten out of the normal buying and eating (that is typical) in Norway. So I feel like I am at the forefront of that change, and the Cooperative is a part of that. And for me that feels like a super organic way to be in the world. It is almost weird to me that people still function in the old way, where they go to a store and buy things.”

She has so drastically changed her consumption patterns over the past ten years that she finds it odd that others have not. It seemed to me that her involvement in the Cooperative and similar alternative food provisioning networks was an important part of building and maintaining her identity. However, what I found interesting about our conversation is that she spent little time discussing the sense of community that other respondents felt was particularly valuable. Instead, her connection to the Cooperative seemed more important on a political level, than on a community-connection level.

“For me, being a paying member and being someone who contributes in that way, I feel like that is an important thing. To understand that if I don’t keep this continuity in the Cooperative, that is a negative thing. So I have kind of thought that my part of contributing is something that is meaningful”

Here she is explaining that though she has not taken on a role of responsibility and has not been able to do a “shift”, she still thinks that her bag orders are important for the Cooperative. The fact that she does not participate in the “shifts” and roles that require more interaction with other members may be why she did not discuss a sense of community.

She likes that the political nature of the Cooperative is “very mild and gentle” and she feels she is “part of a movement in a mild way...there is a sense of pride in that”. She seems to feel that the Cooperative creatively bypasses the slow, bureaucratic and incapable political realm, offering consumers a way to make a political statement through their consumption choices.

“For me, it feels like sadly politics and politicians are very distracted by their own conversations. And life is happening out here and one of the good things, like the Cooperative - and there are so many other things that happening as well - are really really good. And then we feel like we need to infiltrate politics again and make them understand it is happening out here already. They need to pay attention to this”
Her involvement in the Cooperative is not just about her health but also contributes to a “movement”. Being a member of the Cooperative is about being part of something bigger working toward the common good. She quickly added that she “fully supports the farmers that are daring to do something different” and “Really loves when a project bypasses a problem completely. And I think instead of having the discussion about changing the food production, or changing the way we consume in society, the Cooperative just bypassed that”.

To summarize, Anna was one of the few members who focused on the political aspect of the Cooperative and positively described it as a “gentle” way of being part of a movement that supported environmentally friendly consumption habits in a way that bypassed the existing political system while still making a political statement. At no point did she comment on the sense of community that others found valuable and when she explained her support for alternative farmers, it was said in a way to suggest that she appreciated them for the same reasons she appreciated the Cooperative - both dared to do something different in ways that prioritized concern for the environment. It is my interpretation that the previous two consumer members discussed food as a medium through which to feel connected to the people and processes related to food. In Anna’s case, I interpret her relationship to food to be fairly political. She referred to the goods in a general sense, commenting on their quality in terms of “healthy” and “organic” but her emphasis seemed to be on how her purchasing choices reflect her political stance and have the potential to impact the political arena.

Isabelle

Contrary to Anna, Isabelle seemed to find the Cooperative and its goods valuable mostly because they connected her to people, food, nature, and memories in positive ways. Similar to Anna, however, she finds that the Cooperative is innately political and believes that the platform it provides encourages new ways of knowing and engaging with food. Based on our conversation, I interpreted her responses to draw from conventions from the inspired, domestic and civic ‘orders’.

Isabelle started as a member a little over a year ago. She was pleased to hear about the Cooperative “because food is very important to me and it always has been”. She
grew up in south-eastern Europe and said that where she grew up, “everything was organic and super tasty”. She has lived in several parts of Europe but found that food in the places she has lived was not as good as food from her homeland which is her “benchmark...which is super high...but the Cooperative and the farmers market make it possible to find produce that has the same taste”. She claims she has struggled to find “tomatoes that taste like tomatoes. At least compared to tomatoes from where I grew up, which are kind of very special and very tasty.” Taste is important to her but it is more than palatability or flavor. It is directly linked to positive memories of her childhood in her homeland. She speaks about going to the grocery store in Norway and buying the organic there, “but they don’t have the same taste...because I somehow can recognize, sort of taste, what I am used to since childhood...taste with an initial belonging”. This sense of belonging comes from the food she eats and how much it reconnects her with her home. When I asked her why she joined the Cooperative she said,

“Taste was one of the issues and the second was an ethical drive because I am not happy to pay the price I have to pay at the supermarket knowing how the price is increased from the original price that you pay to the farmer.”

For her, quality food does not only taste better but it is higher quality when she knows that the money she is paying goes directly to the producer.

From Isabelle’s perspective, the Cooperative “forces people to learn about food because you receive these vegetables and you ask your friends how to prepare it”. Food becomes a medium through which to learn new things and engage with others, encouraging interaction based around food preparation. By receiving produce that she is not sure how to prepare, Isabelle engages with her friends and other members of the Cooperative to learn how to use it. Beyond this, she finds these interactions valuable because she learns more about Norwegian traditions and finds that they are only truly understood if the food comes from small farms. She is not originally from Norway and said, “I believe Norway has some wonderful traditions. But the trick is that if you buy conventional lamb or cabbage, I don’t think you’ll get the wonderful taste of fårikål which you would get by using small farmers products.” Here she references a traditional Norwegian dish of mutton and cabbage and explains that the flavor of the dish depends on where the food has come from and that food that
comes from “small” farmers is richer in flavor and meaning. The Cooperative, as a direct connection to producers, from her perspective is “important for improving food culture”. From her perspective, the Cooperative is an educational medium that Isabelle believes has the potential to positively impact Norwegian food culture.

Not only does the Cooperative provide a link to tradition, she also thinks it encourages more environmental awareness.

“This idea that we should have strawberries in December is simply unsustainable. And I don’t think it is even necessary to make us happy. For example, Norwegian apples taste wonderful so I don’t know why I should consume mango. I mean it is fine but I think it is a matter of education; how you raise your kids or how you approach food. And I think the Cooperative helps you understand that there are certain seasons especially in a country like Norway with such a harsh climate. And that you should stick to what the season offers and you can be very happy and nourished with what the season has to offer.”

Production limitations due to the harsh Norwegian climate are embodied in the goods that the farmers can provide each season. Her allusion to learning about the climatic conditions of Norway is one way for members to learn more about the environment and engage in practices that can support more sustainable consumption.

Another aspect of the Cooperative that she enjoys is the meat bag. The meat bag contains cuts of meat that are not often sold in the grocery stores.

“I was happy with the meat bag because of the fact that it had no conventional cuts because I am completely against this trend of having chicken breast. And the things that are popular today, chicken breast or beef tenderloin. They are not that tasty compared to other less noble parts of the animal.”

The popularizing of certain cuts of meat is not appealing to her because they do not taste as good and she explained that she wants more of the animal to be used for human consumption. She relates this back to her concern that farmers receive a fair price for their goods and their labor.

Isabelle feels that her membership with the Cooperative has political overtones.
“I think there is an intrinsic connection between your choice of buying organic produce or local food. The political forces and parties support these choices…I don’t know if it is idealized, but my impression is that things change…if you raise awareness, things will change. And it is connected to the fact that you can influence the political level through your choices as a consumer. They still take consumers more seriously in this country”

The Cooperative demonstrates that there is a consumer base in Oslo, looking for new ways to engage in food and she believes politicians pay attention to alternatives such as these.

Isabelle also expressed some concern regarding the health of food products. She has studied food for many years, particularly looking at additives in food. This informs her discussion regarding quality. For instance, she explained, “I have noticed that there are a lot of additives used in conventional products in Norway. There are a lot of additives and the taste is disappointing”. When she sees ingredients that do not look natural to her, she immediately worries about the health implications as well as the flavor.

“It is not just the idea of it not being good for our health. But there is also the degree and extent of risk. Relatively dangerous…for example endocrine disrupters which are chemicals that interfere with your hormonal system and completely change who you are in the long term. We must be very careful…children consume a lot of this so it is important to understand that if children consume a lot of this, it is not the same as an adult’s consumption”

Because she can buy food from the Cooperative that is unprocessed and therefore has no unnatural ingredients she does not worry for her personal health. But her concern here is expressed more broadly in that she finds the food available in the grocery stores not safe for others. Part of her involvement in the Cooperative is her concern for her own wellbeing but also, by supporting the organization, and sending a political message through her membership, she hopes to draw attention to the importance of “natural” foods so others can have healthier food options.

The relationship between her, as a consumer, and the producer is critical in defining quality for Isabelle. Isabelle expressed an innate emotional element to food.
“I think we should emphasize more the connection and poetry behind food. We take it for granted. It is a daily activity. We have to eat that. We survive through that. But I think there are a lot of memories involved in it. For example, when I bite into a watermelon, I am immediately transported back to my childhood. So we are losing contact with this emotional part of food and I think the Cooperative helps to reconnect our memories…it is poetic, it nourishes our soul and the stomach. I don’t believe we can survive only by feeding the stomach. We need poetry in everything we do. The Cooperative helps do that.”

This element of poetry that she is referring to draws from the inspired ‘order’ in that there is something about food that is emotionally resonant yet difficult to precisely explain in words.

In summary, taste, “belonging”, “naturalness”, safety, and “feeding the soul” are important attributes of food that inform how and what she eats. During our conversation, she seemed to draw most heavily from the inspired, domestic, and civic ‘orders’. It is my interpretation that for Isabelle, food is about connection – to place, people, and nature – and she appreciates that the Cooperative encourages these connections. From Isabelle’s perspective, industrialized foods are not healthy nor safe and the Cooperative offers ‘clean, good’ food that can help people to reconnect to the emotional, connective aspects of food and processes related to it.

**Elise**

My conversation with Elise was short, but informative. When she spoke about her membership, it was clear that she valued the Cooperative and what it provides. The goods provided by the Cooperative “ticked all the boxes” she felt were important. She did not seem particularly focused on the community aspect of the organization but liked the principles the Cooperative is based on. My interpretation of her responses suggests that ‘quality’ includes conventions from the civic and domestic ‘orders’.

She believes the Cooperative is “an easy way to be environmentally friendly...all this food I can eat and feel good and it’s organic”. The Cooperative brings together many of the values Elise believes should be present in food. She finds it difficult to do this in the grocery stores. She explains her dilemmas while shopping elsewhere:
“I go through phases. Sometimes I look at everything and wonder where it is made, what it is made of. Or sometimes I just go to the organic section and try to only buy that. Sometimes, I am poor and I get whatever I can afford. There is an ideal world and the reality of it. In the ideal world I would love to buy local organic, but in reality, sometimes you can look at the organic and see that it is from Spain. Or you could buy local and it is from Norway and you have to ask yourself ‘where is my priority?’ … I think that is why I like the bags when I get them from the Cooperative. I feel like they fulfill everything.”

Her explanation of how she makes decisions in the regular grocery store exemplifies the complexity of making “ethical” consumption choices. Quality encompasses local and organic. Though she is pragmatic and acknowledges that she often buys food that does not necessarily fulfill all her ethical criteria, when she purchases produce from the Cooperative, it fulfills all the criteria she feels are important.

One of the main reasons Elise signed up for the Cooperative was to eat more vegetables. “I thought, if I get all these vegetables I will have to figure out a way to eat them and I have started eating more vegetables because of it.” She trusts the Cooperative to supply her with goods that fulfill her civic considerations and appreciates that this challenges her to lead a healthier lifestyle.

Elise also appreciates that she knows where the food comes from. She said, “knowing that the food comes from real farmers around Oslo. Not some big industrial farm in Spain. I think that makes it feel better in a way.” Her membership remains valuable to her because she knows where her food has come from and that it was produced locally. She does not personally know the farmers, but she knows the food has come from a farmer nearby.

She acknowledged that the Cooperative does not provide her with everything that she wants because of the limitations of food production in the Oslo region.

“I think most of the things I miss are things that are not local. Like mangos, avocados…so I see why the limitations are what they are because we live in Norway and in the winter we don’t really grow anything else. So the Cooperative does their job well. It is just that my food tastes are not as local as I wish.”
What is interesting about this explanation is that she mentions one of the aspects of the Cooperative she finds disappointing - the lack of variety. She acknowledges the environmental limitations associated with this and concedes that what her palate wants sometime superseds her other criteria for “quality” food.

Elise seemed to me to be interested in and aware of the processes related to food but did not emphasize food as a medium of community connection. Food that has embedded values is important to her and some of those values relate to production processes of food – such as organic. But she did not mention that her choice to eat organic connected her to the soil, to place, or the environment. This was different from some of the other consumer members. In fact, her admission that her palate is not as local as she would like, by my interpretation, demonstrates that food is more of a product to her, than food being representative of process or of connection. She values the goods she receives from the Cooperative because it gives her access to produce that supports smaller farms in the local area and production methods she agrees with but does not necessarily make her feel connected to these farmers or their farms. My interpretation is that she draws mostly from the civic and domestic ‘orders’ when discussing quality and appreciates that the Cooperative gives her access to goods with these embedded values. She admitted, however, that she often purchases food that is not organic or local and that there is a gap between what she would like to prioritize in theory and what she prioritizes in practice.

**Summary of Consumer Members**

To summarize, all of the consumer members seemed to value the principles of the organization. There was a general tendency for the conventions from the civic and domestic ‘orders’ to come to the fore. However, different aspects of the organization and/or the goods seemed to correspond to a wider range of “orders of worth”. Based on my interpretation, several of the members’ explanations were underpinned by the inspired ‘order’: Isabelle mentions the “poetry in food”, Celine is inspired to be creative with the produce, and Ida was initially enthralled with the passion and energy of the organization as an alternative model. It would interesting to further explore how the inspired ‘order’ connects people to food, considering the emotional component of the ‘order’ as defined by Boltanski and Thévenot (1999). Other conventions were also mentioned. Ida admits that she appreciates efficiency
(industrial), but understood that in the packing process this was not what members were seeking. Elise concedes that her palate is not inherently local but framed by the extensive selection in the grocery stores and her travels abroad. From my interpretation, it seemed as if consumer members drew from a wider variety of ‘orders’. When they discussed the organization and the goods it provides, these members tended to discuss what they received from the Cooperative and less about the processes that make it work. This relates back to what I said in the introduction of this section. What sets this group apart from the core member group is the nature and level of their involvement.

Consumer members discussed the goods but also appreciated that the Cooperative connected them to food and producers in a new way. They generally valued that the organization nurtures their awareness of connection – to farmers, to soil, to memories, to a sustainable future, to political action, etc. However, it is my interpretation that though these members are aware of (and value) these connections and processes involved in their food, they generally speak about food (and processes) based on more abstract notions of connection. For instance, they don’t personally know the farmers, but they value that there is a “face to their food”; they do not commit a lot of time each year to actively participating with other members, building processes and community within the Cooperative, but they value that they are part of a community. It is my interpretation that the way they speak about the organization and the goods, is indicative (to some extent) of their perceptions of food as product and as process. Many of them are aware of the processes related to food but are not involved in the organization’s processes and so refer to the governance of the Cooperative, or even processes of the dominant food supply chain, in vague ways. More time is spent discussing the goods themselves, something they are familiar with. They are aware of the processes but they are not so deeply involved in the processes that the connections between themselves and the other actors in this network are tangible in the way the core members’ discussed. This distinction between the member groups might seem slight but it is an important difference and impacts the way in which members are shaped by and shape the organization.
However, I should mention that I could have easily divided this group into sub-groups. Some of these members were core members in the past and have quite a bit of insight to the organization’s governance. Some of these members work professionally with food on a daily basis – locally, regionally, globally – and have a very complicated relationship to food, its production, distribution, provisioning, and consumption. These experiences likely shape their perceptions of food. However, I grouped these members together because of their current level of involvement in the Cooperative in order to explore the reciprocal relationship between the organization and those who are involved. In other words, that there are patterns among their responses but there is also a fair amount of diversity.

Table 5: List of consumer members and the “orders of worth” I interpreted as being present in their explanations in interviews.

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Another interesting pattern between these members, that I will discuss more later, was that several of them referenced personal health as one of the reasons they are members. It is my interpretation that these references to health could “map” to the civic ‘order’, given the Norwegian welfare state in which care for oneself is intrinsically tied to the common good. However, it is worth noting that health can also be interpreted as a personal goal that does not align with any of the ‘orders’. I discuss this in a later section of this chapter.

**Ex-Members**

These people expressed an overall satisfaction with the organization but decided not to remain members for a number of reasons. From their perspectives, the Cooperative was 1. inconvenient, 2. did not provide enough goods, and/or 3. was not affordable. What I found interesting about conversing with these people was that some of them expressed a fair amount of guilt about no longer being a member and it was perhaps because of this, that these individuals explained at length why they did not continue their membership. In these explanations, conventions from the
industrial and market ‘orders’ seemed to underpin their explanations for purchasing food elsewhere. Though the Cooperative seemed to embody many of the values they felt were important, the reliance of the organization on members’ volunteering and the designated time for pickup was not conducive to their lifestyles. Below I discuss the ex-members one by one to demonstrate how these individuals discussed the Cooperative, the goods, and their decision to no longer participate. In some cases, I have included my interpretation of which ‘order’ I think the respondent’s explanation falls under. I suggest that the expectations of these members (i.e. affordability, diversity of produce choice, food aesthetics) are heavily influenced by the existing food provisioning systems in Oslo (i.e. the chain grocery stores). However, most of these members seem to feel a fair amount of tension between the conventions they want to prioritize and the conventions that ultimately guide their decisions when purchasing food. Based on our conversations, it became clear that these individuals navigate the food system in complicated ways as they try to balance their values with expectations set by the broader market.

*Jonas*

Jonas joined the Cooperative because it addressed shortcomings of the existing food system and embodied many of the values he believes are important. My interpretation is that he discusses the importance of the organization based on conventions from the domestic and civic ‘orders’ and justifies his lapse in membership based on conventions from the market and industrial ‘orders’. The tensions between these ‘orders’ is obvious in his explanations of the way he would like to interact with food and the way he actually interacts with food.

The Cooperative seemed like a good opportunity for Jonas and his girlfriend to support sustainability in a way they felt was positive. During my interview with Jonas, it became clear that sustainability was, at times, interchangeable with ‘local’. For instance, he first heard about the Cooperative through his girlfriend who knew he was “interested in sustainability and localizing the economy” so they decided to be members. From his perspective, sustainability is

“Production and consumption that can go on more or less forever. Which is far removed from the consumption patterns we have today. So I think we have to localize economies a lot more. We have to produce
things locally that can be produced locally and some things we can, or will have to, import. And that can be done in a sustainable way. But with food, I definitely feel it should be local. I don’t know the exact number but we should be eating 80-90% local food. And that would probably be sustainable in my mind. Sustainability is the number one priority that we should be looking at from all angles at this point. It’s a key issue in my life.”

His statement reflects not only that sustainability is attainable through localizing economies but also that the issue is quite important to him and that the Cooperative offered a direct way in which to support these values. Though he does not feel the Cooperative overtly discusses politics, Jonas believes that membership in the Cooperative is innately political.

“I would not say that the Cooperative itself seems political but everything is political in the end. It is of course a political act to engage in this way. It changes the way we do politics, it changes the way we do economics, it changes the way we interact with one another. And to me that’s political.”

For Jonas, being a member of the Cooperative changes the ways people interact with one another and that this interaction has a political impact. The Cooperative enables new interactions that are more local and therefore more sustainable, from his perspective.

Jonas had some interesting reflections on his personal participation in the Cooperative. When Jonas was a member he “only distributed bags once but then again we only participated for a few months. So it was only one time that I actively participated.” He found the work boring.

“The job itself is menial work…I think it is one of those things that we have to start doing, you know, work more together as a society and build more connections locally. Because we have grown so detached from each other and we just buy services and goods from other places. We become alienated from goods, food, everything we consume. So, I think it’s important to reconnect with people around you and shop from people that you go to and meet.”

He acknowledged that the Cooperative encourages community development and moves away from commodified relationships, suggesting that he is aware of the broader processes involved with food. However, he felt as if his participation
consisted of menial tasks. When I asked him if he felt he had gained anything from his membership with the Cooperative, he said,

“Not much but I think that is because we did not participate very actively. I think if I would start engaging more I probably would. But I didn’t so that’s probably why the experience wasn’t that great with the work and stuff. Because I didn’t get to know people well. But if you start to know people that are involved, I think it would be pleasurable.”

Here, he draws a direct link between the amount members participate and the amount of pleasure they may get from their involvement. As someone participates more often and relations between members become stronger, Jonas believes the experience of being an active member becomes more rewarding.

Jonas appreciated that the Cooperative provided new ways of understanding foods. Jonas and his girlfriend were determined to try new recipes because of the food they received from the Cooperative.

“We organized meals around what we got in the bags. We tried new things because I think that is part of the Cooperative as well. One of the roles it plays is to reconnect us to local food and see that it can actually taste good even though it is plain and kind of looks bland.”

He is not particularly convinced that the goods from the Cooperative are tastier or healthier but he does think the Cooperative teaches people about how we are connected to the producers and the environment. The emphasis he placed on “reconnection” and “learning” and his consistent mention of the “local” throughout the interview indicates that he finds the educational component of the Cooperative important. It provides not only goods but knowledge about foods that can be produced nearby, which he has stated is something he believes is better for the environment.

Jonas is a vegetarian who tries to avoid eating dairy. He initially cut meat out of his diet because he “could not justify killing animals” and it was later that he learned the “negative impact raising animals for food had on the environment”. Both of these justifications encompass a concern for the common good. If he were to begin eating meat or increase his dairy consumption again, he would consider buying

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8 Interestingly, this summarizes my findings among the member groups.
from the Cooperative. “I would never, I could never see myself going back to eating meat from Denmark or imported meat wherever it comes from.” When asked to elaborate, he said that meat from the Cooperative was entirely different.

“Due to transparency and animal welfare. And the fact that I could actually go to these farms and see the practices myself. That is a big thing. Not that I would do it but at least I would have the opportunity to go there. There is a philosophy in the Cooperative that it should be transparent, high quality, and animal rights are a consideration in the entire process”.

His difficulty in justifying the killing of animals and the detrimental effects certain methods of animal husbandry can have on the environment could potentially be superseded by new relations between himself and the producers because of the trust he has in the Cooperative. Though he admits he would likely not check the farms, he trusts the Cooperative to pick responsible and reliable producers who treat their animals with care and who raise them in environmentally sustainable ways. The building of trust between actors and the reconnections this can foster was an important aspect for Jonas.

“Just being able to go to the places where the food is produced is quite a big thing. Because I feel we are so detached from where everything we consume comes from. We don’t see the working conditions, we don’t see the animal welfare, and we don’t see anything. We just see a price and we basically go with that, or most people do. Whereas local food means more global justice as well because I think food we buy from abroad is too cheap. We are not paying the laborers enough. We are exploiting them through our consumption. This has long historical roots and it is going to be difficult to change but local is one way of doing that. To pay a fair price for food. And to realize that it actually takes a lot of effort and time and money to produce just food. So I think a return to local food is a return to just food.”

Here Jonas is discussing his frustration with the way people, including himself, make choices. Price is the indicator most people use to purchase food. The existing food system is very efficient and some might argue provides an impartial way of assessing value. However, there are values that cannot be communicated in price and this is the root of Jonas’s frustration. There are other aspects of the food chain that he feels are important to know about to determine the overall quality of food and this directly relates to whether there is environmental and social justice along
the supply chain. He expressed that the best way to do this is to reconnect people to each other and food, locally. When he mentions local, he refers to geographic distance but wrapped up in the physical dimension of local is his perception that we can more closely monitor whether fairness and justice are present among actors, including animals.

Jonas and his girlfriend ordered bags from the Cooperative on a regular basis for four or five months but then stopped when they moved to a new apartment. “We were busy moving so we forgot about the Cooperative in the midst of all that and then we never picked it up again.” He explained that though he has not renewed his membership, he feels it is the right thing to do.

“I mean I should be participating in it because it’s very much in line with how I think the world should be and how we should be consuming and so on and so forth. But yet, here I am studying sustainability, researching food and even I can’t do it. That says something. We have a long way to go if people like me can’t commit to it.”

Jonas is convinced of the “right” or “good” ways to consume that are directly tied to domestic and civic ‘orders’ but yet finds that he cannot commit to being a member. The inconvenience of the Cooperative was a particularly notable barrier for him. Though he would augment recipes in order to use the goods he used to receive, he would always combine them with goods from the regular grocery store.

“There were always a few extra ingredients that you would have to purchase in order to make the food taste good, I felt. Like most of the goods are kind of bland. You get potatoes, onions, garlic, but those things don’t constitute a meal”.

Though Jonas clearly aligns himself with the Cooperative, both in the goods it provides and the way in which the organization makes this possible, he does not find the food tasty enough to stand alone. Not only did he feel the goods did not provide a ‘full meal’, he also felt like the model itself demanded a lifestyle shift that was too demanding. Interestingly, he explains this as an innate aspect of our era.

“I think that is a really big problem with these models in general at this stage. Because people are so busy, they have work, they have kids, they have all these obligations to take care of, a few extra hours may not seem like much, but it may feel like too much in this day and age.”
From his perspective, it is a given that everyone is busy and that models of alternative engagement have an uphill battle to confront and overcome this. This demonstrates the perceived ubiquitous presence of industrial and market logics in our context today. Jonas admitted that though he feels guilty about it, he purchases goods from chain grocery stores that are near to where he lives and studies.

“I shop at Kiwi, mostly. Its right next to me and it’s all about convenience. And obviously, you can get more stuff…it is convenience and it is nice to eat different kinds of stuff. Freedom of choice, in a sense. It is nice. So there is a paradox there. I realize that. I am being a bit of a hypocrite. I want to participate in the Cooperative. I want to support it. Still here I am and I don’t. It is just so convenient to buy everything in the grocery stores. Everything is there, it is always open…where with the Cooperative you have to go there at a specific time on a specific day so your schedule has to be adjusted.”

Jonas is not alone in this. Other members mentioned that their busy lives do not leave them the time they feel they need to be active in the Cooperative. They instead purchase goods from grocery stores, only sometimes prioritizing foods that meet their other criteria that are based in the civic and domestic ‘orders’.

Jonas’s responses offer an interesting example of the tensions between ‘orders’. He expressed the importance of justice, connection, and localization of food but found the Cooperative model too inconvenient. When he purchases food from the grocery stores, he admits to not buying organic but instead limits his consumption of animal products. Though this does not give him the satisfaction of supporting social justice, from his perspective, it does allow him to maintain his environmental and animal welfare considerations for food. In the same way that there are many ways of “being” a member of the Cooperative, there are also many ways to follow one’s values when purchasing food. My conversation with him suggests that he wants to include ethics of care in his consumption practices and though he has access to a food provisioning model that enables this, there are strong forces that shape his expectations that act as barriers to pursuing this. In his case, the barriers he noted were based on (in)convenience, a convention from the industrial ‘order’ and “freedom of choice”, a concept reinforced by current economic relations (combination of industrial and market ‘orders’).
Based on all of my interactions with members, Jonas was the most vocal about the processes (and power dynamics) involved in the dominant food system – particularly the aspects he did not agree with. He articulated the “benefits” of being involved in the Cooperative and that more participation would likely lead to a more rewarding experience. However, he has not re-activated his membership. From an ‘orders’ perspective, he aligns himself with conventions based in the civic and domestic ‘orders’ but in practice, he admits that his decisions are based on convenience, price, and available variety of food (combination of industrial and market conventions).

*Sofie*

For Sofie, the Cooperative seemed like a “*cool idea*”. She was originally drawn to the Cooperative because she had heard about the people starting it and was excited about because it was new and interesting. The Cooperative enables members to think about food in new ways.

> “It’s a different way of thinking about food and how you acquire food. It makes it more tangible in a way: that food is something that is grown or if you eat meat, it comes from animals. There are kids today who think that chicken comes in the form of fillets”.

She states that the Cooperative reconnects people to food, how it is raised, where it comes from and how it looks before it reaches the table. In the interview, she also implied that through reconnecting with food, individuals may begin to appreciate the innate value of food before it becomes an ingredient – that it was a living (and in the case of animals, breathing) thing.

For Sofie, the Cooperative provides a way for people to reconnect with the countryside. “I love living in the city, but you kind of get estranged and I wanted to get a bit closer”. Her childhood was spent in a small town where fishing was the main industry. She discussed the difficulty of coming from this background and taking the proximity she had to food for granted when she was young. When she moved to Oslo, she enjoyed “city life” but part of her missed the connection to food she had had as a girl. The Cooperative was one way for her to reconnect with food in a way that felt meaningful because it brought her nearer to food, in a way that reminded her of her childhood.
Sofie also found the governance model of the Cooperative intriguing. She remarked, “I think it is really cool how it is a cooperative. So not only do you take your bag, you also need to contribute”. When I asked her if she had contributed, she laughed and said “no, never”. For her, it was “an all-or-nothing commitment” that she could not fit into her lifestyle now. If she finds the time, she does want to participate in the Cooperative because she thinks it is “a really interesting and good idea because I think people need to be around people…when my mom was young for instance, there was a lot more interaction that was not online…it was face-to-face and the small town where I am from was this vibrant town with a lot of cultural things happening…I think the Cooperative is kind of a way to try to remedy that change”

Again, she references her childhood and the interaction between people that she finds valuable. She feels the Cooperative’s governance model addresses the disconnection she feels is part of the plugged-in-era.

Sofie felt that if she participated in the Cooperative, she would need to “go full-in to contribute to all the things that I think are good about the project, such as cooperation, giving time and effort”, but for now, it remains a “cool idea”. Sofie recognizes aspects of the Cooperative that she values but she has not maintained her membership and has not participated in the shifts at any point. Though she references the processes related to food and she is aware of her connection to the environment, farmers, and animals, adopting practices that tangibly connect her to these remains a “cool idea” and not something she actively participates in now.

Instead, Sofie shops for food at the regular grocery stores and tries to support “small shops around where I live…it’s easier and a bit more affordable to get ahold of ‘kortreist’ and organic food now”. Affordability and convenience guide her purchasing decisions and now that there is more available that fits her “quality” criteria (organic, kort-reist) she no longer feels like the Cooperative is the only way to access goods with embedded values that are important to her.

Sofie really liked the idea of the Cooperative and the possibilities it provided for people to connect in new ways with one another, their food, and the countryside.

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9 Norwegian term directly translated as “short-transported”; often translated as “local”
However, the increased availability of goods that align with her environmental criteria has made it easier for her to access the goods she seeks. She does not need to be a member in order to do this. What I found interesting about our conversation is that she seemed enthusiastic about (re)connection with people and the potential it has for transforming personal relations but that she did not have the time to be involved. In terms of “orders of worth”, it would seem in Sofie’s case, that domestic conventions are intriguing and interesting, but these do not supersede the practicality of convenience. She can feel good about purchasing goods that fulfill civic conventions but in ways that are more convenient and time-effective (industrial). Though she is aware of the processes related to food, at the moment, she admits that she is not engaged in in a way that might deepen her connection to the environment and others.

Eva

Eva appreciated the Cooperative’s principles and spoke highly of her membership in what I interpreted to be conventions from the domestic and inspired ‘orders’. However, she also explained that there were larger factors that made it difficult for her to be a member and these were aligned with industrial and market ‘orders’.

Eva liked that the Cooperative provided an arena of action in which people with similar interests are part of an organization toward collective action. “For me it was a community feeling. Like when you go to a festival and then you feel like you are part of something; something that I believe is good”. Her reference to a festival is an interesting one in that I suggest she is referring to a more general sense of momentum and energy that can be felt as people come together to appreciate something they enjoy. This suggests that her ‘feeling of community’ does not necessarily come from directly connecting with people but connecting with them through a bigger cause.

Though Eva already knew a lot about the food system generally, she was excited to be a member because she had recently moved to Norway and wanted to learn about food here. “I liked the way they informed about the vegetables in the bags”. She is referring to both the website and Facebook page of the Cooperative. These two communication channels provide information regarding which farm the food comes
from each time and how to prepare the foods. The Cooperative has a dedicated Facebook page and an ebapge on the website for members to share recipes so people learn new ways of cooking their foods and this was valuable to Eva.

When Eva arrived in Norway, she wanted to connect with a community and the Cooperative was one way of doing this.

“For me, back then, it was also joining something local, some organization. So I like the whole idea…it is a nice practice. A nice thing to do. I support that idea and for those who live more central, I guess it is more convenient. Or for people who don’t cook very often, its way more convenient. But I really liked the localness. Also, though I did not participate, I like the cooperation and the fact that you have to.”

Though the Cooperative’s governance model and the goods it supplies contain embedded values that she thinks are important, the pickup times proved to be too much of a hurdle. This inconvenience is coupled with her disappointment that the Cooperative did not provide enough goods. “I still relate to it, but I am not active anymore…there is too little”. She does not receive enough goods to feel it is worth her time to rearrange her schedule to pick up the produce. I suggest that this barrier is explained in the industrial ‘order’, and that conventions such as (in)convenience, override other “orders of worth”.

“I actually feel like I started to appreciate more of the herbs or even the dried herbs and concentrated juice. So this is what I thought was really nice because it lasted longer. That was not something you could buy anywhere else…I think the quality was not anything bad. I think more that the contents of the bag was too small to cook from it for a longer period.”

Eva liked the idea of accessing products that were unique or difficult to find elsewhere which suggests that quality is linked to exclusive access to certain products (market). However, there was not enough food for her to make all of her meals from the Cooperative’s goods.

Though Eva understands why the “price is what it is” (paying farmers a fair wage, organic, local goods) she said she cannot afford it. Eva is able to buy goods in stores for a much cheaper price, and she can do this when she wants, where she wants. Her alignment with the domestic and civic ‘orders’ implicit in the principles
of the organization did not override conventions from the industrial and market ‘orders’ in a way that encouraged her to remain a member. Part of the reason she joined was to incorporate a sustainable practice into her life. She felt, however, that because she did not receive enough produce that could constitute her meals for a week, she was not actually contributing to sustainability in a meaningful way.

“It didn’t feel worth it. The time, cost and everything. It is not the cheapest but that’s obvious given what they offer but it’s not making anything easier. Not even my conscience because I was eating one dish that was super good but then I either starve for a week or go to a store and buy whatever there is”

The fact that she felt she did not receive enough goods to provide meals throughout the week, and that it was not convenient, made her membership less valuable. Interestingly, she remarks that “it did not make anything easier” indicating that to some degree pursuing sustainability should be easy, or made easier by alternative food networks. To her, her membership felt like a token effort – one that may boost her credibility with peers but does not make her feel as if she is contributing to sustainability in a real way.

“It kind of felt inconvenient. Ok, I can continue [the membership], but then it would be the statement ‘Oh yea’, I can say at a party ‘I am a member of Kooperativet’ but I don’t contribute to sustainability because I actually felt like it was such a small part of what I eat. It didn’t feel like a step”

Though she enjoyed learning about the vegetables, the idea of cooperation between members, and the products themselves, the inconvenience, price, and amount of goods made her membership feel less valuable. Though Eva aligns with the principles and appreciates that the Cooperative provides an alternative for others, she did not feel that her membership addressed everything she was hoping to find.

“I can see the importance of it and I totally value and support it but through this scheme it was not doable for me in the long run. I see it as an important and unique because when you go to the store, it is hard to find something Norwegian other than carrots and apples maybe, and then sometimes broccoli and cauliflower, but other than that it is hard to search for something that is only Norwegian or that is locally produced that gives you this hint of seasonal fruits and vegetables.”
Yet, as was made clear in her earlier explanations, this “important and unique” approach was not executed in a way that met her other criteria of convenience and cheapness which supersedes her civic and domestic concerns. Her perceptions of what should and should not be easy or convenient or affordable directly clashed with other ‘orders’, rendering her membership into a “token effort”. Eva seems to like the idea of community connection and food as process (particularly how it can enable her to pursue sustainability) but does not pursue this via the Cooperative. Instead she incorporates sustainability into her diet in other ways. For instance, to maintain her consideration for animal welfare, she has adopted a vegan lifestyle. She explained that she gets her protein from nuts and dried fruit, none of which are organic or produced locally. She purchases these in a neighborhood in Oslo that is known for having the lowest prices. She acknowledges that this comes with other ethical concerns but that at least she can get enough food without compromising her concern for the welfare of animals. Similar to Sofie, Eva had an all-or-nothing mentality. For Sofie it was important to be an active member if she were to join again. For Eva, if every meal could not be sustainable, then it was not worth the price, inconvenience, and effort to get local, organic goods from the Cooperative. It is my interpretation that Eva spoke about food mostly as a consumable product. She is aware of the processes related to food, and appreciates the work the Cooperative does to incorporate people into these processes, but she could not afford (time and money) to be sustainable in this way. She liked the idea of being connected to people, particularly around a “practice of sustainability”, but does not pursue this via the Cooperative.

**Matias**

Matias appreciated that the Cooperative provided him with goods that were local, Norwegian, and organic. During our conversation, he mentioned how important these qualities are and how the Cooperative played an important role in the larger shift toward organic in the Oslo region.

Matias mentioned that he valued the learning experience the Cooperative provided. It was a “nice way to get to know more about different varieties of vegetables”. When he first started as a member, he was interested in learning more about what Norwegian farmers could provide throughout the year. Based on my time speaking
with him, he seemed to value the educational component of the Cooperative because it allowed him to support Norwegian farmers while learning more about how the climate affects Norwegian food production.

Matias explained that he was interested in food that did not require long transport. Though he did not expand specifically on this, based on our conversation, his concern for short-transported food seemed to come from a concern for the environment. He said he had joined the Cooperative in the beginning because he thought it was a “great opportunity to get short-transported and nice variety of Norwegian vegetables in season”.

Matias recalled his time as an active member in the Cooperative and felt as if the Cooperative “played a positive role as a small community” and that the organization had done a successful job at demonstrating the consumer demand in Oslo for organic foods. He said that the founding members played “key roles in providing information about ecological farms in Norway”. He suggested that the Cooperative itself and the founders who started the organization, played instrumental roles in demonstrating that there was a consumer base for such products.

Matias is no longer a member of the Cooperative for two reasons. First, the Cooperative required too much time during the week which was difficult to do after he had children. Second, he felt he did not get enough food from the Cooperative to make his time and money investment worth it. He used to supplement goods from the Cooperative with food from the larger grocery chains (Meny, Kiwi, REMA 1000) and from small corner stores that sold vegetables and fruits.

Of all the ex-members, he is the only one who went from the Cooperative to another alternative food network – one that arguably requires more time. He is now a member of community supported agriculture (CSA, andelslandbruk) which provides more goods and allows him to structure the time he volunteers in a way that better fits his lifestyle. He can take time, one weekend a month, to visit the farm with his family to do a little bit of work and pick up his share of food. He is required to give 10 hours a year of his time. The CSA farmer prefers if he and his family help out for 20-30 minutes each time they come with weeding and tidying in
addition to providing assistance during large harvests. This contribution of time works better for him and his family because they can do it on the weekend. They also have access to a car which enables this kind of participation. He feels that the direct contact his children get to the animals, plants, soil, and milieu of the farm is critical to reconnecting them to food. He also receives “enough goods given the time and energy input” to make his involvement in the CSA feel worthwhile.

Matias decided not to renew his membership in order to pursue another alternative food network that better suited his lifestyle. Though the CSA demands more time, it offers a connection to food and production that the Cooperative cannot. Because Matias owns a car and is able to transport the goods he receives from the CSA, this is a more rewarding alternative food network for him and his family. Though he appreciates the Cooperative and believes it is an important option for people who live in the city and do not have a vehicle, it was not the right model for him. Matias referred to the Cooperative as a “gateway” through which people can learn about alternative food. His interaction in the organization is what motivated him to become more involved in supporting local farmers and reconnecting with the environment via food. We spoke little about specific products from the Cooperative, but based on my interpretation of our conversation, Matias seems to view food as medium through which to connect, himself and his family to the environment and others. Food is both a product and a process – both of which are enriched by local connections.

**Summary of Ex-members**

In Table 7 below, I summarize how I “mapped” the ex-member responses to the ‘orders’. There was an even wider range of ‘orders’ in this member group. For the most part, ex-members seemed to agree with the Cooperative and the work that it does. However, aspects that are an innate part of the structure and governing of the organization made it too inconvenient or too expensive. Their explanations demonstrate consumption decisions may be based on conventions that people do not necessarily wish to prioritize, but do. These conversations provide insight into how some people navigate the complexity of the food system as they seek to support their values.
Table 6: List of ex-members and the “orders of worth” I interpreted as being present in their explanations in interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inspired</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Civic</th>
<th>Renown</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
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<td>Eva</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matias</td>
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</tbody>
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5.2 Further Discussions

Above I have discussed how certain “orders of worth”, based on my interpretations, underpin members’ perceptions of quality and how this impacts the form and function of the organization. I have also demonstrated how the level of involvement in the organization shapes members’ perceptions of food and the food system. I have concluded each member section with a brief overview of the patterns within and among member groups and described how these members’ perceptions shape and are shaped by the Cooperative. In this section, I add some comments, arising out of my research, on the analytical framework I used.

1. There seems to be an innate tension between certain orders.

2. By contrast, some ‘orders’ appear to be complementary.

3. The renown ‘order’ may obscure the conventions that underpin different organizational strategies in the provisioning of “good” food.

4. There is a possibility for an additional ‘order’ that is particularly relevant to food studies in Norway.

Innate Tension Between Certain “Orders of Worth”

The reasons given by respondents in the ex-member group for leaving the Cooperative included higher costs, limited variety and inconvenience. Here, the domestic and civic ‘orders’, although appreciated, do not supersede the industrial and market conventions. In this case, the tension between ‘orders’ creates a challenge for the Cooperative in the form of membership loss. This is difficult to overcome.
As I explain in the beginning of this chapter, domestic and civic “orders of worth” underpin the Cooperative’s principles, processes and operations and the members appreciate that this fosters new relations in the community (farmer:member; producer:consumer: member:member) and supports environmentally friendly production. The Cooperative’s identity is wrapped up in the principles of the organization and based on my interpretations the principles are underpinned by conventions of the domestic and civic ‘orders’. The principles established a clear purpose from the beginning, and based on my interaction with those most familiar with the operations of the organization, the principles have become deeply embedded within the core-members decision-making as they carry out processes within the organization. Their participation and commitment to the project is guided by the original principles, keeping the identity of the organization true to its purpose.

The core-members want the consumer members to get a “good deal” but that deal cannot be negotiated outside of the fundamental concerns for the producers, their production methods, and their limitations. In brief, there seems to be an innate tension between domestic/civic ‘orders’ and the industrial/market ‘orders’. There are times when the core-members have to incorporate, or at least compromise with, the industrial and market conventions that frame consumer member expectations in order to maintain member support for the organization.

When the core-members attempt to balance the interests of producers and members, they do so through negotiations that acknowledge the limitations of producers and the interests of the consumer members. From what I was told, suggestions are given and adjustments made in order to reach an agreement. The process considers all actors and an agreement is reached through open dialogue and ongoing negotiation. Therefore, the consideration core members must give to industrial and market conventions is not evidence of an AFN being folded into the market and industrial ‘orders’ but instead demonstrates that ‘orders’ inform organizational operations in complex ways, especially as the Cooperative works to balance the internal organizational strategies with broader economic organizational strategies.
Some ‘Orders’ are Complementary

Based on my analysis, the inspired ‘order’ was present in many of the explanations given by the consumer members. This ‘order’ is not explicitly apparent in the principles but is valued by the members and is mostly referred to in terms of inspiring creativity and inventiveness in the use of goods and possibilities for community engagement. The environmental limitations of local, seasonal food in the Oslo region is interpreted by some members as a creative challenge that has shaped their food preparation and consumption. The “inspiration” factor was referenced a number of times, and was appreciated in its own right. However, when members expanded upon why they are inspired, it often related to civic or domestic concern for others – often in recognition of the labor that went into the production. It is my interpretation that this is an example of how ‘orders’ interact and in some cases, build upon one another to more deeply embed certain conventions into day-to-day practices.

The Renown ‘Order’: Recognition Competition

The Cooperative was very popular in the beginning, largely because it incorporated values into goods and provisioning that were important to people. Over a short period of time, the renown of the organization attracted the interest of more people than the organization could actually handle. So the waiting list grew. However, in the past year, there has been a significant drop in membership. Some members, particularly those who were drawn to the Cooperative because of its popularity, and not necessarily because of its fundamental principles, have likely stopped being members. This may be due to some of the challenges the ex-members discussed (price, variety, convenience) but may also be related to a drastic context change in the broader market. In the past four years there has been a dramatic increase in the availability of organic and fair trade goods in Oslo. Organic and Fairtrade are recognized certifications that communicate environmentally friendly production processes and ethical supply chains, respectively. Due to the increased availability of these goods in the grocery stores and the growth of other alternative food networks (such as community supported agriculture and independent shops that carry local, bulk, and organic products), consumers can access goods with embedded values via mediums that are more convenient. This presents challenges.
for the Cooperative. In a sense, it seems to be a case of “one good value outcompeting another good value” (Borgen 2009, 8). The processes of the Cooperative and the retail chains that sell organic and fair trade goods are, however, based on different logics. In the Cooperative’s case, domestic and civic conventions are considered first and then compromised with conventions from the market and industrial ‘orders’. In the grocery chains, the viability of a product depends upon its ability to be incorporated into the logics of the dominant food system (price, standards), with the added value of domestic and civic conventions.

I suggest that the prioritization of ‘orders’ in the different food supply chains reflects (and reinforces) different conventions and therefore transforms/reproduces different social norms. The Cooperative is a community that directly connects people to food via participatory governance in the supply chain. The larger supply chain connects people to more abstract notions of care and connection to others and the environment. Both may bring attention to the processes related to food, but only the former offers a tangible way in which to become part of the process. My data suggests that the more involved people become in processes that are related to food, the more likely they are to perceive food not as a product and themselves as consumers – but instead themselves and the food they eat as interconnected via complex relationships and connections. This has the potential to influence social norms and the ways in which people interact with food, others and the environment.

**An Additonal ‘Order’?**

My interviews reveal a proclivity for consumers to be preoccupied with their personal health. Based on my interpretation, this does not neatly align with any of the given ‘orders’ in the “orders of worth” framework. Potentially there may therefore be room for an ‘order’ based on personal health. Though this was not specifically an aspect I had set out to explore, well-being and health seemed very important to many of the respondents and supports Borgen’s (2009) research. The assessment of worth in this ‘order’ may be heavily framed by the narrative of “health” in the broader society. Worth might be communicated in the way the person looked, how they prepared their food (i.e. deep fried, dry pan-fried, boiled, baked, fermented, raw), and what types of food and exercise they incorporated into their lives. People within this order would be healthy, energetic, and aware of basic
nutrition guidelines within their society. As I have mentioned earlier, in the Norwegian context, this ‘order’ might be said to fall within the civic ‘order’ since care for oneself could be perceived as care for the common good in a welfare state. However, to develop this further, much more in depth research would have to take place on ‘health’ and people’s perceptions of how it relates to society.

Summary

The use of the “orders of worth” framework in the interpretation of my data revealed some interesting insights about the framework itself. It would seem that ‘orders’, serving as frames of reference, interact in interesting and complex ways. The innate tension between civic/domestic and industrial/market ‘orders’ demonstrates the challenges that organizations and people face as they navigate food production, provisioning, and consumption. Some ‘orders’ may be mutually supportive and it would be particularly interesting to explore when/if/how the inspired ‘order’ complements or is complemented by other ‘orders’. Greater availability of organic and fair trade goods in Oslo may create competition for the Cooperative, thus reducing the relative significance of the ‘renown’ order. Lastly, based on my research, there may be a possibility for an additional ‘order’ that might be termed “health” considering the recurring theme of personal health in my respondents explanations.

One of my aims was to demonstrate how perceptions of “quality” inform organizational strategies. To do this, I explored the reciprocal relationship between the Cooperative and its members using the “orders of worth” framework. Using this framework, I found that though there are differences between members and member groups, to a large extent, when it comes to “quality” and the Cooperative, conventions of the civic and domestic orders are prioritized. However, because different members have different expectations for the organization and the goods it provides, the Cooperative (core members) has developed and maintained processes that enable ongoing dialogue to balance various actors expectations and producers practical limitations. The constant consideration for others and the incorporation of civic and domestic conventions in the processes of the organization directly challenges the impersonal tendencies of the globalized and industrialized food system.
The Cooperative incorporates “quality” into the goods it provides by establishing and maintaining relationships of respect and care. “Quality” is therefore not perceived solely as a characteristic of a product, but is woven into the fabric of the governance of the organization. I suggest that one of the main critiques of AFNs and their proclivity to be folded into market/industrial ‘orders’ was not the case with the Cooperative. It is possible that the Cooperative loses some members because of the challenges this creates (inconvenience, lack of variety). Despite this, the organization/core members develop and maintain processes of food provisioning that first and foremost support local farmers and alternative production methods. This tendency to prioritize domestic and civic ‘orders’ fosters new ways of understanding and connecting to food. The organization’s reliance on participatory governance and processes based on ongoing dialogue between actors, provides a concrete way in which members can become part of the process of food. Participating in the governance of the Cooperative embeds the conceptualization of food as process ever further because one becomes the process. Core members were not just aware of their connection to the environment and the farmers but were critical to the provisioning of food. This approach makes tangible the connections members have to the land and to those who produce food. This has the potential to change the way people interact with food and food systems.
6 Final Thoughts

6.1 The Cooperative and its Members

Alternative food networks, in their myriad forms, have the potential to challenge the destructive tendencies of the globalized food system, affecting how food is produced, distributed and consumed and the logics these processes are based on. However, the degree to which these networks truly provide an alternative, and to what extent they challenge inequities in the dominant food system cannot be assumed. It is by exploring AFNs on a case-by-case basis that activists, politicians, citizens, researchers and participants can better assess to what degree inequalities and destructive tendencies are indeed challenged by alternative networks. It has been proposed that the potential for food system transformation relies on the degree to which alternative logics, based on the welfare of the environment and people, can become embedded in day-to-day practices (Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2014). It is unlikely that people can create the social and environmental change they hope to achieve purely through their consumption practices. However, my research suggests that the Cooperative provides a platform from which members can participate in reflective, open, and inclusive processes. Those who are most active in these processes seem to more deeply internalize and operationalize the social and environmental values of the organization, embedding alternative logics into day-to-day practices. Alternative food networks like the Cooperative, allow people to carry out necessary consumption practices in a way that fosters connection, cognizance, and care for others and the environment.

Based on my research, the Cooperative’s principles and inclusive governing model challenge destructive logics of the dominant food system. The organization challenges unequal distribution of power along the supply chain, fosters community development, and makes visible the environmental and social connections we have with food. This is not to say that it challenges all dimensions of inequality nor to idealize the community it creates. Not all members are aware of what it takes to run an organization like this. Not all members are aware of processes related to food and the impact these can have on the environment and people. Not all members are willing and/or able to be actively part of cultivating these connections. However,
the organization is based on principles that draw out these environmental and social connections. The values that underpin the principles are woven into the processes of the Cooperative – processes that are constituted by negotiations between actors who consider each other’s realities and welfare, to find solutions that can work. Importantly, this does not develop into rigid rules but is acknowledged as an ongoing, dynamic development that requires time and reflexivity as situations change. It is this aspect of the Cooperative that directly challenges destructive logics of any food system – whether dominant or not – and embeds alternative logics into everyday processes. This form of governance and the flexible channels through which organizational processes are developed and maintained enables the Cooperative to be cognizant and reflexive about its operations, goals, and impact.

The ongoing inclusive dialogue that requires constant consideration of people and nature – not as entities unto themselves but as embedded in larger processes – is what characterizes the alterity of the organization. The fundamental importance of this kind of process development to the governance of the Cooperative means that the organization challenges the underlying conventions of standardization and efficiency that inform most economic relations, particularly in larger market systems. It also moves the consumer and producer beyond their binary roles and into the broader context of community. It is, by design, a community initiative that is driven and informed by member participation and interaction. The organization, constituted by its members, builds relationships between actors that challenges the rational, self-serving character of homo economicus and reinserts connection, community, and concern for nature back into food. This platform relies on engagement, collaboration, discussion, and learning among actors where food production, distribution and consumption are nodes of activity in which people can build new relations and new knowledges. It is my interpretation, that the Cooperative’s “alterity”, or potential to transform the food system, resides in the open, inclusive and reflexive processes that underpin its governing model.

People’s relationship to food is dynamic and therefore how they interact with it affects their perceptions of food. Therefore, those who are most involved in the governing of the organization internalize the values embedded within the principles and processes more deeply than those who are less active. This reciprocal
relationship is important. There is a difference between being aware of the processes that are related to food and being engaged with these processes. The difference between awareness and engagement has an impact on perceptions of food, the processes related to it and one’s role in these. So, the Cooperative, its governance model, the principles it is based on and the platform it creates endeavors to make visible environmental and social connections via food. It is an alternative network that can (and does) influence people’s perceptions and relations to food. However, being a member of the Cooperative does not guarantee that new perceptions and relations with food will be established – as is clear in my data. In addition, one does not have to be a Cooperative member to establish new perceptions and relations to food. The Cooperative is merely one way that people might connect and come to know food in new ways. Further study of the dynamics between actors in the Cooperative would certainly enrich understandings of AFNs, their impact on participant’s relation to food and the ways in which urban-rural and consumer-producer relations can be (re)defined.

### 6.2 Implications and Further Research

There is an inherent complexity to the food system and people seeking to be ethical consumers navigate this complexity in complicated ways. In my data, it initially seemed as if there was a value-action gap, particularly among the ex-members. They wanted to support the values the Cooperative stood for, but for whatever reason, did not remain members. However, they all tried to pursue ethical consumption, as defined by themselves, in different ways. For example, Jonas and Eva did not purchase meat (or much dairy) in order to support animal welfare and sustainability in their consumption choices. Though this did not necessarily “tick all the boxes” for them, it addressed the ones they felt were most important in a way that was convenient and affordable. Sofie purchased organic and “kort-reist” food from local shops near to where she lived. Again, she was able to support the values that were important to her in a convenient way. Matias joined community supported agriculture, which aligned better with his schedule and he felt he received a better amount of goods for the labor he put in. So, there was not necessarily a “gap” between what these members wanted to support and what they did in practice. All of these members discussed how their values informed their consumption practices.
Though they all appreciated the Cooperative and liked the idea of the model, convenience was a barrier for all of them, and price was a barrier for some. Also, the values they sought to reinforce when purchasing food elsewhere were varied and could be satisfied in different ways outside of the Cooperative. This demonstrates two important points: 1. Consumers’ expectations of food are informed by the dominant market and 2. as discussed above, value-action gaps may not be “gaps” at all, but multidimensional, complex, dynamic strategies that people adopt as they navigate the complicated food system.

Without a doubt, the industrialized and globalized food system powerfully shapes consumer expectations. The variety of goods, year-round availability, product cheapness, and convenience are considerations for almost everyone I spoke with. Whether these criteria are prioritized over other criteria, varied from person to person, and in my research, between member groups. From an ‘orders’ perspective, when looking at food systems, there seems to be an innate tension between the civic/domestic ‘orders’ and the market/industrial ‘orders’. To what extent this tension exists and to what degree the ‘orders’ may complement or supersede one another could be an interesting topic of further study. Regardless, the expectations that are informed by the dominant food system likely hinders alternative foods and/or food networks. For instance, in the Norwegian context, it is argued that there is a general perception that standard Norwegian products (their production and provisioning) are “good enough” (Borgen 2009). Food campaigns, such as ‘Nyt Norge’ and ‘Keyhole’ have imbued trust with the general Norwegian consumer population in the standard foods that are available via the dominant food system (Borgen 2009). This has likely obstructed the momentum of alternative food networks and alternative foods, such as organic and biodynamic.

This may be changing, however. Based on the conversations I had with people, there seems to be a tendency for Norwegians to want to support Norwegian farmers. Many informants mentioned that they had farmers in their family or that farming was part of their family’s heritage. In fact, farming is an important part of the Norwegian identity. This suggests that civic (care for others) and domestic (new relations) conventions can be incorporated into food network strategies, with emphasis on the farmer. This could be part of what is fueling the recent growth in
alternative networks, especially Community Supported Agriculture (CSA – andelslandbruk) in Norway. Perhaps this approach has become so popular over the past three years because it creates a direct connection between urbanites and a farmer. There has also been an increase in independent grocers who stock only local, organic, and/or biodynamic goods. The growth of other alternative food networks in Oslo has created challenges for the Cooperative but support for CSAs and organic/local storefronts may contribute to the embedding of alternative logics into food and food systems. In this sense, the alternative food networks may complement one another to propel new ways of knowing food that counters logics based on profit and convenience. To determine this, more research would need to be done on the other alternative food networks in Oslo to understand their priorities and modes of operations.

Another growing trend is the availability of alternative products such as organic and fair trade on grocery store shelves. The incorporation of alternative products in the general market could indicate that pressure from the fringe is encouraging the inclusion of civic values. The availability of organic and fair trade goods in the supermarkets has made goods with embedded values more convenient to obtain. However, the degree to which monoculture organic and global fair trade networks truly incorporate concern for the environment and others is questioned. The presence of these goods in the dominant market context may indicate that powerful actors in the food system recognize that there is a growing number of consumers who want to shop ethically. But the purchase of these foods does not necessarily challenge the logics that underpin the destructive tendencies of the food system (nor the power dynamics) that make obtaining these goods possible. Regardless, to some degree, the availability of these goods indicates that civic and ecological values have been accommodated in the dominant market. Though this may indicate that momentum in ecological citizenship is gathering, critical analyses of how this incorporation takes place, who is part of that process, and what goals are prioritized remains a vital field of study. Researchers could also explore the context from which both AFNs and alternative products arise in order to investigate the interplay of alternative networks and alternative products. This would provide more insight into the power dynamics of different actors in the food system and the strategies they adopt as ethical “qualities” are increasingly available.
At a macro level, AFNs are at the fringe and have been discussed as symbolic entities that have minimal effect on the dominant food system. However, at the micro level, AFNs can have a deeply significant impact on people’s lives. The Cooperative is a thriving alternative food network that maintains a membership base of 1,500 people. Though this is a small proportion of the population in Oslo, it remains a formidable force of people who are learning and engaging with food in new ways. It enables members to participate in processes related to food. This participation changes the way people understand food and food systems, often in ways that encourage consideration for nature and others. The Cooperative also supports over two dozen small-scale local farmers who prioritize ecological health above output and profit. By example, the Cooperative demonstrates how open, reflexive and ongoing processes can be a form of governance for food systems – a form of governance that contests the prioritization of efficiency, competition, and commodification. Initiatives like the Cooperative, that endeavor to prioritize the welfare of nature and others, provide grounded evidence that alternative logics can become embedded in day-to-day practices. These new logics encourage alternative ways of knowing food – ways that not only oppose, but offer alternatives to the destructive tendencies of the industrialized and globalized food system.
References


# Appendix 1: Popular food authors mentioned in my thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Books</th>
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<td><strong>Foer, Jonathon Safran</strong></td>
<td>Eating Animals (2009)</td>
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<td>Slow Food: the case for taste (2004)</td>
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<td>Chez Panisse (1982)</td>
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Appendix 2: More Photographs

Figure 9: Produce waiting to be distributed

The goods are delivered to one of the pick up locations, Skippergata 22. The café/venue allows the Kooperativet to use the space to prepare the member bags. Lately, the goods have been left in the crates and as members arrive, they assemble their own bags to take with them – they are told how much they can take of each item. Photo credit: Erin Dumbauld
Figure 10: New pickup system

Members picking up their bags at Skippergata 22. They are encouraged to pack their own bags and are told how much they can take of each item. This pickup approach was adopted in summer of 2017. The new approach was developed as a practical solution to a lack of available volunteers but also increases member interaction on pickup days. Photo credit: Erin Dumbauld
Oslo Kooperativet bags that have been packed and are ready for pick up at one of the pickup locations. This pickup location is at Mathallen which is an indoor food market with specialty shops featuring goods from small-scale Norwegian producers and shops with foreign imports. Mathallen allows the Cooperative to use part of the central dining area to pack and prepare bags. When I started as a member, the produce would be delivered to the pickup location, then a group of members would pack the bags from 1pm-3:30pm and another group of members would wait with the bags while members came to pick them up from 4pm-7pm. This has recently changed and is shown in the previous photograph. 2016. Photo credit: Erin Dumbauld
Appendix 3: Interview Guide

How long have you been a member of Oslo Kooperativet?*

How did you hear about it?

Have you been involved in the organization? In what ways do you participate?

How often do you order a bag?

Why did you choose to become a member? What are some of the reasons you joined?

What do you feel you have gained from being a member?

Would you say that your involvement with Oslo Kooperativet is a statement of some kind (political, community, environmental, health, animal welfare)?

Has your relationship to food changed in any way?

When you think of food, what do you think about?

When you think about the Norwegian food and its production, what comes to mind?

When you think of conventional agriculture, what comes to mind?

When you think about organic agriculture, what comes to mind?

When you think about local food, what comes to mind?

Have your food consumption habits changed in any way?

When you buy food elsewhere, where do you shop? Why?

When you think about sustainability, what comes to mind?

What would be your advice to Kooperativet to improve the organization?

* This was a guide I developed in the beginning of my research project before I knew what direction my research would take. In very few cases did I actually read these questions as they are structured here. In fact, there are very few cases in which I looked at the document while interviewing my respondents. In order to learn about the Cooperative, as it is perceived by others, I let the interviewees guide the trajectory of the interviews. I have included this here to give the reader an idea of how I initially approached my topic and my interviews.