

IRSA - CONGRESSO MUNDIAL DE SOCIOLOGIA RURAL (01/10/2025 A 20/01/2026) - IRSA 24 - HOW ARE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS GOVERNED?

BEYOND HORIZONTAL AND AFFECTIVE RELATIONS: UNPACKING THE HYBRID GOVERNANCE OF ALTERNATIVE FOOD NETWORKS IN SPAIN

Andrés Navarro Álvarez (andres.navarro@uab.cat)

Sergio Villamayor Tomás (sergio.villamayor@uab.cat)

Our food systems are in crisis. As globalized food supply transgresses planetary boundaries, climate change increasingly threatens the food security of a growing population. The resulting social and environmental trade-offs are unevenly distributed across social groups and geographies. Against this backdrop, alternative food networks (AFNs) advance a “promise of difference” in terms of justice and sustainability. These niche innovations seek to reconfigure producer–consumer relationships and agri-food practices while navigating the inherent tensions between vision and viability. Consequently, institutionalizing endogenous modes of governance remains a major challenge for the long-term success of AFNs.

Although hybridity is widely theorized as a defining trait of AFN governance, empirical research continues to privilege “alterity” over “conventional” aspects. In particular, organizational accounts tend to downplay economic and hierarchical

forms of coordination, foregrounding horizontal and affective arrangements instead. Moreover, existing analyses often fail to acknowledge that farmers, consumers, and third parties embody distinct societal sectors within AFNs, each bringing different institutional logics to organizational processes.

This study aims to explore the diversity of organizational practices that govern AFNs, examining how these practices are shaped by the nature of producer and consumer involvement. We analyze 45 initiatives in Catalonia and Valencia (Spain), encompassing different types of producer–consumer relations. Primary data consists of online semi-structured interviews with one key informant per initiative, including leaders, managers, and active members. Interview transcripts are coded and analyzed through the lens of organizational theory to assess the interplay of market-like, bureaucratic, communitarian, and democratic practices.

We expect to identify recurring patterns and tensions across these food provision arrangements, offering nuanced insights into AFNs' relational agency. In doing so, the study contributes to debates on commoning, conventionalization, and niche–regime interactions, while informing more effective advocacy strategies and policy interventions to support food system transformations.

Palavras-chave: food system governance; alternative food networks; hybrid organizations; sustainability transformations.