

*Politics and territorial governance
of food consumer groups
in the district of Lavapiés, Madrid*



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Abstract: The article aims to characterise the organisational model and the discourse of the food consumer groups located in Lavapiés, a district in central Madrid (Spain), in order to test whether these groups can be conceptualised as forms of political and social innovation based on the principle of cooperation between producers and consumers. The methodology consists of an empirical study based upon semi-structured interviews with a prominent member of each of Lavapiés' consumer groups. An inductive coding and an analysis of co-occurrences were conducted in order to process the qualitative information. We verify the hypothesis that these groups constitute an example of construction of self-organised alternative social networks based upon the concept that food consumption can be considered to constitute a political choice, contributing to creating agro-ecological alternative models of food production and consumption. Territorial governance of consumer groups involves the existence of close links with a dense social network embedded in the neighbourhood of Lavapiés, and with Madrid's agro-ecological movement.

Keywords: consumer groups, agro-ecology, politics, territorial governance, Lavapiés.

**La política y la gobernanza territorial de los grupos de consumo alimentario
del distrito de Lavapiés, Madrid**

Resumen: El artículo tiene como finalidad caracterizar el modelo organizativo y el discurso de los grupos de consumo alimentario de Lavapiés, un distrito del centro de Madrid, con objeto de verificar si estos grupos pueden ser conceptualizados como formas de innovación política y social sustentada en el principio de cooperación entre productores y consumidores. La metodología consiste en un estudio empírico basado en entrevistas semi-estructuradas con un miembro relevante de cada uno de los grupos de consumo de Lavapiés. Para procesar la información cualitativa, se llevaron a cabo una codificación inductiva y un análisis de coocurrencias. Se verifica la hipótesis de que estos grupos constituyen un ejemplo de construcción de redes sociales alternativas auto-organizadas basadas en la idea de que el consumo alimentario constituye una elección política, que contribuyen a crear modelos alternativos agro-ecológicos de producción y consumo alimentarios. El modelo de gobernanza territorial de los grupos de consumo involucra la existencia de vínculos intensos con las redes sociales del barrio de Lavapiés y con el movimiento agro-ecológico de Madrid.

Palabras clave: grupos de consumo, agroecología, política, gobernanza territorial, Lavapiés.

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Introduction

The predominant model of food production and consumption on a global scale, led by the big retailing firms and the big agro-industrial companies marketing commodities, is characterised by a high degree of oligopolistic concentration of the world's food market shares and by optimisation of large-scale supply, logistics and distribution of raw materials and standardised food products. Critics of this model state that it generates huge inequalities, as well as a clear imbalance in commercial bargaining power between distributors and farmers; furthermore, it generates environmental degradation, due both to the long distances raw materials and products are transported and to the high level of consumption of synthetic phytosanitary products and fertilisers and to the high degree of carbon emissions (EPA 2016). Likewise, the globalised Big Retailers' model promotes territorial imbalances, both in the production zones of one same country and at international scale, and tends towards the homogenisation of food consumption, thus hindering the production and cultural diversity of local agro-food systems (Sanz-Cañada and Muchnik 2016).

By way of another option in relation to the prevailing model, there is growing interest in alternative food production and consumption models, based upon the need to contribute to changing both the prevailing economic model of agro-food globalisation and the social relationships that maintain and reproduce it. Although their diversity hinders their definition, since the end of the twentieth century the develop-

ment of a plethora of new production-consumption forms of interaction, known as "alternative agro-food networks" (AFN), implies fostering collective actions possessing at least three common features (Whatmore and Thorne 1997): (a) the search for more sustainable ways of production (i.e. agro-ecological production); (b) the search for new models of relations between producers and consumers based not only on competition but also on new solidarities; and (c) the consequent search for new ways of organising commercial relationships based on the development of short supply chains. A growing body of literature addressing AFN has since been produced (Deverre and Lamine 2010; Goodman *et al.* 2012; Tregear 2011). AFN have assumed not only environmental and social objectives, but also political ones, as well as the generation of relational social capital in a new territorial context concerning organizational proximity between rural and urban areas. Some of the main models adopted by the AFN are, among others, consumer groups, social and neighbourhood vegetable gardens, producers' markets and food supply by public institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.).

The present paper focuses upon the consumer groups (CG), a consumer-led typology of AFN. Although today they involve a variety of differentiated organisational forms, as well as different degrees of alternativeness, CG are born as non-formal associations of consumers devoted to the regular collective purchase of food products, ordered directly from farmers located in neighbouring areas and who show respect for the environment, among other ethical criteria. These products usually take the form of shopping baskets of organic fruits and vegetables, and eventually, other food and also non-food products (i.e. cosmetics). CG shift from an individual concept of consumption to a social one, where processes of appropriation of items and social practices involving consumers constitute key issues (Brunori *et al.* 2012).

In recent times we have witnessed the advent of a certain degree of diversity of CG at international level which we could, to simplify, classify into two principal typologies¹. In the first place, certain CG present a clearly political orientation towards agro-ecology and food sovereignty, and they are characterised by the goal of social transformation and by self-management. Although there is a range of intermediate categories, at the other end of the scale are the groups whose consumers are fundamentally concerned with healthy, ecological food exhibiting sensorial quality, but who

1• Some different criteria can be defined for a typology of CG: whether or not they have a political orientation, the degree of commitment with the producer, the type of management, and the size of the group (Couceiro *et al.* 2016).

have no clearly defined political orientation and who do not require their members to have a high degree of commitment or to spend much time on group activities.

Our research aims to characterise the organisational model and the discourse of the CG located in Lavapiés, a district in central Madrid, in order to test whether these CG can be conceptualised as forms of political and social innovation based on the principle of cooperation between producers and consumers. The degree of alter-nativeness and the territorial governance of the Lavapiés CG will shape the hypothesis to be tested. In particular, we aim to verify if the Lavapiés CG meet the following conditions: (a) their organisation is self-managed; ii) they are politically oriented towards the principles of food sovereignty and construction of communities of consumption; and (b) they are embedded in the social networks of the Lavapiés quarter. We conducted an empirical study of the Lavapiés CG, focusing on their internal organisation, upon the networking process with local farmers and on the social environment of the neighbourhood.

The second section of the article reflects the theoretical framework of our research and the research hypothesis: on the one hand, we present the features characterising some of the CG experiences in Spain and, on the other, the changes that have taken place in the organisational paradigm of alternative food networks and in particular, of the CG. After addressing the methodology in the third section, the fourth section is dedicated to the discussion of the results obtained from the empirical study: the CG creation and formation processes, ideology, internal organisation, links with producers and with the social and citizen network and, lastly, the conceptual relationships taking place within the scope of the discourse of the CG in Lavapiés. The final section puts forward the conclusion of the study.

The consumer groups: analytical framework

Spanish experiences

The first associative consumer experiences in ecological food products arose in the 1960s in Japan, where consumer groups called *teikei* (meaning cooperation in

Japanese) were created; they have since continued to grow². In the United States in the 1980s, the model of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups was created³, and subsequently spread to Canada and the United Kingdom. The models that have reached the highest level of development in Europe are the French *Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne* (AMAP)⁴ and the Italian *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale* (GAS)⁵: they started up, respectively, in 2001 and 1994. Moreover, CG have also spread considerably in numerous countries, such as Germany, Austria and the Nordic countries.

This model of CG imply communities of growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of agro-ecological production (DeMuth 1993). Consumers usually commit to paying the harvest in advance, or even provide the farmers in certain cases with working capital in advance (i.e. in some CSA). In all of them, the group does not search for the lowest price, but instead puts people and environment before selfish personal interests. The experiences we refer to in this section are mainly related to options lying closer to agro-ecology and food sovereignty.

Although the first CG were set up in Spain in the 1980s, it was at the start of the twenty-first century when a period of ongoing expansion began which has lasted up to the present: it first occurred mainly in the big cities but subsequently spread to medium-sized towns and rural areas. At the start of the 2000s, the rise of the anti-globalisation movement brought about a series of relationships and complicities which facilitated the creation of alternative consumer spaces at local scale (Vivas 2010). This period saw the appearance of pioneer experiences in the solidarity economy. They were characterised by a markedly political attitude towards food sovereignty. Many of them were CG or cooperatives of producers and consumers which have lasted to the present time. What is more, they continue to constitute principal nodes of dissemination of agro-ecological social networks and knowledge

2• <http://www.joaa.net/english/teikei.htm>

3• According to the latest census from 2015, a total of 7,398 farms were integrated in these groups in the USA (USDA 2015; see also: <https://www.localharvest.org/csa/>).

4• Associations for the Maintenance of a Peasant Agriculture. The network comprised over 2000 groups in 2016 (<http://www.bastamag.net/Plus-de-2000-Amap-en-France-le-boom-des-circuits-courts;> see also: <http://www.reseau-amap.org/amap.php>).

5• Solidarity-based Purchasing Groups. There are almost nine hundred GAS throughout Italy ([http://www.retegas.org/index.php?module=pagesetter&tid=3;](http://www.retegas.org/index.php?module=pagesetter&tid=3) see also: www.economiasolidale.net).

(Galindo *et al.* 2006; López García and López López 2003; Mundubat 2012; Sevilla Guzmán 2012).

More recently, the social movement 15-M arose from the demonstrations and protest movements organised by diverse groups and associations in Spain as from May 15th 2011⁶. This movement places particular emphasis upon the need to put forward an anti-oligarchic view of citizenship, as opposed to the concentrated power of economic and political elites. The core idea involved promoting a more participatory democracy, a true division of powers and other alternative models of economic relations. A whole range of factors gave rise to the 15-M movement: the world financial crisis, the accompanying policy of cutbacks in social spending and the high unemployment rates all highlighted the existence of a clear detachment between most of the population and an elite political class that did not heed their problems. New cases of self-organised connective action networks differed from traditional collective action movements, not only with regard to the characteristics of the organisations involved and of participants, but also in relation to the mobilisation channels (Anduiza *et al.* 2013).

This context of social mobilisation and debate caused the appearance and consolidation of a whole series of formulae of self-organisation, horizontality in the decision-making process and collaborative economies, among which are the agro-ecological networks and, specifically, the CG. Moragues-Faus (2016) analyses the after-effects of a political eruption that has promoted an increase in agro-ecological CG in Valencia, concluding that these initiatives are contributing to building egalitarian food democracies.

In Spain, consumer groups can either operate as autonomous entities or be part of a so-called "agro-ecological cooperative of consumers". Despite their denomination, they do not constitute formal cooperative structures according to Spanish law: they are, from an economic point of view, informal and collaborative associations between several consumer groups and some farm workers receiving wages from the coopera-

6• During the spring of 2011, in different parts of Spain a whole series of demonstrations, assemblies and protest camps took place; their epicentre was in the *Puerta del Sol*, Madrid's most central square. This discontent became manifest during the multitudinous demonstration on the evening of May 15th 2011, after which a group of people decided to camp down overnight in Puerta del Sol square, giving rise to the Sol Camp, which lasted until August 2011 and gave rise to assemblies, work groups and information points. Others followed suit, erecting camps in many cities around Spain. Following the eviction of the campers in Puerta del Sol square, the movement set up assemblies in different quarters in Madrid.

tive for their work⁷. Moreover, producers and consumers participate jointly in the decisional structures of the cooperative (assemblies, commissions, etc.) in issues relating to production and consumption. With regard to the CG not integrated within cooperatives, the relationship between farmers and consumers is of the supplier-customer type, although involving a tacit commitment to continue purchasing and maintaining a close relationship; in many of them, consumers buy shares of a farm's harvest in advance or commit to remaining in the group for a certain period of time, normally one year.

Moreover, the existence of structures grouping together the CG, social vegetable gardens, producers' markets and consumer associations, among other groups, supports the dissemination and consolidation of new alternative food initiatives: *Ecoconsum* or the *Xarxa de Consum Solidari* in Catalonia, the Andalusian Federation of Ecological Consumers and Producers, the *Basherri* network of consumer groups in Guipúzcoa, Basque Country, or *Madrid Agroecológico*, among others. These associative and self-organisational platforms play a vital role in the dissemination of technical and organisational knowhow, in the creation of producer and consumer networks and in awareness campaigns addressing responsible and supportive food consumption.

All these national experiences of agro-ecological CG can be viewed as a form of pragmatic militancy (Chometon 2011), which is the result of a renewal of the ways of engaging in the public space: "first and foremost, it entails acting, *hic et nunc* (here and now), to change a problematic situation, even on a very small scale". The day-to-day organisational dimension of CG is highly relevant in order to enable links, dialogue and forms of action among consumers, and between consumers and producers. Organisation should hence be viewed as a constitutive element for social innovation of agro-ecological CG.

Nevertheless, if the majority of consumers initially joined agro-ecological CG due to ideological convictions, over time they can become less "activists" and more "users", a phenomenon referring both to consumers and to farmers. This can have a plurality of effects on organization and practices. For example, a growing demand for professionalization and consequently for brokerage services is observed, due to the high cost in terms of time needed to actively take part in these initiatives (Albanese

7• Until very recently, dues have not been paid on these salaries to the Social Security. To cover sick leave allowances and other circumstances, funds have been accumulated in the so-called "resistance funds". Whether or not to incorporate these farmers' salaries into the formal economy is under debate in Madrid's agro-ecological cooperatives BAH! and SAS.

and Penco 2010). In the last few years in Spain, the process of up-scaling of organic and local agriculture has been reflecting a new reality in which another kind of CG, as well as purchase of local food through on-line platforms (Food Assembly/*La Colmena* or *Farmidable*) have begun to spread: these alternatives have their roots in conscious consumption but are not so much linked to networks of political activism (Miralles *et al.* 2017; Michelini *et al.* 2017).

Agro-ecological consumer groups as civic food networks: research hypothesis

CG can be interpreted as civic food networks: new forms of relationship between consumers and producers engaged together in a variety of "forms of agro-food governance mechanisms showing the increasing importance of the role of civil society in relation to market forces and the (national) state" (Renting *et al.* 2012: 292). This concept is linked to the theoretical approaches of food democracy (Lang and Heasman 2004), food sovereignty (Wittman *et al.* 2010) and food citizenship (Lyson 2005). Having analysed the literature, we now set forth the features characterising the ideological and organisational paradigms of the agro-ecological CG as civic food networks: many of them are common to other types of alternative food models.

Firstly, from the perspective of agriculture, one requirement of the model is that it must be agro-ecological. Agro-ecological praxis means developing of a model of agriculture one of whose main objectives involves the absence of synthetic fertilisers or phytosanitary products, as occurs in certified ecological agriculture, but also the closing of the material and energy cycles, conservation and enhancement of natural heritage and especially of soils. Furthermore, an objective of the agro-ecological model is to respect and enhance farmers' living conditions, a fact that intertwines with the principles and rights put forward by the doctrines of food sovereignty. This model is based upon an agricultural economy that is integrated within its ecosystem, and whose requirements for true equilibrium are: geographic proximity between production and consumption, elimination of commercial intermediaries, consideration of waste generated in the chain of production and marketing, and integration of local agricultural economies within the core of the social movement (López García and López López 2003: 211).

Secondly, a fundamental feature of agro-ecological CG is that the consumers themselves are aware they can play a transforming role, at least at small scale, in eco-

conomic relationships referring to food products. This represents a change in paradigms in relation to the neoclassical concept of consumption, considered as an activity pertaining to the individual sphere and based solely on one's own interests. On the contrary, the alternative approach is based on the premise that if consumers avail of sufficient information on where the food product comes from and under what conditions it was produced and distributed, their choice of food products can involve a political decision (Brunori *et al.* 2012). Alternative consumption is a socialization tool that has been instrumental in building not only social relations, community identities and new modes of understanding, but also a grass-roots alternative to the dominant regime of food provisioning (Fonte 2013).

Closely related to the concept of food consumption as an instrument of political choice, CG's ideology considers renewed collective political action to constitute a priority: it expresses a capacity to socialise and mobilise individuals and families in relation to political, environmental and social justice issues (Graziano and Forno 2012), far beyond mere consumption for self-interest. Many of these groups have arisen from within the social movements and are considered by their members as being yet another component of a complex system aimed at transforming the current political, economic and social model. Sharing a context of activism tends to lead to involvement in other types of activism, because information is shared in assemblies and in other internal means of communication. To contribute to changing the agro-food model, there is a need to establish alliances with other social stakeholders (ecologists, livestock farmers, fishermen...), and to participate in alternative political spaces that transcend agricultural and food-related issues (social forums, platforms...) (Vivas 2010).

A fourth feature inherent to agro-ecological CG refers to the fact that the basic principles of their organisational model are self-management, mechanisms of participatory democracy and promotion of networks of relationships outside the groups. The organisational model defines the decision-making structures (assemblies, commissions, etc.) in which both groups participate and decide what to produce and how, the value of the production, the characteristics of the supply, the working conditions of the farmers, etc. The participatory mechanisms of the members do not merely involve decision making, but also include the execution of these decisions and the aforementioned mechanisms of social reproduction within a process that constructs the community (López García 2015). These dense social networks catalyse the creation and dissemination of shared knowledge. Co-decision, as collective practice in consensus-building decision making within each CG, and co-production, as an ongoing conversation nurtured by frequent correspondence, support and visits to the farmers, characterise many CG initiatives worldwide (Grasseni 2014).

In fifth place, this model is not just a tool for social mobilisation; it also assumes that the collective spaces satisfy personal needs and desires other than mere consumption, due to sharing experiences of day-to-day transformation of living conditions which provide greater possibility for personal development than individual experiences. Collective identity results from the mutual recognition of a group of individuals who define reality in the same way and who share certain values and ways of acting. It is not only necessary for the group to achieve its working objectives in relation to production and consumption; there is also a vital need to contribute to creating a community that can address its day-to-day issues. In this sense, Lamine (2008: 37) typifies members of the AMAP as "creators of new cultures living within a system of new values and behaviours, open to personal development and to the search for themselves, to spirituality, solidarity and dialogue".

Finally, a key characteristic refers to "territorial governance", in the sense defined by Gilly and Wallet (2005: 701), as "the process of dynamic articulation of the set of practices and institutional devices existing between actors in close geographic proximity, intended to address a production- or consumption-related issue or to implement a territorial development project". In a predominant context of globalised mass food markets presenting asymmetry in information and numerous decision makers, the existence of successful territorial governance processes currently involves, from the decision-making perspective, conducting networked processes of collective organisation in which processes of multi-level coordination among the economic and social agents take place (Torre and Traversac 2011).

Based on the literature review presented above, and attempting to characterise the political and organisational model of the Lavapiés CG, in the present paper we formalise two main questions, viewed as hypothesis to be tested by means of the empirical analysis: *(a)* Do the Lavapiés CG constitute a political option characterised by a significant degree of "alternativeness"?; and *(b)* Is organisation, and in particular territorial governance, a constitutive element of social innovation of the CG of Lavapiés?

Research methodology

Our methodology consisted of an empirical study conducted at the end of 2014 and based upon semi-structured interviews with a prominent member of eleven

Lavapiés' CG. Prominent members are more involved in CG management and dedication to food activism than the average member, but they all share similar political and cultural approaches which inspire the group. The age of the interviewees was comprised between 25 and 40, mostly around 30. They all have a university degree and most of them are engaged in different types of political, social and ecological activism.

Due to the fleeting nature of some consumer groups, there was a need to create an inventory based on a snowball method: as a selection criterion, we selected groups presenting at least a certain degree of stability, estimated to be one or two years' existence. We conducted interviews with eleven consumer groups: three of these were integrated within agro-ecological cooperatives –*Bajo el Asfalto está la Huerta (BAH!) San Martín, BAH! Perales and Surco a Surco (SAS)*⁸– and eight independent ones, two of which were associated with bookshops. The questionnaire addressed the following themes: history of the group, functioning, organisation and objectives, characteristics of the baskets of vegetables; relations with producers, relations with other CG and with neighbourhood social movements; a view of the situation from the start, as well as future perspectives.

The qualitative information was processed with the programme Atlas.ti. We conducted an inductive coding in which, as an initial step we performed an automatic count of all the words appearing in set of interviews. A meticulous selection of the words (verbs and nouns) conceptually related to our study was made. The words selected were classified into twenty six codes and these, in turn, into eight supercodes: table 1 shows the relative importance of the codes and supercodes, measured by means of the sum of the number of appearances per interview of the words they comprise. The words were located by means of automatic search procedures: the corresponding supercode was assigned to the paragraph containing this word. Figure 1 reveals the relative importance of the supercodes, but in this case in terms of numbers of citations. In a complementary manner, we implemented a deductive coding process, consisting of assigning concepts to phrases and paragraphs in the text based on careful reading of all the interviews: it was used to select and analyse the textual citations appearing in the paper.

8• BAH means "the vegetable garden is under the asphalt". SAS means "from furrow to furrow".

Table 1.

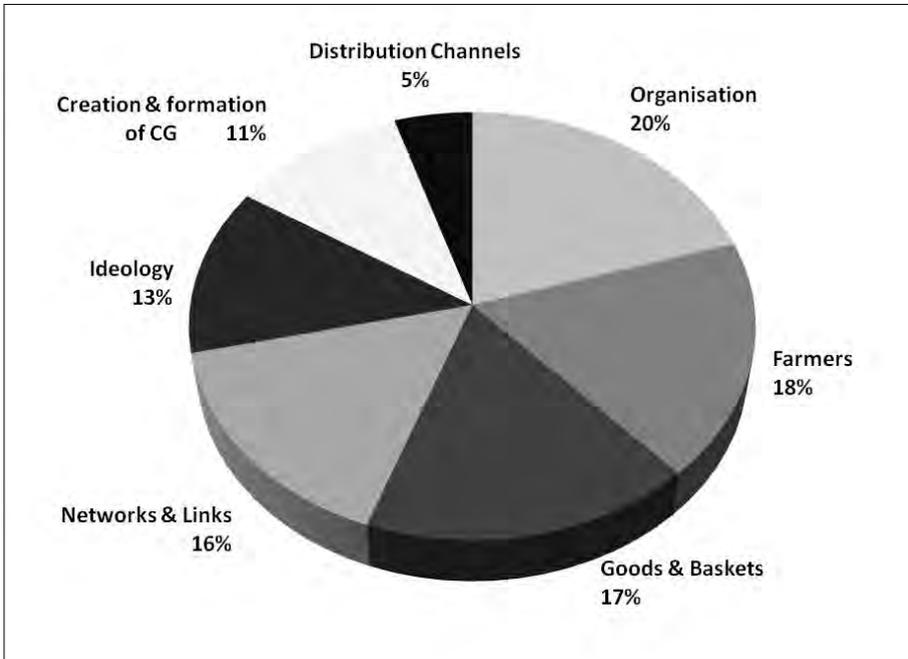
Supercodes resulting from the inductive coding performed by means of Atlas.ti: words they comprise and number of times they appear on average in each interview

CREATION AND FORMATION OF THE CG 36.9	ORGANISATION: PARTICIPATION AND TASKS 60.8	SOCIAL NETWORKS AND LINKS 34.2
train, create, arise, set up (groups) 19.9	organisation, management, self-management, functioning 27.5	network, fabric, association 7.7
evolution, growth, development 4.2	assembly, commission, minutes, debate, discussion, planning, reconsidering 12.7	meeting, conference, workshop 5.1
promoter, founder, activist, driver 6.3	task, delivery, shift, waiting (list) 12.7	neighbourhood, quarter, Lavapiés 12.3
short-living, permanence, survive, remain 6.3	agreement, collaboration, consensus, discrepancy, conflict, boycott 7.8	Lavapiés Agro-ecological Network (RAL), Mercapiés, El Puchero, Social Market 9.1
IDEOLOGY: AGRO-ECOLOGY AND COMMON GOODS 34.3	DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS 13.7	FARMERS 35.8
ecology, agro-ecology, environmental, sovereignty 8.7	distribution, channel, supermarket 5.3	farmer, worker 29.3
politics, public, State, institution 9.8	intermediary, supplier, logistics 8.5	country, vegetable garden, rural, 5.7
ideology, thinking, movement, democracy 3	GOODS AND BASKETS 44.8	tilling, growing 0.8
leadership, discourse, awareness, values 0.7	goods, product, basket, order, price, fee 42.2	CRISIS AND ECONOMICS 6.5
social, common, collective, community 12	certification, label 2.6	crisis 5.2 Economics, economy 1.3

Source: own primary data. The words appearing in the table comprise nouns, verbs and adjectives, as well as their respective derived words.

Figure 1.

Percentage share of supercodes in terms of number of citations



Source: own primary data.

Once we had obtained the citations referring to inductive supercodes, we conducted an analysis of co-occurrences, which are the intersection spaces of the citations corresponding to two different supercodes. A high co-occurrence between two concepts indicates a high concomitance of both in the interviewees' discourse. There is a relatively high number of co-occurrent paragraphs (552 in total: 50.2 per interview), as it even surpasses the total number of citations (502: 45.6 per interview), which means that the concepts and themes addressed in the interviews are quite well interrelated. In table 2 we show the matrix of co-occurrences which reflects, for each cell, the number of co-occurrences between two given supercodes. We used this information to design figure 3 (see the fourth section of the article below), which provides a diagram of the principal conceptual relationships existing in the discourse of the Lavapiés CG: it takes into consideration the total number of co-occurrences assigned to each supercode and, in particular, the total number of co-occurrences between two supercodes, taken two by two.

Table 2.
Matrix of co-occurrence between supercodes

	Farmers	Distribution channels	Creation and formation of the CG	Economic crisis	Ideology: agro-ecology and common goods	Organisation: self-management	Goods and baskets	Social networks and links	Total
Farmers	0	13	5	1	17	28	28	21	113
Distribution channels		0	2	1	8	5	4	4	37
Creation and formation of the CG			0	3	7	8	6	9	40
Economic crisis				0	8	3	1	3	20
Ideology: agro-ecology and common goods					0	13	4	16	73
Organisation: self-management						0	26	18	101
Goods and baskets							0	14	83
Social networks and links								0	85
Total									232

Source: own primary data.

Analysis of results

Lavapiés is a quarter in Madrid's historic centre which, as from the 1970s and 1980s, became a culturally alternative neighbourhood, due to the progressive exodus of the traditional working-class occupants and the consequent occupation by young people, alternative groups and immigrants. As can be seen in Map 1, the quarter is very close to the centre of the city, in *Puerta del Sol* square. Lavapiés has since gradually become a cultural melting pot and is currently the neighbourhood with the highest number of communal initiatives and associations in Madrid. According to Sequera Fernández (2013), what has been occurring in Lavapiés can be considered as

atives (*Bajo el Asfalto está la Huerta* and *Surco a Surco*), self-managed social centres, bookshops and, more recently, the Lavapiés Agro-ecological Network (*Red Agroecológica de Lavapiés*, RAL): it is the coordination platform of all the neighbourhood CG and plays a central role as a coordinator in disseminating networked knowledge (see below).

The interviewees point out that the recent spread of the number of CG in Spain was brought about by the rise of the 15-M political and social movement in 2011, in a context of economic and political crisis, as occurred with other short food supply chains and other kinds of experiences in collaborative economies:

From the 15-M arose a different way of doing politics, which had already existed because there were people who were already organised. Many other people, however, were not involved and many neighbourhood movements appeared ("Seize the neighbourhoods", "Seize the square", etc.) and spread from initiatives like CG or the urban vegetable gardens. The year 2011 was one of exponential explosion.

All the interviewees agree that the economic and political crisis has given rise to a context of social mobilisation which, particularly in Lavapiés, has constituted a culture medium favourable to the development of agro-ecological initiatives. Some of them point out, however, that the economic crisis has also had the opposite effect, preventing the spread of the model due to issues relating to purchasing power. In certain cases, especially with CG integrated in cooperatives, cancellations of subscriptions are seen to have been caused less by difficulty to pay fees than by changes in members' personal situations: changes of address, emigration in search of work, changes in lifestyle, such as becoming mothers and fathers, etc. In any case, a certain degree of rotation exists in all the Lavapiés CG; an attempt is made to compensate for this by the creation of waiting lists.

In general terms, we can talk of a certain tendency of the model to remain, because those that last for more than one or two years tend to become consolidated. Creating a community is seen to constitute one of the principal reasons for groups' permanence in time:

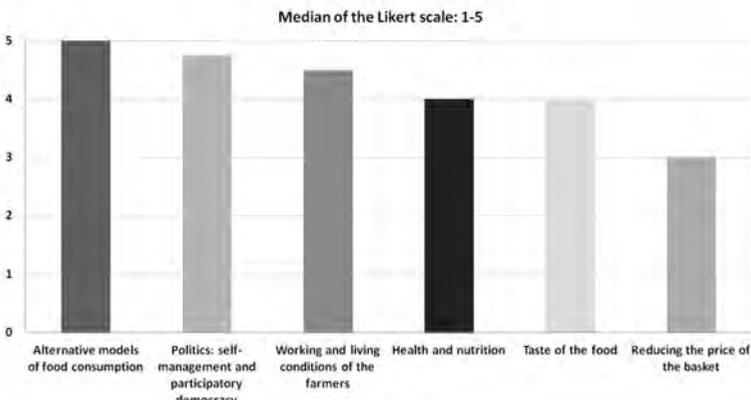
They persist because of two factors: people don't get frustrated because results are tangible and furthermore, friendships and good relationships are created among group members.

Nevertheless, the interviewees indicated that some new groups that had been set up in recent times disappear because they have not always been able to maintain their activity.

Ideology: agro-ecology and common goods

Firstly, the interviewees were asked to give their opinion about the main reasons contributing to the decision to set up a CG (figure 2): they were asked to qualify from 1 to 5 (Likert scale) each of six options on a discrete scale ranging from "very unimportant" (1) to "very important" (5). The three options of a more political nature were very highly valued: developing "alternative models of food consumption" (median of 5), experiencing "self-management and participatory democracy" (4.75) and improving the "working and living conditions of the farmers" (4.5). Considered relatively important, although somewhat less, are reasons of "health and nutrition" and the "taste of the food" (4). The objective of "reducing the price of the basket" only scored an intermediate level of importance (3). This means to say that, although Lavapiés CG members clearly demand attributes relating to health, nutrition and gastronomy in relation to food products, their decisions and choices refer largely to political and social criteria.

Figure 2.
Main reasons contributing to decide to set up a consumer group, according to the interviewees



Source: own primary data.

Secondly, the inductive analysis reveals (see table 1 above) the high frequency of appearance of the code "social, common, collective, community" (12 citations per interview), of the code "politics, public, State, institution" (almost 10) and of the code "ecology, agro-ecology, environmental, sovereignty" (almost 9). This shows that the discourse of the CG focuses not only on ecological aspects, but also upon political and social ones, in line with the principles of agro-ecology and food sovereignty.

In this context, the articulating element of the ideology of the Lavapiés CG's proposal for small-scale transformation possesses several essential components: the main role played by small proximity farmers, the need for agro-ecological growing techniques and the absence of intermediaries in the distribution chain. Hence, an interviewee stated:

The aim was to consume in a different way ...and we are doing it; helping to promote a small producers' project in Madrid, ecological and proximity consumption...and we've achieved that.

Another indicator of CG's political and social orientation is that one of their main objectives is to support the living conditions of the farmers and to establish relationships of exchange between producers and consumers based upon trust and building of common goods, as can be seen in the following opinion:

The most important thing is to change the food supply chain, to have direct contact with producers in order to support their project, and for us to know where the food we consume comes from. There is no intermediary: a commitment to the producers and an alternative way of consuming that cannot be frequently found on the market; consequently, a political commitment.

Although the features of the ideology we have just described can be observed in all the groups, the ones associated with cooperatives present quite a high degree of activism and agro-ecological commitment: this is higher, for instance, than that detected in the case of bookshops or some groups not linked to cooperatives; in these cases, members do not avail of enough time to dedicate to activism.

The Lavapiés CG's ideology also gives great priority to the objective that their members experience firsthand as a community new model of an everyday nature, whose achievements can be reached at the group level, even in the short term:

The search for new democratic practices, the demand for real democracy; these involve self-management on a daily basis. These experiences (the

CG) are quite important with regard to constructing alternative models of day-to-day living.

Likewise, political and social demands need to go hand in hand with a system of political praxis that is defined by participatory democracy and self-management. Constructing the community, in the sense of conserving and promoting the mechanisms of social reproduction (López García 2015), are clearly seen to constitute one of the main goals of CG:

Many people are now joining the cooperative in order to belong to a group, to the community.

Transcending any objective relating to gastronomy or health, the ideology of the Lavapiés CG attempts to fully meet political, socioeconomic and environmental requirements. As a result of the previous findings, the agro-ecological model of the Lavapiés CG aims to build common goods, thus enabling conventions for the management of collective action based on strong and networked social relationships (Ostrom 2000).

Finally, we should highlight some elements of the debate on the configuration of the ideology of the Lavapiés CG. All the groups attempt to reduce the carbon footprint and there is debate on whether or not to order products that cannot be grown in the surroundings of Madrid for climatic reasons, for example oranges or bananas. There is also discussion on the amount of compulsory work to be performed by the members of the group versus externalisation of certain logistics tasks. Another frequent debate involves whether or not to participate in initiatives promoted by the Public Administration aimed at fostering short food chains.

Organisation: baskets, participation, tasks and cooperation

The size of the Lavapiés CG ranges from 6 to 40 baskets distributed on a weekly or fortnightly basis, which corresponds to an interval of between 6 and 75 members or families, as some of the baskets are shared by two or more members. Maximum group size is habitually limited to 40 baskets due to the difficulty involved in managing bigger structures through assemblies. On occasions, when the groups realise that the waiting lists are not just temporary, they themselves encourage consumers on the waiting list to form new groups.

Of the eleven groups examined, six make their orders through closed baskets and five by means of open baskets⁹. In reality, the closed baskets are mixed, because the vegetables of the associated farmers are ordered in closed baskets, with a pre-established weekly or fortnightly periodicity, whereas all other goods are subject to open orders, with some kind of longer-term periodicity (fruits, cheeses, wine, oil, honey, meat, etc.): this is the model adopted by cooperatives and by other groups presenting a higher degree of interaction with the activity of the farmers.

The tasks and activities to be performed at the core of the groups involve three main goals: the relationships with the farmers, the assemblies and the deliveries. To find and contact suitable producers is a vital need for CG, and in this sense, the Lavapiés Agro-ecological Network (RAL) plays a very active role, as we will subsequently see, articulating mutual support among the groups of the neighbourhood.

Secondly, the self-organisation decision-making process has its maximum expression in the assemblies, held on a monthly basis. In the case of groups integrated within cooperatives (BAH and SAS), apart from the group assemblies, the cooperative holds a monthly general assembly, with the attendance of group representatives. At the assemblies, the day-to-day organisation of the group is agreed on:

We hold a monthly assembly to discuss the day-to-day workings of the group. We encourage participation in the assemblies and practice democracy in our daily lives.

Thirdly, managing the orders and delivery of the baskets regularly entails a lot of volunteer work, and consequently, shifts are organised among group members. Likewise, people are entrusted with managing the waiting lists, receiving new members and explaining to them the group's workings and tasks. Groups usually require a commitment to attend assemblies and to work in the farm at least once a year. Likewise, many groups call upon members to do certain tasks in the vegetable garden that require a considerable amount of labour, like, for instance, applying compost or building an irrigation ditch. There are also quite regular dissemination activities, such as talks or workshops. Certain more specific tasks were also mentioned, such as setting up processes of participatory certification or improving a software application needed to place orders.

⁹ A closed basket means that the composition of the basket cannot be chosen by the consumers; on the contrary, an open basket indicates that consumers select what they want to buy in each regular order.

CG integrated within cooperatives have a more complex functioning than the ones that are not integrated, because they are organised into commissions: the two main commissions deal with agriculture and economy, but there can also be commissions managing dissemination, festivals, etc. The organisation of commissions attempts to promote "organisational proximity" between farmers and consumers, conceived as the different ways in which they interact and conduct common actions, complying both with the logics of belonging to the same network of relations and with the logics of sharing objectives (Torre and Beurel 2012):

We attempt to avoid exclusive roles: one person taking on the role of the consumer and the other, the producer. We want to do away with this system by means of joint activities and commissions. The farmer is not the one who singlehandedly designs the vegetable garden activities. An agricultural commission exists, made up of consumers.

No serious conflicts can be said to exist in the Lavapiés CG, but rather discrepancies regarding the different degrees of involvement of members or different opinions about the quality and suitability of the farmers:

...Questions referring to participation, to how the group works and how to integrate the new members who had not been actively participating.

The lack of serious conflicts can be accounted for by the fact that these groups are often considered as spaces of coexistence and mutual support, as a network of friendships and activism, in line with the goal of social reproduction of the community. Although it is recognised that group management can give rise to tensions, it is also indicated in the interviews that, significantly, many groups in Lavapiés have members with experience in assembly management, a fact that helps to resolve potential conflicts. Members' minimum commitments vary from one group to another, and are strongest in the cooperatives: at the very least they must pay their fees, pick up baskets and organise shifts to handle orders and deliveries.

Links and networks of the Lavapiés consumer groups

Interviewees were asked about the existence of relationships with agricultural producers, with other CG and with other social movements in Lavapiés: table 3 provides non-excluding answers. The maximum degree of cooperation corresponds to

relationships of collaborative work in which decisions are shared, a situation that predominates in the scope of relations between the Lavapiés CG and their own producers (nine affirmative answers out of 11). On addressing the relationships with other consumer groups, the CG predominantly participate in common associations and platforms (seven out of 11): the Lavapiés Agro-ecological Network (RAL) constitutes the preferential place of interaction among neighbourhood groups. The answers referring to relationships with other social movements and with the associative network of Lavapiés reveal a greater abundance of relationships maintained by group members at an individual level (nine out of 11), whether this be for reasons of multiple activism or because they frequent common spaces in the neighbourhood.

Table 3.
Number of interviewees, out of a total of 11, stating that their groups maintain relationships of cooperation with farmers, other CG, social movements and the quarter associative network

	Collaborative work. Shared decisions	Participation in common associations and platforms	Relationships maintained at an individual level and occasional ones	No relation
Farmers	9	2	2	1
Other CG	5	7	5	2
Social movements and the quarter associative network	0	2	9	1

Source: own primary data.

The agricultural producers are generally neo-rural, young, of urban and alternative origin. An essential requirement to choose a farmer is that they must have the ability to work collaboratively:

These people present a young profile, urban, around 25 years old, studies finished, they dream of going back to a neo-rural context. None of them are from the country or have ever been farmers.

The central elements of the relationships between farmers and consumers, from the perspective of the decision-making processes taking place in the CG, involve prod-

uct prices being set by the farmers. However, this question must be debated in the assembly and there must be consensus between producers and consumers. One of the main advantages for farmers participating in the CG is the financial stability they acquire through the commitment to a weekly or fortnightly purchase by consumers, which lasts for a certain period of time, generally yearly. In this manner, farmers are guaranteed that their produce will be distributed, thus avoiding losses of crops caused by a lack of immediate sales of relatively perishable goods, such as vegetables, especially when referring to closed baskets. It is not a formal commitment to buy, but it is a tacit one. Consumers also understand the seasonality and variability in the size and composition of the basket resulting from the vagaries of agricultural production.

By contrast, the farmers take on the commitment to comply with agro-ecological principles, to apply standards that are more environmentally demanding than those applied to the organic label and to produce a certain variety of goods to enable them to comply with the schedule of basket deliveries. The Lavapiés CG have no particular interest in their producers being certified as an organic label, because certification involves a significant production cost for them¹⁰. On the other hand, there is an important relationship of trust and proximity between producers and consumers, who verify the day-to-day reality of agro-ecological practices. The CG do, however, appear to show an interest in implementing processes of participatory certification, aimed at collective self-evaluation of the practices, and this is being put into practice in some cases.

In addition, we can differentiate two types of links of Lavapiés CG with the social network of the neighbourhood: those that they maintain with the agro-ecological context of Lavapiés and those with other types of associations and groups.

First, the unanimous answer by interviewees indicated that the relationships established with other CG in the quarter were fundamentally made through the Lavapiés Agro-ecological Network (RAL). A vital task of the RAL involves establishing which proximity producers apply agro-ecological practices that provide a guarantee for setting up relationships of trust. Every year in February the RAL organises a workshop dedicated to presenting new producers offering their services and it also promotes periodic visits to the country to meet the producers. A second task of the RAL deals with centralisation, dissemination and providing information on the people on

10• However, other farmers are certified, particularly those who need to attend to other complementary marketing channels.

the waiting list of the Lavapiés CG; once this information has been obtained, the RAL organises workshops to teach people how to set up groups, thus complying with the aim of helping to disseminate the agro-ecological model. A third function of the RAL involved developing *Mercapiés*, a platform whose task is to make joint orders for food products other than vegetables.

Furthermore, the RAL also constitutes a forum for political debate, sharing knowhow on agriculture, food and nutrition, as well as a centre of dissemination of agro-ecological information and food sovereignty; thus, the Lavapiés Agro-ecological Meetings (*Jornadas Agroecológicas de Lavapiés*) are organised on an annual basis, as well as other events addressing agro-ecological debate. A person interviewed highlighted the function of dissemination and teaching of the RAL:

It has given me quite a lot, I've learned a lot about food... Interaction, you can have a laugh over a meal. Learn how other groups function....

In the second place, CG members are integrated within a dense and diffuse network of relationships in the neighbourhood, although often not as a group, but as individuals. In this sense, we can mention ecologists' associations (*Ecologistas en Acción*), self-managed socio-cultural centres (*Tabacalera*), time banks, or other citizens' movements in the quarter. The Madrid Social Market (*Mercado Social de Madrid*), a platform promoting an associative network of collaborative economy, services and consumption, is given particular mention by the interviewees. The objective of "creating a community" is indicated not only within the groups, but also within the context of relationships with residents in general:

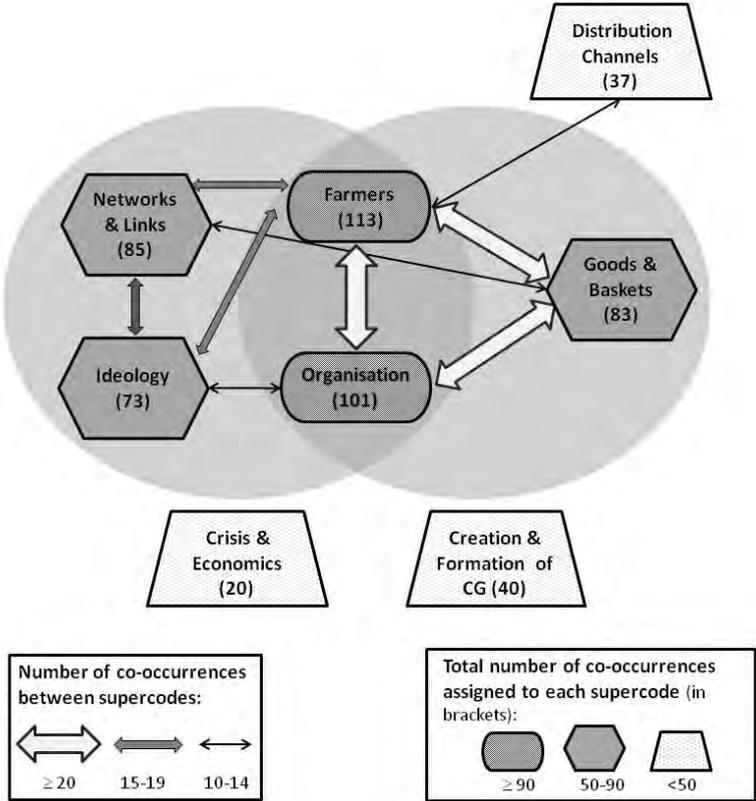
The fact of meeting up and getting together in a place means that we are helping to create networks, in this case, in the place where we distribute the baskets... We usually meet, see each other round the neighbourhood, we talk, generate networks among the residents. I've met a lot of people through the CG and I think it's a great way to create a neighbourhood.

Discourse of the Lavapiés consumer groups: principal conceptual relationships

Figure 3 provides a diagram of the main conceptual relationships existing in the discourse of the Lavapiés CG, based on the matrix of co-occurrences (see table 2

above). One can observe two sets articulating the discourse whose points of intersection are the supercodes "organisation" and "farmers". The latter two supercodes, along with "goods and baskets", share quite a high number of co-occurrences. Likewise, the above mentioned supercodes make up a second group along with "ideology" and "networks", although the values of the respective co-occurrences are relatively high, albeit lower than those of the previous group.

Figure 3.
Diagram of the principal conceptual relationships existing in the discourse of the Lavapiés CG based on the analysis of co-occurrences



Source: own primary data

Interpreting figure 3 enables us to detect that, in consonance with the fact that considering the living conditions of the farmers is seen to constitute a distinctive feature of alternative food models, for the Lavapiés CG, the relationships with the producers also represent an articulating axis of the groups' organisation: as can be seen, the central node is made up of "organisation" and "farmers". Based upon this central node, it can be seen that, in the first place, the type of relationship with the producers determines the choice of "goods and baskets", which in turn constitutes a key element of group organisation. Additionally, the self-management organisational schemes that the groups build up in the territory (in associations such as the RAL or *Madrid Agroecológico*¹¹, in agricultural production nuclei like Perales de Tajuña, etc.) become strategic factors associated with the ideology of social transformation; this in turn is closely related to consideration of farmers' living conditions: note the relationships established among "organisation", "farmers", "ideology" and "networks".

Conclusions: politics and territorial governance in the Lavapiés consumer groups

Our analysis of the discourse of the Lavapiés CG, even if not generalizable to all the typologies of consumer groups in the city of Madrid, provides important insight into past and current trends in the alternative agro-food networks led by consumers in the Region of Madrid. It is the densest CG neighbourhood network in the city and therefore generates greater territorial externalities of innovation in the form of knowledge dissemination networks. This CG network is deeply embedded in the agro-ecological movement. Of an activist nature, it arose in Madrid at the end of the nineties. In the last three years, with an incipient change in scale of agro-ecological consumption, the most activist model cohabits in the Madrid Region with other formulae of CG and of platforms for marketing local products in which there is a greater degree of exter-

11•Shortly after conducting the fieldwork in 2014, in January 2015 the platform Madrid Agroecológico was set up. It is a space for encounters and coordination of a large amount of initiatives, groups and activists associated with food sovereignty and agro-ecological food production and consumption in Madrid and the centre of the Iberian Peninsula. See: <http://madridagroecologico.org>

nalisation of distribution functions and a lower level of dedication by members to the groups' work tasks.

Through the present empirical analysis, we have verified the hypothesis that these groups constitute an example of construction of "self-organised social alternative networks" based upon the fact that food consumption can be assumed to constitute a political choice. Collective action benefits from cooperation and knowledge dissemination relationships with farmers and with the socio-political neighbourhood network. Their discourse is wholly a political one and connects with the principles of agro-ecology and food sovereignty, which appears to be supported by the following facts and indicators. First, their discourse transcends gastronomic and health-related objectives; rather, it attempts to fully meet political, socioeconomic and environmental demands. Second, the interviewees confirm that the goal of the CG involves social transformation, albeit at small scale, which in turn refers to the aim of improving farmers' living conditions. Third, these alternative models integrate consumers within their local agro-food systems in a proactive manner. Finally, among their political objectives, the Lavapiés CG incorporate models of day-to-day life, in particular creating and reproducing the community.

We have also verified the second hypothesis, as results indicate that the Lavapiés CG achieve a satisfactory threshold in relation to the conditions defining their degree of "territorial governance", as we will now show in the next four paragraphs.

One pre-requisite to achieve a certain degree of territorial governance involves a good flow of dissemination of networked agricultural, environmental, socioeconomic and political knowhow. The Lavapiés CG are eager to promote expansion of the model and to disseminate knowhow, a fact that can be observed in the choice of agro-ecological farmers, in workshops aimed at setting up groups or the political debates taking place in the assemblies. This model of knowledge transfer can be seen not only at the heart of the groups themselves, but also in broader contexts such as the RAL or Madrid Agroecológico. Training oriented towards the functioning of self-management models (workshops for setting up groups, talks, debates, etc.) contributes to generating common goods and territorialised social capital, which can create positive synergies for implementation of other political, social or economic activities at local scale.

A second condition to achieve a certain degree of governance refers to transaction costs. In the Lavapiés CG, the fact that commitment and trust are key elements in the relationships between producers and consumers significantly reduces transaction costs. That is to say, economic transactions are preferentially based on their use

value and not on their exchange value. However, some features of the organisational model could be considered to increase transaction costs, as in the case of the time and effort invested in decision making in assemblies and commissions: nonetheless, the activist model often considers these activities not as a cost, but rather as an opportunity to create a community.

A third condition met by the Lavapiés CG in relation to the concept of territorial governance involves the fact that the organisational and decision-making model is bottom-up. The corner stone of group and cooperative organisation is self-management, in which the assembly is the place for decision making par excellence. Imposing a size limit on the CG enables better discussion and participation among members.

In the fourth place, the territorial aspects of governance are accounted for by the fact that the Lavapiés CG choose to set up proximity networks between producers and consumers. A distinctive feature of the alternative food networks is that they combine commercial proximity with geographical proximity between producers and consumers. Additionally, these networks address a third type of proximity: the dynamics of "organisational proximity", defined as the greater proximity or distance existing in the economic-organisational strategies of the economic stakeholders and institutions of a local agro-food system (Benko and Desbiens 2004). Thus, we have demonstrated that the Lavapiés CG contribute to creating new relationships of organisational proximity, based on cooperation between producers and consumers, which transcend the rural scope and in which rural-urban spaces take on a leading role.

From a rural perspective, thanks to the setting up of consumer groups in certain quarters of the Madrid Metropolitan Area, some nearby rural nuclei with alternative famers are appearing, above all in the valleys of the Tajuña and Jarama rivers (Perales de Tajuña, San Martín de la Vega, Velilla de San Antonio, etc.). Farmers dealing with the Lavapiés CG are generally neo-rural, young, of urban and alternative origin, often with limited access to land ownership. CG therefore seems appear to support generational turnover in periurban areas. Although at a scale as yet too small, CG, together with other short food supply chains (Aubry and Kebir 2013), can contribute to revitalising rural periurban areas, stimulating cooperation among farmers and providing incentives in learning agro-ecological practices. Wider diffusion of consumer-producer organised collaborations could benefit from cooperation in logistics and transport among CG.

From an urban point of view, it seems evident that the Lavapiés CG are contributing, on a small scale, not only to enhancing access by consumers to more reasonable prices for quality food products, but also to promoting the empowerment of

consumers in relation to agricultural and rural issues. One of the main challenges in the near future requires disseminating the agro-ecological model in the Madrid Metropolitan Area in order to contribute to turning rural proximity areas into more multifunctional areas, providing a certain range of ecosystem services associated with agriculture and involving the agricultural and environmental recovery of territories that had gradually become degraded over the last few decades.

In conclusion, our analysis confirms the hypothesis that CG, and in particular their specific configuration in Lavapiés, can really represent not only an innovative way of organising relationships between consumers and producers inspired by agro-ecology and civic conventions, but also a political option characterised by principles of alternativeness. This also occurs thanks to their connections with wider political movements. Thus, CG represent not only an expression of food democracy, food sovereignty and food citizenship, but also of general citizenship (Lamine 2008), going beyond mere food provisioning. At the same time, our analysis supports the view by Chometon (2011) that internal organisation and territorial governance are constitutive elements of social innovation of CG, conceived as a "community's new social and organisational practices". Indeed, in CG meeting personal needs is inextricably linked to more general goals. For this reason, the social effectiveness in internal organisation and territorial governance constitutes a key feature for the success of GC in terms of ability to generate environmental and social externalities.

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