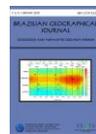




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### ARTICLES/ARTIGOS/ARTÍCULOS/ARTICLES

## Exploring the role of consumers as drivers of agri-food networks: contexts, beliefs, and governance

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### ABSTRACT

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The paper takes into account the Solidarity Purchasing Groups. In many European countries these groups of consumers are based on common interest not only in quality and healthy food, but also in the direct contact with producers. New relationships among consumers and farmers are established which appear to be complementary to the standard long retail circuits. The study aims at illustrating and testing the hypothesis that the Solidarity Purchasing Groups organize the food provision by through a polycentric decision system. An empirical analysis is proposed which concerns with the organization of the decision-making processes in Solidarity Purchasing Groups (SPGs). Three typical case studies were carried out in order to corroborate the hypothesis that polycentric governance systems are achieved by through constitutional processes aimed at achieving a horizontal distribution of critical decisions rights.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:**

Solidariedade grupos de compras  
Processo de tomada de decisão  
Recursos comuns

**RESUMO: EXPLORANDO O PAPEL DOS CONSUMIDORES COMO CONDUTORES DE REDES AGROALIMENTARES: CONTEXTOS, CRENÇAS E GOVERNANÇA.** Neste artigo pretende-se apresentar os trabalhos dos grupos de compras solidárias. Em muitos países europeus esses grupos de consumidores agem tomando como base o interesse comum em realizar compras, não só em termos de qualidade e alimentos saudáveis, mas também no contato direto com os produtores. Novas relações entre consumidores e agricultores são estabelecidas, de tal modo que parecem complementar os circuitos do varejo. O presente estudo tem como objetivo demonstrar e testar a hipótese de que os grupos de compras solidários são eficazes em organizar a aquisição de alimentos por meio de um sistema policêntrico de decisão. Uma análise empírica é aqui proposta no que diz respeito à organização dos processos de tomada de decisão em solidariedade entre os grupos de compras (SPGs). Três estudos de casos típicos foram realizados a fim de corroborar a hipótese de que os sistemas de governança policêntricos são alcançados por meio de processos constitucionais destinados a obter uma distribuição horizontal dos direitos de decisões críticas.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:**

Solidaridad grupos de compra  
Proceso de toma de decisiones  
Recursos comunes

**Resúmen - EXPLORANDO EL PAPEL DE LOS CONSUMIDORES CONDUCORES DE LAS REDES AGROALIMENTARIAS: CONTEXTOS, LAS CREENCIAS Y LA GOBERNABILIDAD.** En este artículo se pretende presentar los trabajos de los grupos de compras solidarias. En muchos países europeos estos grupos de consumidores actúan basándose en el interés común en realizar compras, no solo en términos de calidad y alimentos saludables, pero también en el contacto directo con los productores. Se establecen nuevas relaciones entre consumidores y agricultores, de así que parecen complementar los circuitos del minorista. El presente estudio tiene como objetivo demostrar y probar la hipótesis de que los grupos de compras solidarios son eficaces en organizar la adquisición de alimentos a través de un sistema con varios centros de decisión. Un análisis empírica es aquí propuesta en lo que concierne a la organización de los procesos de toma de decisión en solidaridad entre los grupos de compras (SPGs). Tres estudios de casos típicos se llevaron a cabo con el fin de corroborar la hipótesis de que los sistemas de gobernanza con varios centros se logran a través de procesos constitucionales destinados a obtener una distribución horizontal de los derechos de decisiones críticas.

## Introduction

The Solidarity Purchasing Groups (SPGs) are example of food provision networks and in many social and geographical areas are rapidly increasing in importance. European experiences have been analyzed under various disciplinary perspectives and have given raise to a rich and complex organizational picture. SPGs include the (a) reconnection of producer and consumer, (b) the direct exchange through which this occurs, and (c) the shared goals and values (Mount, 2012). Goodman, (2003) pointed out that the European research on alternative food network addressed several critical issues, from food safety to contested trajectories of rural economy and society. Scholars fostered an intensive debate on food networks addressing conceptual issues (Morris and Kirwan, 2011; Kirwan, 2006; Tregear, 2001) and the implication of such forms on the field of the civic life (Renting *et al.* 2012). Tregear (2001) argued that the key characteristics of the alternative food network are: the anchoring in a particular locale; the orientation towards economic viability: the interest for the ecological sustainability and social justice. Nonetheless these networks entail heterogeneous set of food systems. The research on food networks the requires to pay attention to actors goals (Tregears, 2011, p. 425) in order to avoid the risk to conflate spatial characteristics with the desirable outcomes, the actor behaviour and the food properties. Renting *et al.* (2003) identified the basic dimensions of the governance of the food networks pointing out the central role of localization and of direct contact between producers and consumers. Short exchange circuits and standard retail activities in the European Agribusiness are thought of as being complementary (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006). Higgins *et al.* (2008) associated the locally based and face-to-face organization of the alternative food networks to the influence of the coordination patterns of the chain upon the quality outcomes expected. SPGs were considered as organizational innovations emerging in the transformation of the Agribusiness, also in the context of the rural development processes and differentiation (Marsden, 1999). Scholars highlighted the complex organizational nature of the SPGs according to at least three main aspects. Firstly, SPGs are thought of as an organizational form which belong to the class of short circuits (Sonnino, Marsden, 2006), a set of innovative forms of food exchange which tend to be based on a network principle of organization. Secondly, SPGs are characterized by a strong influence of specific values upon the organizational choices (Kirwan, 2006). Thirdly, SPGs tend to encourage or to pursue the direct contact among farmers and consumers. These points also suggest that citizens and consumers expectations tend to be overlapped in the life of a SPGs. Health, environment protection and ethical goals are thus associated to the practical objective of efficiently organizing the food provision to groups members. The complexity of the members expectations influence the organization of the SPGs. In the analysis of the organization of SPGs a lower attention has been paid to the arrangements supporting the decision-making process. The origin and the evolution of each group as an organization can be understood in terms of constitutional processes (Grandori, 2010) based upon the distribution of critical rights (control rights, decision rights, property rights etc) among the participants. Therefore, the analysis of the allocation of the decision rights among the group

members helps to achieve an enhanced comprehension of such forms and of the opportunities they build up for improving the consumption patterns and connecting the farmers to the consumers. The paper aims to illustrate and to test the hypothesis that the Solidarity Purchasing Groups (SPGs) are based upon polycentric decision systems (Ostrom *et al.* 1961; Ostrom, 2010). This hypothesis reflects the idea that a polycentric decision system corresponds to the expectations of participation of the group members. Nevertheless we also contend that it is likely the most efficient way to integrate the different level of decisions necessary to mobilize the groups resources and to provide the food at the small group scale.

The analytical framework is presented in the paragraph 2. The empirical analysis is illustrated in the paragraph 3. In the discussion of the results we also argue that the organization of the decision process highlights, on the one hand, the complex organizational nature of the SPGs and, on the other hand, the many facets of their activity. In the last paragraph we includes some final remarks.

## **Analytical framework**

### *The theoretical context*

The great variability of the experiences in food networks basically entails processes of re-localization of economic activities and practices (Sonnino, Marsden, 2006). This requires a more complex conceptualization emphasizing the role of the concepts of both network and territorial embeddedness (Hess, 2004). The complexity of the class of the innovative consumers networks has been addressed under both an organizational and an institutional perspective. Two dimensions of short food supply chains have been identified (Renting *et al.*, 2003): a) the organizational structure and the specific mechanism entailed in the extended relations in time and space; b) the quality definition and conventions. With respect to the first dimension three positions are distinguished:

i) *face-to-face* interaction, consumers purchase directly from producers, in this case the “act of purchasing” is the means to access to consumption and the degree of engagement is based on the direct contact;

ii) *relation of proximity*, more larger is the distance and more complex become the organization and the institutional arrangement. Spatial proximity may be intertwined by cultural proximity (Renting *et al.*, 2003, p. 400). Note that the consumption is seen as an instrument of extending of the supply chain *via* the buying power, under this view the consumption in this circuit is perceived as an instrument.

iii) *extended relations*, in which there is not a direct relationship between producers and consumers.

The classes identified become more complex as soon due to the complementary relationship between conventional and “alternative” circuits increased (Sonnino, Marsden, 2006).

The second dimension considered concerns the quality definition and conventions. Two main categories are identified. The first focuses on the link between quality attributes and the place of production or producer. This

relationship is complex in nature and entails cultural as well as historical elements, which are associated to the product and are also at the core of the consumer's perception. A second category of short food supply chains defines quality in terms of *bioprocesses* taking care of the natural intrinsic characteristics of the product and entailing in that they are for health and safety (Renting *et al.*, 2003, pp. 401-402).

Brunori *et al.* (2012, p. 4) contend that the conceptualization of Solidarity Purchasing Groups is based on the establishment of new social relationships as alternative food production initiatives (hybrid networks that includes new actors – mainly consumers - and excludes others) and on the change of rules and norms of production, consumption and selling and building new technologies and infrastructures. Re-embedding production and consumption into new social relations and dis-embedding them from dependence on big players in the agri-food system can avoid the risk of appropriation and conventionalization. Re-embedding production and consumption gives also a basis to the political action of the networks: a) they exert their freedom of choice in a radical way, as they change not only one or several items, but the whole shopping environment; b) they participate to food movements aimed at changing rules affecting the food system; c) they co-produce –together with producers and with a variety of other actors new system of food provision; d) they reconfigure the way that food is embodied into socio-technical practices (Brunori *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore SPGs are conceived as system innovation drivers to the extent that their reconfiguring the boundaries between: political action and consumption, public organizations and business, citizenship and private interests, lay actors and experts (Brunori *et al.*, 2012). Multidimensional patterns of actions give thus raise to a multidimensional path of change and innovation in which the consumption is re-located within the context of the whole social life and system of relationships. Beyond the methodological and theoretical implications, the re-anchoring of consumption in the system of social relationships allows the actors to cope with uncertainty in terms of reflexivity.

### **A conjectural conceptualization of the SPGs' practices**

The focus of the actors –held as participants of networks not more as individuals – is not on the characteristics of food *per se*, but rather on the integration of the food characteristics in higher level of symbolization where the food entails multiple use values (Holloway *et al.*, 2007). For example, to connect consumption and production of food allows the groups to with the uncertainty about the origin and the intrinsic qualitative characteristics of the products. A further example is that the interest toward the local production-consumption systems is emphasized both because of the attention paid to the environmental resources and to basic necessity of establishing and nurturing direct relations between consumers and producers. The SPG practices mirror the multiplicity of the meanings of food and its centrality in the setting of networks of relationships. According to Brunori *et al.* (2012) the SPGs practices contribute to:

a) to transform the shopping environment, basically promoting the emerging of relation aspects in the circulation of the food;

b) to engage the participants in food movements and in the change of rules affecting the food system;

c) to reconfigure the way that food is embodied into socio-technical practices.

This characterization highlights the innovative nature of the SPGs and the structuring capability of the practices. However, beyond the food, SPGs are interested to further goods (Holloway *et al.*, 2007). Health and environmental quality are co-produced through the specification of the characteristics of the food products and the joint coordination of the production processes with the farmers.

Under an organizational point of view (Grandori, 2010), the practices of the SPGs members have to be interpreted with respect to the constitutional processes establishing the relationships among the members and among the networks and the groups. According to Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994, p. 1438), social networks are “phenomenological realities” or “networks of symbols”. Culture and social relations empirically interpenetrate with and mutually condition one another so thoroughly that is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. Nonetheless cultural discourse are analytically autonomous with respect to the network patterns of social relationships. The correspondence (and the autonomy) of the networks of relationships and symbols defines the food chains as context negotiated. In such a geographical, social and symbolic space, the processes of structuring relationships interact with processes of cultural systems creation: networks are thus socio-economic systems supporting processes of connection and disconnection. We contend therefore that in the experience of SPGs the food is the necessary instrument for the constituting of social relationships and in turn provides to the members the access to further goods perceived as urgently necessary in the face of the uncertainty affecting the quality of the food and the social exchanges. The practices of SPGs members tend to embody meaning and identity in the sense of Jones and Murphy (2010) and are at the basis of the specific decision-making process which characterize the groups. To consider the practices contribute “can help to reveal the formative characteristics, spatial and temporal contingencies, and/or uncertainties and inconsistencies that constitute/mark all economic activities and systems, even those that seem highly formalized and structured” (Jones and Murphy, 2010, p. 381). We then conjecture that the structuring capability of the practices (Jones and Murphy, 2010) is explicitly aimed at constructing systems of activities whose expected outcomes are the provision of food and of health and environmental protection as joint products of the food and ecological embeddedness (Holloway *et al.*, 2007; Morris and Kirwani, 2011). This hypothesis can be expressed by through the concept of *action situation* whose structure includes: i) the set of the participants; ii) the position to be filled by the participants, iii) the potential outcomes; iv) the set of the allowable action and the functions linking the actions to the potential outcomes; v) the control that an individual has in regard to this function; vi) the information available to participants about actions and outcomes and their linkages; vii) the cost and benefits assigned to actions and outcomes (Ostrom, 2005, p. 32). More precisely, according to Ostrom, the *participants* in an action situation are decision-making entities assigned to a

position and they are capable of selecting actions from a set of alternatives made available at nodes in a decision process and the *positions* are the connecting links between participants and action situation vary substantially in the degree to which participants control their own entry or exit from a position (Ostrom, 2005, pp. 38-39). Moreover our hypothesis is thus that the members (and the subgroups) of a SPG are participants of an action situation assigned to specific positions where food, health and environment as potential outcomes of system of activities yields. We concentrate on the decision-making processes organization. Actually, the SPGs tend to be characterized by: a) decision processes that concern various levels of decisions; b) a variable engagement of all the members in the decision making processes, also thanks to several communication media (Brunori *et al.*, 2012). Grandori (2010) showed that actors may organize their activities by taking into account the how of their resources are complementary focusing on the specification of:

- a) the pooled resources;
- b) the actors or types of actors providing them;
- c) the rights over resources are pooled and which are not (who owns the committed assets; how will decision rights are allocated and according to which procedures will action be selected, how will the rights to residual rights be distributed;
- d) the mechanism will lock resources in while providing the partners with exit rights and modes.

The resources pooled in the constitution of a SPG are basically the labour and the skills of the member and a small amount of further resources – including money – which normally support the logistic activities. Due to the openness of the groups, the types of the actors are not differentiated with respect to the type of resources. While a detailed framework is normally identified with respect to the decision processes. The distribution of the decision rights is a critical characteristics of the SPG as it reflects the basic values of the members and contribute to shape the organization of food provision. The values entailed are basically associated to the network context (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Grandori, 2010). The allocation of the decision rights to the group members should reflect the “network roots” of the values. Furthermore, the network also influence the ranking of the group resources (labour, knowledge, social and political relationship) in the sense of Grandori (2010). Therefore we introduce the hypothesis that a SPG gives raise to polycentric decision system (Ostrom *et al.*, 1961, pp- 831-832). “Polycentric” connotes many centers of decision making that are formally independent of each other. Whether they actually function independently, or instead constitute interdependent system of relations, is an empirical question in particular cases.

A polycentric decision system allow the group to:

- a) to organize the decision process adhering to the network relationships without constraining the network;
- b) to economize in gathering and elaborating information about the members preferences;

- c) to facilitate the interexchange of information among various decisional levels;
- d) to facilitate the participation of the members to the group life.

To support the hypothesis introduced we provide an empirical identification of a polycentric decision system within the SPGs . So we propose three case studies concerning SPGs making an attempt in identifying the decision making system implemented by SPGs .

## **Empirical investigation**

### *Method and objective*

Our method is based the conceptualization of the practices concerning the decision-making processes in SPGs. According to Jones and Murphy (2010, p. 381). The aim is to identify the factors and the relationships which account for the organization of such processes in the SPGs studied. Three typical case studies (Seawright, Gerring, 2008, Yin, 1994) are proposed under a confirmatory perspective. The cases concern SPGs located in Perugia, Siena and Florence (Central Italy). The basic research question addressed was: *how is the SPG decision-making process organized?* This research question was drawn from the theoretical propositions introduced. Namely, we conceptualized the SPG in terms of the *action situation* (Ostrom, 2005, pp. 32 ff.) and we aimed at addressing its internal structure focusing of SPG members (participants) and their positions in the decision making process.

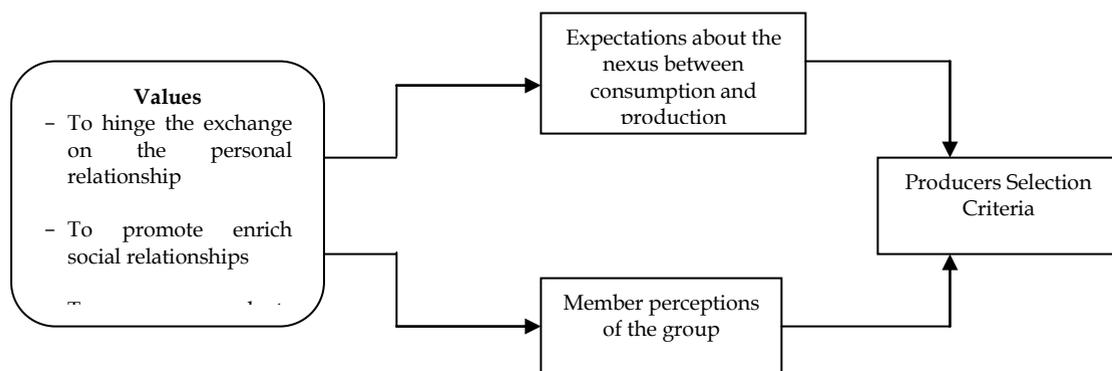
The case studies were carried out by semi-structured interview conducted with responsible person of the group management. Firstly, the list of the questions was sent to the person to be interviewed. The questions submitted concerns: i) the history of the group; ii) the organizational change and the current organizations; iii) the role of the members; iv) the types of internal and external relationships of the group; v) the types of activities carried out; vi) the modes of the decision making process; vii) the types of products demanded by the group; viii) the criteria adopted to select the agricultural producers. Then the interviews was conducted and transcribed. The information collected were elaborated in order to answer to the research question introduced above. The generalization method is the *analytical generalization* in which a previous developed theory used as a template for comparing the empirical evidence from case studies (Yin, 1994, p.31) and in which results are generalized to theory. We analyzed the data through a classification of the decisions labelling as *strategic* the decisions which influence the identification of the long-term characteristics of the organization and shape many other, low order decisions. For example, the *producers selection criteria* contribute to determine the system of group relationship and influence the purchasing decisions. *Operational* decisions are those which substantiate the day-to-day group activities.

### SPG GasPiterina Perugia (Italy)

The group *GasPiterina* was originated in 2011 as a fraction of an existing group. The latter was originally based in the Southern periphery of Perugia (chief town of Umbria, Central Italy) and was established in the 2008 by 7-8 families. Over the years several families have joined the group, and it grew up to 25 families at the end of 2011. Recently some of the families exited the original group and have constituted a news group called *GasPiterina*, which is based in Western periphery of the city. As it will be explained below, the geographical factor was not the unique driver of the organizational change mentioned.

The types of products requested from the group member entail both the identification of the food products requested to fill the family baskets (*consumers requests*) and the setting of the boundaries of the groups activities (*boundaries ruling*). Actually, the identification of the types of products is the basis for establishing the connection between the members of the group and producers. Having identified the types of products, the group members have set the basic dimensions of the economic and social space where carry out the group activities.

As in many Solidarity Purchasing Group, the critical relationship is not held as supplying activity; rather the members concentrate on the production activities and aim at establishing direct contacts with the farmers. Therefore, the identification and the adoption of the criteria needed to choice the producers is a critical step in order to allow to the members to achieve their expectations about the nexus between the consumption and the production stage. These criteria provide also a specification of the perception the member have of the group as an organization. The member's perception of the group is rooted in a set of values like "To hinge the exchange on personal relationship", "To promote enriched social relationship", "To procure products form short circuits". These values also shape the expectations about the nexus between consumption and production. The figure 1 summarizes the nexus between values, expectations, perceptions and producers selection criteria.



**Figure 1:** *GasPiterina* Identification of producers selection criteria.

The basic principle of decision making is the participatory deliberation. The strategic decisions have been made through an extensive process of discussion and an analysis characterized by the participation of all the member of the group. A further strategic decision is the setting up of network relationships with other solidarity purchasing groups. The networks provide the original organizational form of the group. It currently integrates and channels information allowing the group cope with procurement issues which cannot be managed on local scale. The network's relationships are also exploited by *GasPiterina* in order to develop further social initiatives.

The organization of the procurement is based on the association of a responsible person for a given product (or a small set of products). Normally the responsible member:

- a) ascertains the requests of the members;
- b) gathers the specific information concerning the requests;
- c) transfers the order to the producer
- d) organizes the distribution of the product.

The distribution of the products is carried out at the offices of the SPG. This simply model, common in the SPGs environment, can be adopted just because of the small scale of the activities. Beyond the activities mentioned, the organization of the group also entails the relationships with other group, mainly aimed at carrying out communication initiatives.

### **SPG GasAlpa - Siena (Italy)**

The group GasAlpa was established in 2007 by a process lasted about one year. The ALPA (an organization linked to Italian General Confederation of Workers CGIL) has promoted the creation of the group. The first issue faced by the founding members was the choice between a formal or informal organization. The member decided to adopt a formal organization considered as the best tool to pursue the objective of the associated members. Although some of the original members were "institutional actors" (i.e., Associations or institutionalized bodies), they exited the group just a few time after the outset of the basic organization. The group is composed of about 100 households, which are in touch with 20 farms and the value of the products purchased correspond about 50-70.000 euros/year (70% is supplied by local farms).

The management of the group is based on the Assembly of all the members and the Board. The latter is management body composed of elected people, rather it is the outcome of a spontaneous process of self-engagement in the SPGs constituting process and activities. The Board takes the most of the decisions – as

the majority of the members prefer to delegate the decision rights – thus the SPG *GasAlpa* can be thought of as being characterized by a *centralized decision making process* enriched by *participatory deliberation* (on charge of the Assembly) concerning specific issues or, most frequently, the annual validation of the Board management decisions.

The original set of promoters identified a basic organization charging the procurement decision on a responsible person for each product (or small product of products). The procurement activity is organized by the choice of a responsible person as in the previous case. The member responsible for a product normally:

- a) ascertains the requests of the members;
- b) gathers the specific information concerning the requests;
- c) transfers the order to the producer
- d) organizes the distribution of the product
- e) collects the payments and channel them to the member who acts as cashier.

The specialisation of the functions allows the group to act in a transparent manner. Transparency is also a value of the relationships that the group aims at establishing. Further values are: equity, solidarity and direct relationship with the producers. Local producers are preferred. The group tends to require the engagement of the producers in order to achieve a responsible participation and to promote the emerging of sharing views.

Strategic level decisions are normally made by the Board, even though the Assembly is requested to approve such decisions or may encourage the Board to take them. The Board plans the constitution of the systems of group relationships with further SPGs and the *ReteGas*. This line of organizational networking allocates the group's activities and perspectives within the wider context in which the SPGs operate also under the influence of the Tuscany Local Regional policy. Further initiatives are also promoted by the Board, the participation to local markets (also farmers markets) it has been sometimes undertaken. Notably the Board encourages the emerging of a pro-active profile of the members: when some new interest emerges with respect to a product or a producer, the members interested are encouraged to develop the contact, to assess the capability of the potential supplier, to test the supply with respect to the principles of the group and finally to organize the procurement under the validation of the Board. The pro-active enhancing approach is thought of as a strategic tool to the purpose of rooting the membership in the SPG view.

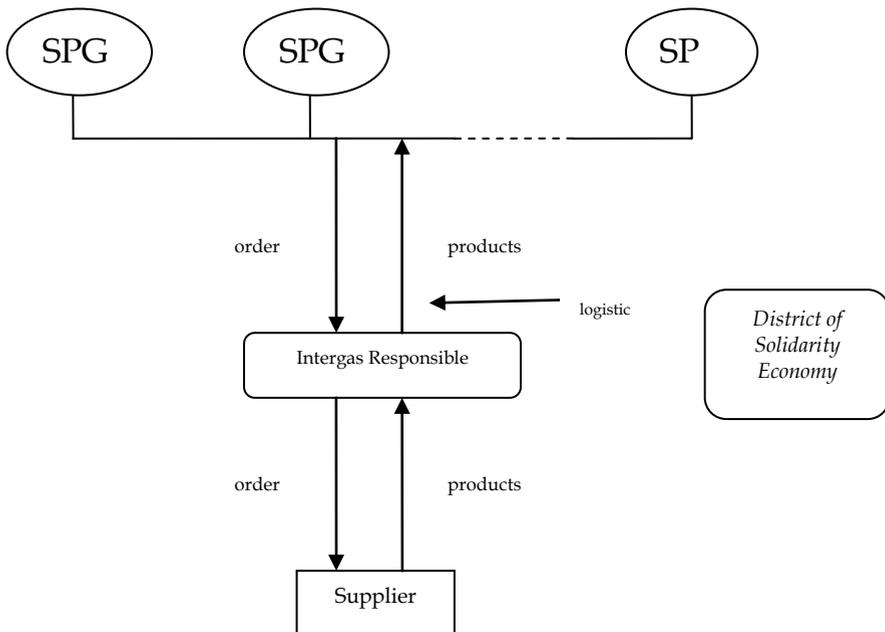
#### SPG Ricorboli solidale – Firenze (Italy)

*Ricorboli Solidale* is a SPG established in Florence (Central Italy) since 2008. It is embedded in a social context that sustains several solidarity initiatives since thirty years. These activities span from micro-credit programs to the direct assistance to groups of families. This social context entails different cultural environments, which are homogeneous with respect to the search for building patterns of social interaction based on relational values and solidarity objectives. *Ricorboli Solidale* started in 2008 with 8 families, but grew up to 35 families in 2012. A distinctive characteristic is that the engagement of the members as responsible of the provision of class of products. This choice strengthens the horizontal connections among the members. The selection of producers is based

upon few, strong principles among which the protection of the nature, of the environment and of the labour and the play the main role. The SPG seeks to purchases products mainly on the local markets. Under an organizational point of view the producers selection is managed by:

- a) gathering information about potential suppliers;
- b) analyzing the potential supplier characteristics, also with respect to the principles mentioned;
- c) a supplying experimental stage.

These activities are supported by the *District of Solidarity Economy* an institutional arrangement active at regional scale which undertakes initiatives aimed at supporting the groups activities. The *District* contributes to the suppliers selection process by providing maps of the producers who reflect the protection principles. A further institutional supports comes from, a sort of coordinating device supporting the SPGs in managing large purchasing orders (*intergas*). The management of the large purchasing order is illustrated in the Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** *Ricorboli Solidale* The management of the large purchasing order.

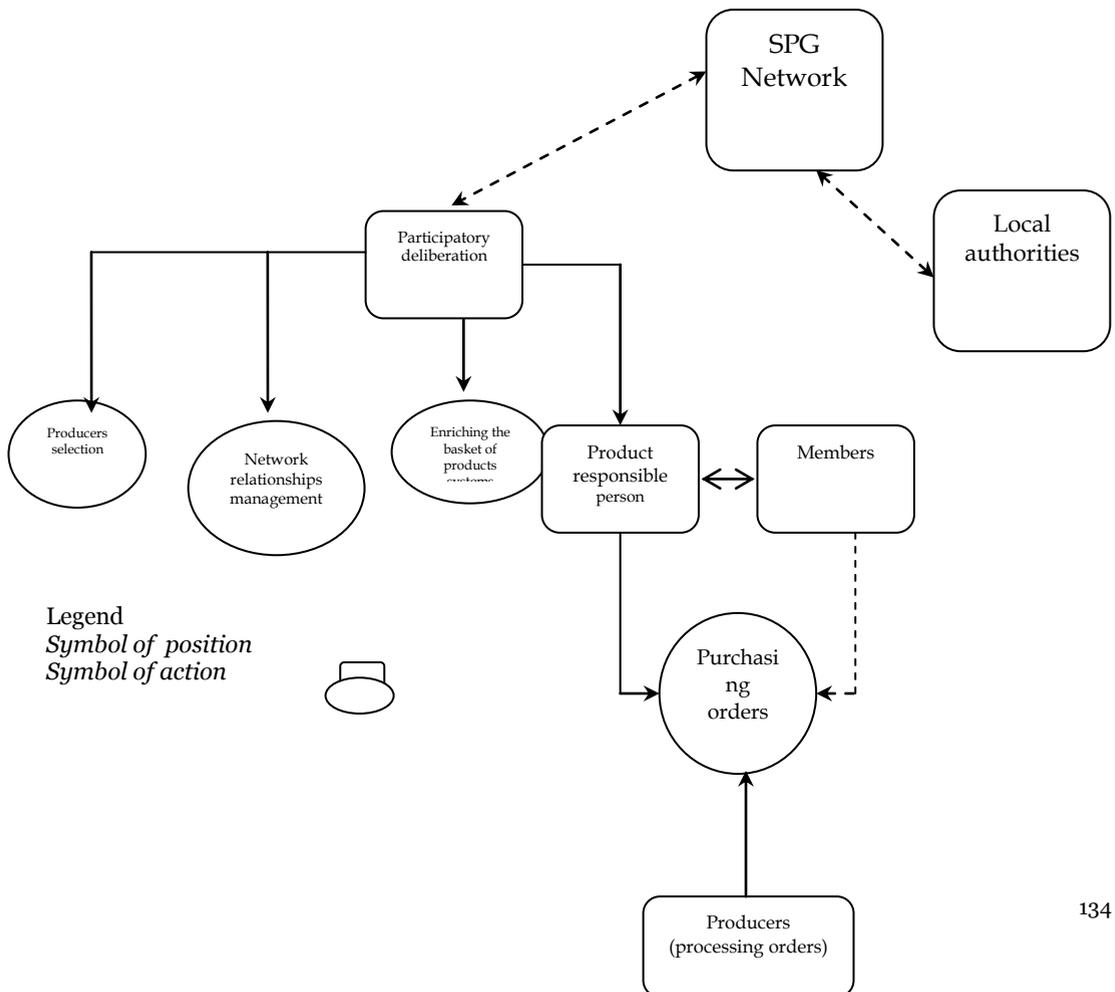
The figure illustrates the building of social space based on the engagement of three positions of the SPG environment. This engagement is aimed both at solving the problem of managing large purchasing order and to put in practice the principles *Ricorboli Solidale* shares with the other SPGs.

The decision-making process is largely based on a deliberative approach whose origin is in the context rather than in *Ricorboli Solidale*. The group meeting takes place by a monthly frequency. The producers may participate.

Ethics is the main guide. A central objective of the SPG is thus the elaboration of principles for the management of common goods.

### A brief discussion

The decision-making systems built by each of the three SPG can be illustrated by the figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Decision-making system.

The figure illustrates the positions of the participants and of the external body who contributes to the decisions making. The deliberative participation is organized at several levels and entails a critical role for the network of the SPGs as well as for the public authorities. It seems that these three decision-making nodes are systematically present in the organization, even though their role could differ across the cases. The decisions give raise to the actions which are in turn to the achievement of the SPGs objectives. The organization of the SPGs activities emerges as the organization of the co-production of health, environment and labour protection (as in the case of Ricorboli solidale). The co-production of common goods under the guide of a polycentric decision making system seems to characterize the experiences examined.

### **Final remarks**

The study considered some organizational aspects of the SPG. The contribution of the study is main due to the emphasis on the relationship between the network context of the SPG and the organizational origin of the group. Drawing from Grandori (2010) we contended that the network context support the ranking of the resources needed by the group and thus channel the allocation of the rights among the participants. We focuses then of the allocation of decision rights. The study addressed the question on how is organized the decision-making process in SPGs. Three case studies carried out and presented demonstrate that the emerging organization of the decision-making process reflect the polycentric system form which in turn correspond to the typical arrangement of the decision making process for the management of the common goods. The evidence may contribute to the design and to the management of the SPGs and to their performance.

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