



Milking money:

Exploring the struggle for autonomy from theory to practice

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List of Acronyms

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MPS	Movimento Pastori Sardi (Sardinian Shepherds' Movement)

Abstract

The ‘middle farmer’ is a key figure within the food sovereignty debates. Powerful actors within commodity chains exploit middle farmers globally while centralizing high profits and reducing small farmers’ autonomy. Yet despite this exploitative relationship, many farmers do not have the capacity to distance themselves from the production of export commodities. The struggle for better terms of inclusion in commodity chains is largely unexplored by the food sovereignty movement where autonomy is largely understood in terms of partial delinking. This paper problematizes the idea of autonomy understood as either partial delinking from capital and market forces or as complete subordination to global commodity chains. By grounding the analysis on an empirical case, it is argued that struggles for autonomy are better understood on a practical level as they are intrinsically correlated to context specific constraints and opportunities for action. I have analysed an agrarian movement’s autonomy and capacity vis-à-vis industrial and financial capital in upstream and downstream markets throughout the current important period of agricultural restructuring. This theoretical framework moves beyond binaries and looks at demands for higher autonomy as dynamic and fluid processes rather than static goals. The movement taken into consideration frames its struggles in terms of delinking when it has the capacity to do so and when this will result in higher relative autonomy. At the same time, they also negotiate for better terms of integration in the dairy chain to increase their relative autonomy

Relevance to Development Studies

The convergence of multiple crisis (environmental, energy, financial, social...) has contributed to raising concern about the current intensive, profit driven mode of agricultural production both in ecological and social terms. Food sovereignty mounts as a bottom up response to the failures of the current food system. This ‘alternative in the making’ is fast evolving both in practice and in theoretical terms and is reaching out farmers, consumers and farm workers around the globe. Many farmers have used this framing thereby creating a diverse movement with different interests pulling sometimes in different directions. Exploring these tensions is necessary and desirable to strengthen the food sovereignty constituency and better understand spaces for alliances and action. This important task includes exploring empirical contexts to tease out nuances which are more difficult to see on a theoretical level. My paper would like to contribute to this in order to strengthen the struggle for food sovereignty and for a truly democratic food system.

Keywords

Struggle for autonomy, capacity, subordination, embeddedness, food sovereignty, shepherds, Sardinia, Movimento Pastori Sardi, financialization, better terms of inclusion.

Chapter 1

Introduction (Heading 1)

The struggle for autonomy

“If they increase the price of milk it does not matter because some time after the price of the animal feed will increase anyway.”

(Sardinian shepherd in the documentary by Pani and Carboni, 2013)

The quote above illustrates, quite powerfully, the common situation that traps small farmers worldwide. Farmers who are subordinated to more powerful actors (industrial and/or financial capital) within a commodity chain generally have a very low degree of control over both the chain and their livelihoods. In this context of subordination, small farmers are in need for higher degrees of autonomy to advance their own interests. The dilemma is that it is in this same situation that a higher degree of autonomy is most difficult to achieve. To attain autonomy, farmers need to have relative power within a commodity chain; but to have relative power within the commodity chain, farmers first need a higher degree of autonomy. This is a chicken-and-egg dilemma that is a pervasive challenge among the food sovereignty movements, explicitly acknowledged in the literature and public debates. How to break from this dilemma is not obvious. The challenge of small farmers’ struggle for autonomy will be critically explored in this paper.

Despite the difficulty of achieving it, the struggle for higher autonomy is paramount for the ‘middle peasant’. It is also central to the food sovereignty project which calls for ‘the right of peoples to democratically control or determine the shape of their food system’ (Nyeleni, 2007). This call mounts as a response to the current industrial food system and the subordination of small farmers that the system creates and sustains (Ploeg, 2008; MaMichael, 2013; Patel, 2013). However, what is meant by autonomy and how it can be increased is often vague, theoretically and politically assumed or advocated rather than empirically examined within food sovereignty debates.

“Much of the mobilization around food sovereignty is directed against the global corporate food regime, and presents a maximally-inclusive, hence *generic*, picture of the kind of non-global, non-corporate (i.e. national, local, small farm-based) food regime that needs to be defended. It also relies on *exemplary* sites of locally based, sustainable farm systems to inspire activists, and to confirm that there are viable alternatives. Both these forms of argument (the generic and the exemplary) can open up a gap between the movement’s platform and its potential constituents.”

(Li, 2015: 206; emphasis added)

To reduce the gap to which Tania Li refers to, one has to look at *how* the struggle for autonomy looks like in practice. One has to look at specific processes of capital accumulation to understand how these create context-specific structural and institutional constraints as well as opening up political spaces (Li, 2014, 2015). This is the meaning of looking at the struggle *in practice* and *in context* rather than understanding food sovereignty as an ideal goal pursued in an exemplary place. Hence, my intention in this paper is to look at the practice of

the Sardinian shepherds' struggle for autonomy of. This will also be referred throughout the paper as an attempt to analyse the *autonomy* and *capacity* of a movement understood as its ability to autonomously set and carry out predefined goals and aspirations (relatively autonomous from capital).

The movement whose struggle I will analyse, namely, the Movimento Pastori Sardi: *Sardinian Shepherds' Movement* (hereafter referred to as MPS). The MPS is not an official member of la Via Campesina. Nevertheless, like many other organizations worldwide, in farming and non-farming sectors, the MPS has framed its struggle using the concept of food sovereignty in order to position itself in stark contrast to the food security claim advanced by mainstream national farmers' syndicates such as *Coldiretti* and *Confagricoltura* where the MPS does not feel represented (Floris, 2014). The MPS shares the main systemic interpretation of the food crisis with La Via Campesina. As the international coordinator of La Via Campesina puts it:

"This current food crisis is the result of many years of deregulation of agricultural markets, the privatization of state regulatory bodies and the dumping of agricultural products on the markets of developing countries. According to the FAO, liberalized markets have attracted huge cash flows that seek to speculate on agricultural products on the 'futures' markets and other financial instruments."

(Saragih, 2008, as cited in Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011:130)

Likewise, the MPS denounces how the liberalization of trade and financial markets in agriculture is gradually eliminating medium and small farmers to serve the interests of financial capital and of corporate agri-food monopolies (Floris, 2011). As the MPS' leader puts it, small farmers are important because they guarantee quality products, they guarantee environmentally sound and culturally embedded productions. However, the MPS leaders have also described food sovereignty as a romantic ideal, perhaps alluding to the idealistic goals that do not resonate with their present status that is closer to Bernstein's notion of petty commodity producers, fully inserted in a commodity chain and subordinated to industrial and financial capital – than to a Chayanovian idea of an iconic family farm.

Most advocates and academics understand higher autonomy and control in food sovereignty as partial or complete *delinking* from commodity chains where power concentrates in the hands of capital (industrial and financial capital). For example, the pillars of localization of the food system and the science and politics of agroecology all tend to give premium importance to delinking from downstream and upstream markets.

The call for autonomy mounts in direct opposition to the subordination of petty commodity producers to large capital; to their incorporation into global commodity chains and complexes and to the subordination of agriculture to international trade. Farmer's subordination is part of an old debate in agrarian political economy. In the classic debates around the agrarian question, Lenin (1982) saw subordination as partly causing the, and resulting in, the social differentiation of the peasantry. Kautsky (1988) on the other hand believed that a hybrid form where squeezed small farmers and powerful industrial actors 'at the margins' of commodity chains (farm inputs and manufacturing) could exist over time. Subordination and global commodity chains are the centre of what McMichael (2004) calls the 'globalization project'. According to Ploeg (2008),

value is extracted from small farmers and concentrated at the centre of ‘food empires’. Frameworks inspired by New Institutional Economics also recognise the importance of understanding integration in tackling poverty and poor access to markets; they thought that linking farmers to value chains is the way forward. International and national institutions alike praise the potential efficiency of this set up, and work to strengthen the relationship between small farmers and agribusinesses. This was a central point of the World Development report of 2008 tackling agriculture and development (Akram-Lodhi, 2008). The incorporation of small farmers into commodity chain usually leads to subordinated relationships. Many contract growing schemes between small farmers and large agribusiness enterprises are example of this.

New institutional economics see ‘subordination’ (although they will not use the term; and instead they will use terms like ‘integration’ and ‘insertion’) as central to development in agriculture, poverty eradication and to efficiency. This view is rooted in the belief that poverty results from lack of access to markets, that efficiency is achieved when low costs meet high returns and that individuals are interested in profit maximization (World Bank[WDR], 2007). Radical agrarian populism, or those working around ‘moral economy’ perspectives, on the opposite side of the spectrum interpret this as inherently unfair, unsustainable and undemocratic. Their idea of efficiency goes well beyond the profit maximization principle and considers as central environmental and social sustainability. Environmental and social impacts are *variables of* what efficiency is rather than mere externalities. For this reason, autonomy is central to the food sovereignty call and it is often expressed by a call to delink from these commodity chains.

Yet, the terms of integration into commodity chains, pose structural constraints on farmers’ capacity to bring about the changes that they want to bring. The institutionalisation and social reproduction of unfair power relations, create constraints that have an influence on farmers’ autonomy to choose their goals. Moreover, being part of a commodity chain and commodity complexes “does not *inherently* mean something adverse for small farmers or for the environment. But this growing phenomenon is a new context for many [food sovereignty] front-liners, which in turn spurs questions regarding long-distance trade, free trade agreements and international regulations and standards, and, perhaps most importantly, the placement of small farms within this value web in ways that are significantly different from Jan Douwe van der Ploeg’s idea of entrepreneurial ‘new peasantries’.” (Fradejas et al 2015: 439)

Shepherds in Sardinia, more specifically shepherds belonging to the MPS movement, do not frame their demands in terms of delinking. The MPS’ demands are framed more along the lines of struggle for *better terms of inclusion* in the dairy chain both in upstream and downstream markets. This translates, in practice, in 1) better access to resources and more incentive to restore feed production in Sardinia and 2) less volatile feed prices on the input sides 3) more access to price making mechanisms, 4) closer relationship between the price of milk and its costs; 5) more control of what type of cheese is produced with their milk in the downstream markets.

Does this line of struggle ‘fit’ in the food sovereignty *transformative* goals as argued by Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011)? The authors, propose a typology of food movements’ key characteristics and differentiate between neoliberal, reformist, progressive and radical trends. They also associate broad demands

for change with different potentials for transformation or reform (see key table on page 117-118). Within the left, they identify two different trends: the *progressive* and *radical* trend. There is a strong emphasis among food sovereignty supporters on the importance of progressive trends but at the same time their limitations. This is because of the risk that decentralised and locally based changes (supported by progressive movements) can provide nested markets but leave little space for transformation and structural impact on the current food system. Food sovereignty, in addition to changes advocated by progressive movements, calls for “a systemic critique of corporate agriculture and liberal capitalist economics as a whole [...] a complete *transformation* of the agriculture and food system [...] a complete *transformation* of society (Magdoff et al. 2000:188).

Research Question

Is a struggle for better terms of inclusion going to bring about structural changes in the dominant food system, or will it only reinforce that system? Instead of uncritically reproducing a priori responses from food sovereignty advocates, I take this question as one requiring empirical investigation to come up with an answer. This question is important *not* to evaluate or judge the MPS’ struggle (that is, whether it is reformist, progressive or transformative). When I look at their struggle for autonomy in relation to the typology of food movement advanced by Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) or with the struggle for autonomy as described by Ploeg (2013), I am doing so using these typologies as heuristic tools; and at the same time it is more to critically examine the limits of these typologies than to look at the limits of the MPS struggle. By doing so I hope to shed light on the importance of understanding movements’ demands for autonomy and capacity as dynamic and fluid processes rather than static goals and fixed circumstances. To this end, this study is an attempt to answer the central question, as follows:

How does the struggle for farmer’s autonomy, taken within the broader context of the construction of food sovereignty, occurs in practice? How does this look like against the ideal vision of autonomy and food sovereignty?

To answer my research question, I will argue that the struggle for autonomy, as indeed other struggles on different fronts, can be better analysed when looking through the lenses of autonomy *and* capacity - Fox’s two dimensions of organizational *power*. As mentioned above, looking at the idea of food sovereignty is not analytically helpful to understand how alternatives are constructed in practice. Bernstein (2010) has stressed the limits of comparing movements’ different demands without looking at the specificities of movements’ contexts and struggles. Moreover, to the extent that the food sovereignty movement aspires to create a broad convergence of movements (Alonso-Fradejas et al. 2015) it should articulate a vision that resonates more with struggles in practice and which is more process oriented rather than based on static, ideal goals. By looking at autonomy and capacity one can understand the structural constraints and perceived opportunities that shape a movement’s political strategies and demands. This helps to reduce the gap between idea and practice.

Methodology

I started this research process with an exploration of the literature around the concept of autonomy and food sovereignty. Informed by some the existing literature on the topic, my initial objective was to look at the struggle for autonomy in a context of debt and subordination (of shepherds vis-à-vis input companies, processors, retailers and financial capital). Given the idea of autonomy as understood by some academics and activists in the food sovereignty movement (further explored in Chapter 2), I was expecting specific manifestations of the struggle for autonomy that I did not find. I shifted to looking critically at the questions of the idea and practice of the struggle for autonomy within the construction of food sovereignty. Even though I did not conduct extensive fieldwork, I had the opportunity to conduct some semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with some shepherds in Sardinia as well as members of the MPS. I conducted my conversations throughout a very limited amount of time (three weeks) and therefore I have a very superficial understanding of the multifaceted experiences of the shepherds I have talked to. However, their stories gave a deeper appreciation of how they frame their struggle for autonomy, of what are considered the biggest constraints and how these are framed and contested.

Some of the main guiding analytical categories result from the conversations I had with shepherds. Hence, I unpack the subordination-delinking problematique from two main angles, inductively chosen: upstream markets -where power concentration manifests in high and fluctuating costs for shepherds- and downstream markets -where power concentration manifests in low returns for milk-. The politics at play in these two markets has different and interrelated layers of power relations that I will consider such as: local, national, regional and international power relations. My understanding of these very complex dynamics remain however limited. I have conducted interviews only at the regional (Sardinian) level. I chose the people to talk to with the intention of having a variety of opinions among shepherds. I talked more extensively to some shepherds that are leading figures within MPS but also to some shepherds and other actors that are diffident towards the movement. By doing so I was hoping to have a more critical understanding of the MPS in Sardinia.

The empirical data that I have used to conduct my analysis include: the official shepherds' demands document (Annex 1), youtube videos of conferences and meetings involving MPS' members, newspaper articles, stories and anthropological research and economic research articles and books. Only few book of critical political economy exist within the literature of shepherds in Sardinia. Even fewer literature has attempted to analyse the MPS struggles within broader geopolitical context. Moreover, the movements of sheep milk, not being an important commodity, have not been easy to track. Therefore, this research is a starting point to identify and connect local and national actors within global agricultural restructuring.

Organization of the paper

In order to address the research question, chapter 2 will explain the analytical lenses used to analyse the practice of the struggles and demands for increased control: autonomy and capacity. Autonomy will therefore be understood as an analytical tool to understand a process and a relation rather than an almost stat-

ic goal. Capacity will be the other inevitable component of how we understand specific demands in a context of existing structural and institutional constraints and opportunities. Chapter 3 will look at the interplay between capacity and struggles for autonomy in the context of upstream markets. It will explore the political dimension of subordination and the financial turn in agriculture looking at the impacts on shepherds. Exploring peasant capacity will be useful to understand their struggle for autonomy in the light of the context in which shepherds act and react. Chapter 4 will explore the same dynamics but in the context of downstream markets. Particular attention will be given to the demand for fairer prices. How can this demand be interpreted in a context where the price of milk is unrelated to costs faced by milk producers? And how can it be interpreted in the same context where distance between producers and those who determine the exchange value of commodities is growing?

By offering a more flexible and process oriented lens (autonomy-capacity) to categorise movements' demands for autonomy I hope to note that struggles for autonomy are more complicated than just struggling for partial or total delinking or not. There are a lot of grey areas that the dichotomy subordination on one side and delinking from the other side are unable to capture. Delinking not always means more autonomy and, at the same time, what may seem to be compromises and 'non transformative' demands for change can indeed be a step towards more autonomy and lead to more space for manoeuvre and more power and therefore more demands for autonomy.

Brief background in a nutshell: some facts to bear in mind

Depeasantization Agriculture and pastoralism have declined in the island as a whole. In 1990 the pastoral farms were 19,555. Between that year and 2010, 6,886 have left the activity leaving 12,699 remaining pastoral farms. Estimates from the regional association of farmers state that more than 7,000 farmers have lost their job (Nuova Sardegna).

Squeezed between two markets. I am interested in the intersection of two chains, the dairy and feed chain at the global and Italian level. I see the dairy chain as part of a more complex chain, what Sanderson (1986) and Friedmann (1992) have referred to as the foodgrain-feedgrain-livestock complex. Looking at chains as complexes allows to see restructurings in the dairy chain as part of broader global restructurings in agriculture motivated by politics –especially politics around production and trade. Space limits allow me to look only at the inputs, production and processing nodes. In these nodes I will look for mechanisms of subordination of shepherds to feed producers (industrial and financial capital) and to processing companies (industrial and financial capital). I will attempt to follow a partial commodity chain analysis in my central chapters in order to uncover power relations between shepherds and other actors in the chain and to understand how these have impacted on the relative autonomy and capacity of shepherds.

Before doing that I want to give some raw information about the main actors within the sheep dairy chain that I will mention throughout the paper.

Actors at the regional-national level:

- Cooperatives.
 - Milk cooperatives (only store and sell the milk)

- An example of cooperative that only store and sell milk is ASPI, located in the south of Sardinia. Felice Floris is the founder of this coop. He is also the main force behind the MPS.
 - Cheese cooperatives (store and transform the milk into cheese and commercialise it)
 - An example is that of LAIT Ittiri (name of the city) considered a successful cooperative. A cooperative of 350 members (shepherds ranging from 60 to 400-500 sheep). The cooperative employs also technicians to check the milk and people from Ittiri to process the milk and sell it. It employs around 30 people in total (transports, accounting, etc). Within the area of Ittiri every shepherd that sells his/her milk is part of the coop. Everyone but one family that has a history of stealing animals. The coop is around 40 years old and is now the second biggest coop in Sardinia. The president shifts every number of years and decisions about money to invest in the coop are made through consensus based decisions.
- Coldiretti and Confagricoltura: the national syndicate that represents small farmers. The MPS as a movement was formed as a rejection of the values and ideas expressed by Coldiretti. Moreover, Coldiretti represents the interests of many larger capitalist farmers and influences greatly the demands of this syndicate vis-à-vis the state. Coldiretti stands for food security
- MPS: most 'radical' agrarian movement in Sardinia. Formed by shepherds of different size and class. Relatively highly autonomous from the risk of co-optation by large capitalist interests in that it detached from Coldiretti and is not affiliated by any political party. All the farmers inside the movement are to different extent subordinated to the dairy chain. The majority of the shepherds produce extensively (as opposed to intensively) and many of them use organic inputs (yet not necessarily grown inside the farm). The movement has also formed alliances with former industrial workers (especially miners) in Sardinia made redundant in the years of the economic crisis of 2007-2008. The name of this coalition is: *consulta rivoluzionaria* (revolutionary board) (Floris, 2014).

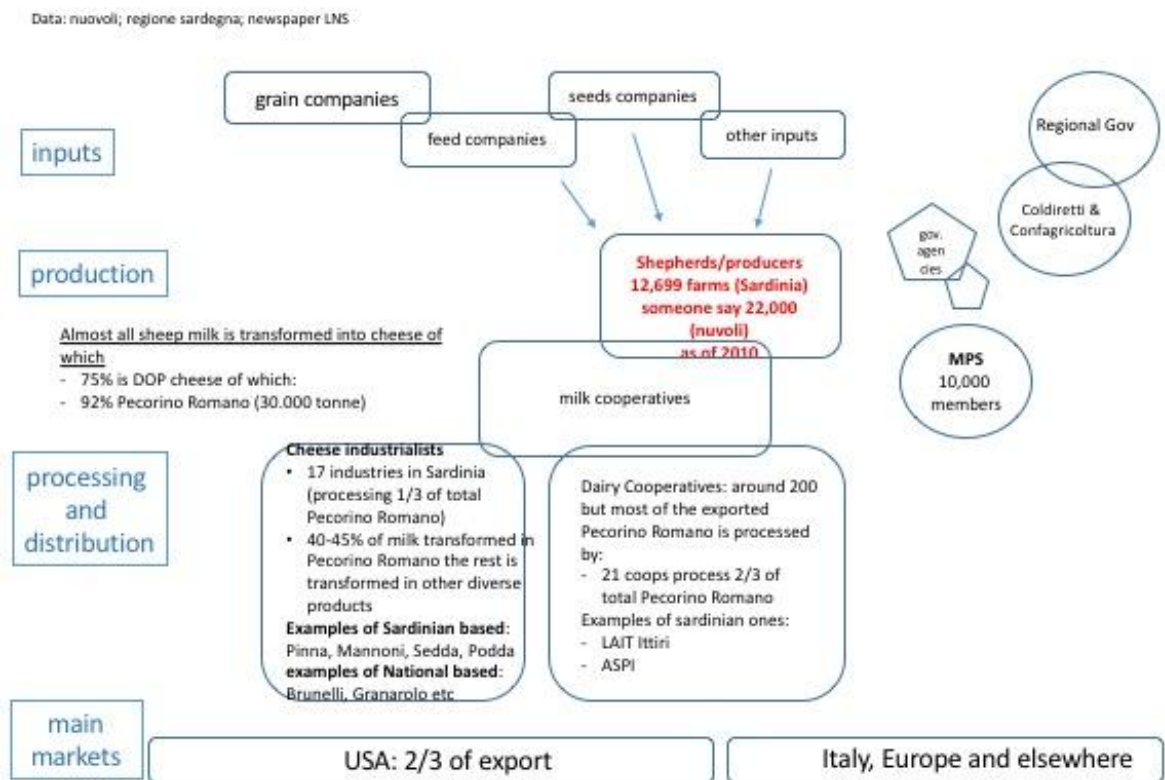


Figure 1: Visual representation of some of the main actors at the regional level and their relation.

Source: compiled by the author using data from Nuvoli (2013), La Nuova Sardegna (2015)

Chapter 2 Autonomy and Capacity as two dimensions of power

Gaining power and control is central for the construction of food sovereignty and the transformation of the food system. Power here is understood as the *autonomy and capacity* to do what one wants to do. The struggle for autonomy from different fractions of capital and powerful actors in commodity chains cannot be understood without looking at the other dimension of power: capacity. In this chapter I will unpack autonomy and capacity as the main analytical tools used throughout this paper to explore shepherds' demands. I will first situate the struggle for autonomy as a response to the subordination of small farmers or petty commodity producers to industrial and financial capital. As the power of agri-food corporation increases and changes character (through financialisation), the struggle for autonomy becomes even more central to the transformation and democratization of the food system. But autonomy is often referred to in the literature as partial or complete delinking. Is this enough to understand the practice of struggles for autonomy? Following Bernstein's proposition about the importance of class and context specific analysis, I will argue that the struggle for autonomy cannot be meaningfully analysed unless we also explore *capacity* understood as the ability to carry out the goals one has set out. Hence, autonomy overlaps with but is not necessarily the same as delinking.

Autonomy as a response to subordination to capital and adverse incorporation into global chains

To unpack the concept of autonomy it is useful to briefly look back at some of the most important debates around peasants' subordination to industrial agriculture and peasants' struggles. This allows to situate the struggle for autonomy as a direct form of contention around the adverse inclusion of small farmers in the current food system.

Lenin (1982) believed in the inevitable and permanent 'differentiation of the peasantry' once peasants started producing for the market (as opposed to self-subsistence). The commoditisation of production would eventually result in some becoming capitalist farmers leaving the majority of the middle peasantry squeezed, pushed to bankruptcy and eventually becoming farm labourers. According to Lenin, the landless proletariat would provide the necessary labour market for domestic industries as well as new consumers for industrial commodities. Therefore, this process was not necessarily negative for this idea of progress.

Kautsky (1988) had a different opinion. For him, given their ability to self-exploit their own labour, small farmers were considered important even in an increasingly integrated world market (as it was the case at the end of the 19th Century, during what Friedmann and McMichael [1989] have referred to as the first food regime). "In such circumstances, according to Kautsky (1988), agroindustrial capital would restrict itself to food processing, farm inputs, and rural financial systems, using science, technology, and money to subsume petty

commodity production to the demands of agro industrial capital” (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010:188).

This is a very relevant picture to some aspects of the contemporary global restructuring of agriculture. As I will extensively explain in chapters 4 and 5, in the context of Sardinia, the concentration of power in the hands of input companies on the one side and processing companies on the other side is very relevant to the shepherds’ struggle. The adverse inclusion of shepherds in the dairy chain was partly a result of scientific and technological advancements that introduced new dietary needs and machines to intensify production. It was also a result of national and European subsidies that regulated processing and distribution through health and safety regulations among many others. Once small farmers were incorporated and subsumed in the dairy chain, financialization processes made the squeeze even stronger.

In this sense, small farmers are not expected to be competitive vis-à-vis agrarian capital in terms of efficiency (understood as productive output). Their comparative advantage is their ability to work harder and depress their wages in times of crisis. At the end of the 19th Century, the crisis of grains’ overproduction meant falling profits for peasants which led them to incur debts, to diversify and/or intensify their production or migrate to urban centres. It also led to a restructuring of global agriculture whereby agro-industrial companies took over some of the functions that were previously finalised within the farm; creating a division between production and manufacturing and subsuming small farmers to agro-industrial capital (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010). This restructuring happened in Sardinia through subsidies that dis-incentivised the production of grains and feeds and incentivised the production of those inputs in northern Italy where large industrial farms were privileged and where state and European finances were channelled.

Kautsky (1988) also linked the agrarian question with the imperialist food regime of the time. He argued that as agriculture lost importance economically as a sector in society, petty commodity producers gained importance politically at a time where the state developmental interventions and industrialisation needed legitimation by the masses and the fear of the communist expansion was still a threat. For this reason, states, especially imperial powers, sustained this class by introducing a structure of import protection to safeguard national products vis-à-vis foreign ones.

In the context of the second food regime (as explained by Friedmann and McMichael, 1989) the EU for example heavily subsidised its farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on specific sectors. The sectors that were privileged reflected an international balance of power between the EU and the USA (more details in chapter 4) and an internal balance of power among European countries where France in particular and Northern countries in general had a lot of leverage in terms of defining the terms of the CAP. This resulted in a “policy favouring almost exclusively the most important products of the northern founding countries, mainly dairy products, bovine meat, cereals

and sugar beet” (Belo Moreira, 2015). Currently, the five largest recipients of European subsidies in Italy are based in the North of Italy. Four out of five are in the Bologna province, two of them are different branches of the same company, one is a bank¹, and 4 out of five are sugar related companies (farmsubsidies, N.D.) Even at the national and regional level politics played its role especially with the important power imbalances resulting from the North South division in Italy. Since the subsidies on grain and feed production were directed to northern Italy and northern EU countries, forage production in Sardinia became secondary. For this reason, and to keep turmoil at its lowest, Sardinian regional government channelled financial support towards the agro-pastoral sector, a strong sector politically² and economically. Yet, the terms of inclusion were clearly going to be negative and the real impact was going to be felt once the EU subsidies started to shrink and austerity policies substituted subsidies.

From 1986 to 1994 the GATT negotiations took place during the Uruguay Round where agriculture was included in the trade agreements. This event was one of the major triggers for the emergence of Food Sovereignty as a concept (Whitman, Desmarais and Wiebe, 2010). The GATT negotiations, provided a forum for the Cairns group³ to push the EU to dismantle its protectionist shield and liberalise its markets (Belo Moreira, 2015). Even though European subsidies are still among the highest globally, its gradual removal left many European farmers, and in this case also Sardinian shepherds, in a debt trap where rising costs and falling wages forced many out of the countryside and pushed others to unite and claim for higher autonomy and their rights.

The MPS was also formed in the 1990s in this political context and also as a rejection of *Coldiretti*, the institutional representative body of small-medium farmers. The MPS recognises that agriculture in Europe is highly subsidized but it also denounces that 70% of the agricultural subsidies go to the 10% of European producers (Floris, 2011). These are large industrial farms and processing companies. The MPS brings together economic demands, it struggles for recognition of shepherds’ identity and represent a strong struggle for autonomy (Pitzalis and Zerilli, 2013: 382).

Autonomy as central to food sovereignty

In the food sovereignty discussions, autonomy is a central component of the struggle. In the Nyéléni declaration it is understood as increased control and power on different fronts: “we are deepening our collective understanding of food sovereignty and learning about the realities of the struggles of our re-

¹ Istituto Centrale delle Banche Popolari Italiane (farmsubsidies, N.D.)

² By politically I mean that many shepherds were associated with communist parties or radical movement for Sardinian independence (Le Lannou REF).

³ The Cairns Group is a coalition of agricultural exporting countries pressing international trade fora to meet their mandate of trade liberalization and enforce it everywhere. This includes the abolition of export subsidies and domestic support

spective movements to retain autonomy and regain our powers” (Nyeleni, 2007). Ploeg (2010) in his article on repeasantization explores this struggle for autonomy from different fronts. I have extracted some of the main components and simply summarised them below.

Autonomy from:	Monopolistic power of input market	Oligopsonistic power of buyers (processing companies)	Land dispossession, land grabbing and contract farming
Resistance as:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-provisioning and lower-input farming, agroecology • co-production and reciprocity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vertical integration and cooperatives; on farm processing • direct selling • multifunctionality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-poor land reform • Right to produce and <i>control</i> on production landscape

Table 1: Autonomy understood as partial delinking (compiled by the author from Ploeg, 2010).

Autonomy from the dominant food regime is often understood, implicitly or explicitly, in terms of partial or total delinking from agri-food chains. Ploeg believes that the peasantry of the twenty-first century should be understood in terms of resistance. He defines this resistance as the ‘struggle for autonomy’ which encompasses a struggle from several oppressive actors in the food empire. He argues that:

resistance and the goal of constructing autonomy are core elements that influence how peasants pattern their forms of production. They materialize in the many attempts to gain self-control over the resource-base; to actively distantiate the production unit from the main input and factor markets; and, consequently, to achieve relatively low levels of intermediate consumption and indebtedness. These strategies are major lines of defence that are controlled by food empires. Distantiation from a fully fledged, simple commodity production (where all resources, apart from labor, are mobilized through and governed by the markets) clearly represents a form of resistance.

(Ploeg, 2010:22)

Essentially, for Ploeg resistance is understood as closer to delinking from the several forms of oppression that the food empire represents, than to the idea of negotiating the terms of insertion to the commodity chain. Despite briefly mentioning the relative degrees of autonomy, Ploeg attributes to ‘the peasant way’ specific characteristics that include: a certain relationship with land and nature, resistance to commodification especially when it enters the production process (i.e. when it is part of the inputs to production), relative delinking from upstream and downstream markets and so on. Partial integration into markets is recognised but the end goal, the demands that small farmers have, especially those in line with ‘the peasant way’, are generally understood as demands for partial and/or total delinking.

In the same way that Robbins (2015) has problematized the unreflexive localism that was often assumed by food sovereignty proponents, my intention is to problematize the concept of autonomy as proponents often refer to. To do so, Bernstein’s (2010) argument is useful to remind us about the importance

and implications of class differences. The different relationship to the means of production, the different position of farmers in the food chain and in this case, of shepherds in the dairy chain matters a lot when we look at the struggle for autonomy. Capacity, understood as a movement's ability to carry out its goals and demands, inevitably shapes the types of demands that a movement will have in the first place. If the struggle for autonomy means gaining autonomy from oppressive forces; oppression (and opportunities) will manifest itself differently across different contexts. In other words, the different material basis that shepherds and movements start from will result in different manifestations of the struggle for autonomy and different demands.

Understanding the struggle for autonomy in practice will therefore benefit from closer examination of the different material bases upon which the struggle for autonomy emerges. Autonomy means significant degree of autonomy from the dominant forces in the industrial food system. But since there are variegated structural and institutional bases, this struggle manifests in a variety of forms.

Autonomy and capacity as analytical tools...rather than static goals

I will borrow Fox's understanding of organizational power (Fox, 1993, chapter 2). Fox analyses organisational power with the help of two lenses: autonomy and capacity. Autonomy is first of all *inherently relational*, it does not exist somewhere and lack elsewhere, it always indicates a relationship. Autonomy is the degree of external influences on a group's ability to set their own goals and pursue them. I take it here as MPS autonomy vis-à-vis capital. Autonomy is a *matter of degree*. It is not a matter of either completely independent or completely subordinated or co-opted. It indicates the agential dimension of power and it is therefore related to the act of choosing the movements' goals according to what is considered by the movement members itself to be fair, valuable, and desirable according to the *shared identity* among a movement. For example, having the ability to choose what to produce and how and who to sell to can be a feature of high autonomy. Having the ability to choose goals independently from interests of larger agrarian capital is also an increase in relative autonomy (for example delinking from movements where large capital dominated the goal formation process).

The second and strictly interrelated dimension of power is capacity. Capacity refers to the *ability of a movement to carry out such goals – to do what it wants to do*. It relates to structural constraints and opportunities. Structural constraints relate and vary from access to resources, to relationship to the means of production, to the position in the commodity chain and vis-à-vis industrial and financial fractions of capital. But capacity is also about perceived opportunities and space for manoeuvre within the system. Tarrow (1998) and other social movement theories (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) are useful to understand the politics of contention and unpack the capacity dimension of power. Tarrow argues that apart from the persistent social and economic oppression that people suffer, contention arises when people perceive political opportunities for action or when their interests or subsistence is particularly threatened. As he puts it:

outbreaks of contention cannot be derived from the deprivation people suffer [...] what does vary widely from time to time and place to place are the levels and types of opportunities people experience, the constraints on their freedom of action, and the threats they perceive to their interests and values [...] contention also increases when they are threatened with costs they cannot bear or which outrage their sense of justice

(Tarrow, 1998: 71)

A farmers' movement may have a high degree of autonomy to set goals like pursuing food sovereignty ideals, but it may not have the capacity to do what it requires them to do because perhaps it is too divided to mount a unified mobilization – in this case, it is far from achieving its aspirations. In the same way, a farmers' movement may obviously be of high capacity because perhaps its members have relatively economically viable individual farm units – but they may not have the political autonomy to form goals and pursue them – in this case, they are also far from reaching their aspiration. It is when farmers' movements, still following Fox (1993), have higher degree of autonomy and capacity that things start to get more promising, politically.

The interaction between these two dimensions of organizational power has to be taken into account when looking at movements demands in order to understand as deep as possible the different variables that influence movements' demands and in this case their demands for change.

In other words, as Bernstein argues, one cannot underestimate the importance of the context and the relevance of class and how this shapes farmers' struggles. He suggests that the demands of agrarian movements and the type of change that these envision, cannot be reduced to a simplistic comparison that one movement is demanding, for example, higher prices while the other is demanding systemic change and that therefore the former is less 'radical' than the latter. This comparison would not take adequately account of the structural and institutional context around farmers as well as their class position in relation to capital.

Understanding the structural system of oppression in its specificity and how this system has been institutionalised (through which mechanisms and at what levels) is essential to understand and analyse movements' demands and struggles (what I will do in chapter 3 and 4). Understanding the *interplay between autonomy and capacity* is key. It includes asking questions such as: what are the key characteristics of the specific commodity analysed? Autonomy from which fractions of capital? What other actors are involved in the chain? This is valid not only when looking at different movements but also when looking at class differences within a movement itself.

For example, the MPS as a shepherds' organisation demands radical transformation of the dairy chain. Separating themselves from Coldiretti and Confagricoltura, the MPS has *increased its relative autonomy* from larger fractions of capital to struggle for the goals that they deem important. Coldiretti and Confagricoltura in fact have too *low autonomy* vis-à-vis the regional government and other powerful actors to demand radical changes from them. For example, the current president of the agro-pastoral policies in Sardinia, Ms. Falchi, is the former regional president of Confagricoltura.

Yet they have relatively low *capacity* to delink from processing companies as to do so will translate inter alia in their inability to commercialise their milk

to foreign markets (constituting 2/3 of the whole market of Pecorino Romano) (Nuvoli, 2013). The strength and shared interests within the movement itself are also variables of the movement's capacity (Tarrow, 1998). Different class positions within the MPS might make unity and strength more difficult to achieve therefore resulting in lower relative capacity. Their demands – that are not framed as delinking but rather as better terms of incorporation – such as fairer prices for milk can be better analysed under this light, by looking at constraints and spaces for manoeuvre and degrees of relative autonomy. Fairer prices⁴ would mean better bargaining power vis-à-vis cheese industrialists and therefore more autonomy to shape new goals according to the changed structural context (Burnett and Murphy, 2014). The best combination of course would be when a movement has high relative autonomy and high relative capacity.

To conclude, before going to fieldwork I assumed that autonomy would translate into struggles for partial or total delinking, from powerful actors in the chain. In the case of Sardinia, as partial delinking from processing companies and inputs companies. Yet demands for autonomy are always in relation to the capacity and ability to carry out predefined goals in specific structural and institutional contexts. Introducing capacity as a dimension of power will allow a better understanding and analysis of movements' struggles and of the possibility and viability of creating an alternative. It will also allow the researcher to better analyse and contextualise the type of alternative agrarian and food movements envision according to their capacity and autonomy. Shepherds' *capacity* to partially delink from the chain, localise and so on influence greatly their struggle and demands and although they might declare to have some specific goals, one always has to look at their capacity in order to understand and appreciate the context -and therefore what they are doing and what they are not able to do - to understand their strategies before jumping to conclusion on the 'genuiness' of their

Given the central importance of looking at the interplay between autonomy and capacity to understand organisational power, the typology proposed by Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) is useful, but should be used only as a heuristic tool. Adding capacity as a dimension of power can be helpful to understand peasants' condition as a process rather than as a static situation. That is, demands are also influenced by the changing constraints and opportunities perceived by a movement. Therefore, concluding that a movement is not genuine enough or has 'failed' to achieve its goals can be a simplistic statement if one does not look at the capacity of that movement to do so. In the coming chapters I will look at autonomy and capacity more in detail in the context of upstream and downstream markets.

⁴ For example prices that reflect more costs rather than only global supply and demand of milk

Autonomy and capacity: Looking at two periods of agricultural restructuring

I am looking at two periods: the first one is the ‘protectionist developmental’ era that characterised European CAP and the West during the second food regime as understood by Friedmann and McMichael (1989). Here the developmental state has been central to integrate small farmers into global commodity chains thereby achieving firstly the appeasing of rebellion in the rural countryside and the creation of a class of petty commodity producers; secondly, easier supply of labour for the development of agro-industries; third, increase in food production and food security and lastly increase in trade and intensification of industrial development. This period reflects a productionist paradigm (Lang and Heasman 2004).

The second one is the shift towards more neoliberal/neoinstitutional policies where the state is not irrelevant but has definitely lost its centrality (McMichael). Some have interpreted this transition period as a shift towards a ‘corporate environmental food regime’ (Friedmann, 2005). Without entering into the debate of whether a third food regime has emerged or not, I find both interpretations by Friedmann and McMichael useful to guide my analysis. The CAP has gone through both processes: restructuring in line with austerity measures and further liberalisation “the EU began switching from its original [CAP] farm price support policies to US-style government direct payments to producers, thereby decoupling production costs from prices, which, allowed the formation of a single ‘world price’.” (McMichael, 2009:153). In addition, an evident greening and emphasis on sustainability is evident in CAP restructuring (Belo Moreira, 2015). Both these aspects are relevant both for the analysis of the mechanisms of capital accumulation and the framing of shepherds’ demands.

Following Burch and Lawrence (2009) analysis, I will add that changes in the financial system are central to understand shifts in the geography of agricultural restructuring. This is especially true when looking at dairy farmers who are extensively dependent on feed imports (as a result of the terms of inclusion in the chain). Therefore, I will look at the integration in international commodity chains first and the financialization of agriculture as two important phases of agricultural restructuring.

Chapter 3 Unpacking capital, oppression and resistance: autonomy and capacity in upstream markets.

In this chapter, I study the two periods described above in relation to shepherds' integration into the dairy chain and their increasing subordination to upstream markets.

In the first period, the 'protectionist developmental' period which coincides with the second food regime, shepherds were integrated into the value chain through the internationalization of the dairy chain and the standardization of feeds, through the injection of subsidies (direct price supports/quotas and deficiency subsidies) that reflected sectorial CAPs for agricultural development and gradual trade liberalisation starting from the creation of the 'Common European Market' coupled with the protection of European main exports. The initial CAP favoured mostly the products of northern founding countries: bovine meat, cereals and sugar beet (Belo Moreira, 2015:175). This resulted in the subordination of shepherds in Sardinia to feed companies mainly concentrated in Northern Italy and Northern Europe as well as maize and soy producers outside Europe⁵. These policies were reflected in the dominant ideology whereby the developmental state was intervening in the economy to "assure food supply and to liberate the labour force for other sectors" (Belo Moreira, 2015:175).

During the 1990s the CAP shifted from a productionist⁶ and protectionist phase to a gradual change towards more neoliberal and 'environmentally sustainable' phase where state intervention lost momentum and the free market mechanism became one of the guiding organising principle (McMichael, 2009; Belo Moreira, 2015). The growing importance of finance, among other factors, is at the heart of this shift (Burch and Lawrence, 2009). "Financialization is widely seen to be a response to the exhaustion of the Fordist economic growth model, where financial capital has replaced productive capital in the quest for new profits" (Clapp, 2014: 799). From price supports, the CAP shifted to "US-style government direct payments to producers, thereby decoupling production costs from prices" (McMichael, 2005:278-9). This restructuring has led to the 'privatization of agricultural risk management' (Isakson, 2014:756) whereby small farmers are now expected to manage risk through financial instruments like credit and agricultural derivatives. With the monetary value assigned to risk, and the progressive liberalization of agricultural financial markets "agricultural risk is now becoming financialized" (ibid.).

⁵ USA but later also Brazil, Argentina and so on.

⁶ Following a productionist paradigm as Lang and Heasman (2004: 29) argue in their book

These restructurings contribute to creating a favourable environment for the extraction of value from the periphery –small scale farmers- and its concentration in the centre –grain processing and distribution companies as well as financial actors-. This entails a growing distance between those who produce commodities and those who determine its exchange value. Price becomes therefore the epitome of shepherds' loss of autonomy and capacity.

From relative autonomy to relative subordination to foreign feed companies.

To understand the subordination of shepherds to foreign feed companies, some of the concepts presented by Sanderson are useful. She talks about internationalisation processes and how these have shaped the way of farming cattle, the feed to nourish them and the cuts selected during the processing node. Internationalization and the term “world steer” don't necessarily mean that, as it happens with a car, the single animal is the result of different pieces coming from all over the world. In the case of cattle, animal ‘production’ still happens in one place but what internationalization means is that whatever goes into the production of cattle, medicines, feed, technology and machines - i.e. the inputs of production - are internationalized and standardized. These processes are standardized because beef and cattle are meant to be sold in the global market and therefore have to meet both international standards for consumption, such as consumer taste (for example a certain marbling characteristic of beef steaks or certain cuts of beef) (Sanderson 1986: 124), and also international standards for trade which means they have to be immune from contagious diseases, they have to be processed in such a way that allow meat to be easily used for different ends and so on.

In the context of cheese and the dairy chain, similar dynamics happen. As in the cattle industry, several processes along the dairy chain were standardized throughout the 20th century. Some of them are: animal feed and its composition; medicines and vaccinations required in order for sheep to be healthy and whose milk can be safely commercialized; vitamins and supplements used to make the milk more balanced and therefore the cheese more palatable to a broader audience; pasteurization processes in order for the milk to be transported without going bad and so on (Ploeg, 2008).

Before the intensification of milk production in Sardinia, sheep were mostly fed with pasture and hay produced in the farm. After the first cheese industrialists came at the beginning of the 20th century, shepherds were gradually required to increase their milk output (Lannou, 1979). Hence, animals started to be fed additional feed in addition to pasture. Those who could not produce enough forage inside the farm, started purchasing it from Sardinian grains and hay producers in the South west of the island. Yet with the further modernization of the island, carbon extraction mines and petrochemical industries were incentivized by national developmental policies with the aim was to promote industrialization and the movement of people from the countryside.

The interplay between the USA grain surplus production, the CAP sectorial policies as well as national and Sardinian political dynamics resulted in financial incentives given to forage and grain producers in order to stop producing (Benachenhou, 2001). The state pursues its development agenda by injecting

subsidies for grains that do not compete with crops produced in northern Italy and other Northern European countries as well as soy and maize coming from the USA. At the same time the state wants to maintain political stability and to create an infrastructure for internal development⁷ of the country. Therefore, the subsidies resulted in high benefits for some more than others. In the case of shepherds, this resulted in increasing the subordination to more distant feed suppliers⁸.

When I was talking to the leader of the MPS he told me that with the rural development plans of the 80s and 90s small hay and cereals farmers (those cereals produced for feed: split peas, maize etc.) were incentivized to leave their land to rest for environmental conservation. For many producers it was more convenient to take the subsidies money rather than producing and incurring the risk of too high costs and too little revenues (because, since this production was not incentivised, the costs relative to production were relatively higher). What happened in the sector was a capitalization of existing producers and the disappearance of smaller ones (Lannou, 1979). With less feed producers to buy from, many shepherds had to turn to foreign producers of cereals and animal feed concentrated in the northern region of Italy. Those who currently buy from Sardinian feed companies are not necessarily buying inputs produced in Sardinia but rather processed and distributed by regional firms and imported from national or foreign grain companies.

Changing suppliers changing diets.

Together with the integration of shepherds to the global dairy complex, the increasing standardization of animals' diets gradually developed in the dairy sector. Animal diets became more similar regardless of the place of origin of the animal itself (Sanderson). This is also true for other technologies such as the centralized feeding mechanism during milking. This has meant not only similar feed everywhere but a considerable increase in feed demand to meet ewes' higher productivity.

This global restructuring, is political in nature (Friedmann, 1992). Friedmann stresses the emergence of a world meat sector with feed inputs sourced globally and meat related commodities sold in the global market (1992: 378). She refers to this as the wheat complex that, she argues, facilitated the dependency on food/feed imports.

The livestock complex parallels industrial restructuring in the world economy. During the food regime of the 1950s and 1960s, animal and crop production were reorganised, first in the USA and then in Europe. While intensive, specialised livestock production was national, new feed crops were from the outset industrial raw materials for the transnational feed

⁷ Understood as industrialization and agriculture for export (Belo Moreira, 2015)

⁸ In addition, this resulted in changing social dynamics in those places where grain and bread production was central (Counihan, 1984); a general trend towards deagrarianization (ibid.) and the creation of relative surplus population (Counihan, 1984; Lanou, 1979; Li, 2009).

manufacturing industry. After the crisis began in the early 1970s, the complex exploded into intense international competition.

(Friedmann, 1992:376)

Europe was a competitor of the USA in wheat production but the USA accepted the protection of European wheat markets in return for the EU to exempt import duties for soybeans. “From the US side, European imports of maize and soya more than compensated for lost wheat sales. For Europe, soya represented the ‘hole in the Common Market’” (ibid: 377)

The production of meat and feed was globally reorganized, undermining local, more ‘traditional’ types of production and increasing subordination to feed imports. “This is even more felt in an island where being dependent means even higher prices” (interviewee #). Moreover, standardization of practices and internationalization of the dairy chain has meant that before, the great prevalence of specific pasture gave a unique and specific taste to the milk and cheese. Since animal feed became more standardized, the uniqueness of the milk is partly getting lost and therefore milk becomes more easily replaceable with cheaper varieties⁹. The elimination of specificities directly damage shepherds’ relative autonomy vis-à-vis cheese industrialists for whom milk became a more easily replaceable input. At the same time this facilitated the concentration of power in the hands of grain and feed corporations on one side and of processing corporations (of milk, meat, dairies) on the other side thereby shifting the power away from milk producers (Ploeg, 2008).

The geopolitical context of EU-USA negotiations is reflected in the changing diets and the altering scientific research around feedstock diets in Europe where soy progressively became an important component of ewe diets for higher productivity and a better **quality**. Feeding animals is now a complex science monitored by animal-nutrition experts and veterinaries. This is evident when talking to shepherds (interviewee 2) that need to place careful attention about the fiber-protein balance of diets to maintain constant production levels that does not change too much across time, and a ‘high quality’ of the milk (interviewee 2).

Changing diets are also reflected in the evolving scientific research around animal food regimes that connect cheese quality as defined by quality control bodies (such as DOP) and consumer taste with balanced diets (Pulina et al. 2006: 255-256). Soy and soybean oil supplements constitute an important part of protein composition that ewes’ diets should have and this has also been proven to lead to higher productivity by scientific research (Mele et al. 2006).

Scientific research is not apolitical as Tomlinson (2013) has argued. Changing diets and the shifting geography of feed and meat production has resulted in maize and soy production becoming the main feed crops traded internationally with maize production quadrupling and soy production growing

⁹ Cheaper in terms of price but not necessarily in terms of costs.

more than eight fold in 50 years (Weis, 2013). “The US was the dominant exporter of both maize and soybeans for many decades, with soybeans principally flowing to Western Europe” (ibid.: 69). However, this has changed with Brazil and Argentina becoming major producers, converting massive amounts of land into soy and maize production to supply Europe and increasingly China. The soymeal used in animal feed is increasing as well as European exports of soy (Gelder et al., 2008).

Following the logic of comparative advantage, this situation was considered economically beneficial. The strategy for the EU was to specialize in some commodities for export while importing others. Subsidised milk prices allowed dairy products to be sold relatively cheaply and allow farmers to sustain high feed costs and the costs of technological advancement.

The financial turn: fluctuating costs and further subordination to a ‘new’ master?

The internationalisation of the livestock complex and partial trade liberalization in the second food regime coupled with high protectionist policies in Europe and the USA help to contextualise firstly, the growing power of grain and feed companies, second, the international and geopolitical character of the livestock complex and third, the subordination of small farmers to foreign¹⁰ feed companies.

The shift to a corporate food regime with finance at its core, helps me understand financial mechanisms of capital accumulation -that replace productive capital- and value extraction. Central to this shift is 1) the restructuring of the CAP 2) the liberalization of financial markets which led to the increasing interest of financial capital in agricultural commodities as well as agricultural capital in financial mechanisms of accumulation and 3) the privatization and financialization of agricultural risk (Isakson, 2014).

This gradual liberalization of financial markets in agriculture results in increased investment in agricultural derivatives and commodity speculation (Rossi, 2013) with large financial and agricultural companies benefitting on one side, inter alia. On the other side, the effects of this shift onto small farmers have been 1) an increased price fluctuation of grains and feed, 2) price movements that did not reflect a ‘real’ supply and demand situation but one rather corrupted by speculation, 3) a further discrepancy between costs and price for small producers, in this case, shepherds.

One of the biggest threats to the reproduction of labour in farms are rising costs and rising debts. The fluctuating cost of animal feed (not forgetting those of seeds, gasoline, land and other inputs) has a big impact to the internal balance of costs (Ploeg, 2013). Before negotiating the price of milk with dairy industries, shepherds have to deal with all the costs associated with the farm. When the relative costs are too high the likelihood of accepting contracts with

¹⁰ Here understood as outside of Sardinia and concentrated in Northern Italy, northern Europe and the USA.

industrialists on very unfavourable terms is very high. Some even leave the co-operatives they belong to (facing the costs of doing so) to sell to industrialists because they can provide capital upfront (interviewee).

In the last decades, the uncertainty of costs has been drastically exacerbated by the increasing financialization of the agricultural sector. The latest symptom of this trend can be seen in the 2007-2008 food crises. This crisis has become the emblem of the complex collision of several crises: financial, climate, energy and food, all deeply interconnected with each other. It was interpreted by international and national institutions as a crisis related to supply not meeting demand and therefore an increase in world prices. Clapp (2009) gives a detailed account of the 2007-8 price rise and stresses that supply and demand imbalances are not enough to explain the calamity. Since other moments where grain stocks were at historical lows did not result in such a deep crisis, she concludes that other factors played an important role in triggering the sharp price spikes, among which a relevant one being the increased speculation of agricultural commodities.

Most of the mainstream economic literature is skeptical of a causal link between excessive speculation and price spikes arguing instead that financial markets help to insure that prices in commodity exchanges reflect the situation in the 'real' market (De Castro et al, 2012:6). However, this proposition seems contradictory given that volatility is required for financial markets to exist. Financial markets were designed to manage volatility, not to contain it. Hedging is based on the existence of risk and volatility, it is a system devised to manage it not to eliminate or reduce it. And when new players are introduced in the commodity market that are not directly losing from volatility but rather only benefitting from it, then volatility stops to be a hedging mechanism and becomes a source of profit (Buckley, 2011).

Isakson (2014); Clapp (2014) and Murphy et al. (2012) all note how speculation in agricultural commodities is especially benefitting transnational grain corporations, the so-called ABCD¹¹ who sell their financial products to commodity traders. Clearly the ABCDs have a privileged position when it comes to investing in financial markets given their massive presence in the market of basic commodities -controlling directly and indirectly as much as 90% of the grain trade worldwide (Murphy et al. 2012:3)-. Creating price fluctuation and benefitting from it is very easy with such a monopoly in the global market.

"The major traders do not just trade physical commodities – they operate from the farm level all the way to food manufacturing. They provide seed, fertilizer and agrochemicals to growers, and buy agricultural outputs and store them in their own facilities. They act as landowners, cattle and poultry producers, food processors, transportation providers, biofuel producers and providers of financial services in commodity markets." (ibid.:3).

¹¹ Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill and Louis, Dreyfus, commonly referred to as 'the ABCD companies'.

Grain companies are not the only actors, banks are also increasingly involved in selling agricultural commodities and creating financial tools to sell to third parties such as the commodity index funds created by Goldman Sachs (GSCI). This tool is aimed at an audience that wants to invest in 'safe' financial products (such as pension funds) that do not require much attention and do not involve much risk of loss. With the liberalisation of financial markets, commodity markets became fundamentally more volatile as everyone became able to invest in them (Kaufman, 2011).

In addition to the aforementioned mechanisms, the CAP has undergone structural changes that have increasingly privatized agricultural risk management strategies. These changes arrived gradually going from the privatization of infrastructures like the cereals elevators, taken over by Cargill, Continental and Louis Dreyfus (Belo Moreira, 2015:179) and the reduction in supported

prices for cereal with the MacSharry reform; to the gradual neoliberalisation of the CAP and of future markets. As it can be noticed from figure 1, the reduction of price supports was replaced by the so call 'direct payments' where subsidies were decoupled from production levels as well as production costs.

CAP REFORMS

- 1992 - Direct payments and set-aside introduced
- 1995 - Rural development aid phased in
- 2002 - Subsidy ceiling fixed until 2013
- 2003 - Subsidies decoupled from production levels
- 2006 - Reform of sugar subsidies
- 2008 - CAP 'health check' - phase out land set-aside policy and milk quotas

Figure 2 CAP Reforms 1990-2010 (BBC, 2013)

Chapter 4 Autonomy and capacity in the context of downstream markets: love-hate relationship with processing companies

Autonomy and capacity should be explored also in the context of downstream markets. As for chapter 3, two main phases of agricultural restructuring will guide my analysis.

First, during the ‘protectionist developmental’ phase, the subordination of shepherds from processing companies was incentivised. The intensification of milk production (which nonetheless remained mostly extensive –pasture grazing- in Sardinia) led to the institutionalization of phytosanitary standards in the production node (like milk pasteurization) followed by quality standards more recently. The elimination of specificity coupled with the opening up of trade barriers (mostly within the EU), incentivised Sardinian shepherds to compete with shepherds elsewhere. This made the price of milk spiral down facilitating extraction of value by processing companies and consequent concentration of power away from shepherds (in Sardinia and elsewhere).

The financialization of agriculture coinciding with the neoliberal corporate food regime has further widened the distance between the costs faced by small farmers and the exchange value of milk. Processing companies, driven increasingly by financial motives, what Isakson (2014) calls ‘shareholder value’ have increasingly pursued a finance-led growth strategy driven by profit motives (rather than pursuing health or quality motives). This has involved growing outsourcing, mergers and acquisitions the externalization of costs into the environment and small farmers (as well as farm labour and consumers).

This situation like in the upstream markets has increased the distance between those who produce value and those who decide the exchange value of the commodity. The wider the distance¹², the less is the influence shepherds have in determining the price of milk and cheese. The less the control they have, the lower the autonomy vis-à-vis industrial and financial capital.

From standardization of milk production practices to institutionalised value extraction

Starting from the end of the 19th Century the first industrialists arrived in Sardinia (coming mainly from the Lazio region) to start industrial cheese production for export purposes. Before their arrival, the production transformation and exchange of dairy products was the responsibility of the shepherd and exchange happened within the very close local areas. Many shepherds used communal grazing land and practiced very sustainable ways of transhumance.

¹² Geographical distance as well as growing uncertainty of the actors involved (Clapp, 2014; Isakson, 2014)

With the gradual land titling and industrialists' growing demand for milk shepherds were gradually incentivised to increase production and introduce technologies in their farms¹³.

Over the years, the transformative activities of industrialists coming from mainland Italy became increasingly important and, at the same time, the previous role that shepherds used to play of transforming milk inside its farm became a marginal one. The function of the shepherd became hence limited to milk production, while the processing and transformation was increasingly delegated to economic figures before unknown in the dairy existing system in Sardinia (Nuvoli, 2013). Today, the majority of the milk produced in Sardinia is processed into Pecorino Romano cheese and exported to one of the historical main export destinations -the USA and Canada- also important destinations of Italian and Sardinian immigration (2/3 of total Pecorino Romano exports).

Gradually, cheese industrialists started pushing for the improvement of milk quality standards and technological advancement in the farms to insure a higher output and better quality (Nuvoli, 2013). An example of the push for more controlled quality can be seen in the institutionalization of pasteurization of milk norms in 1989 at the national level and in 1992 at the European one (ibid.). Like in the input node, also in the production node the standardization of practices has meant a higher dependency on external processes and less autonomy for small producers. In fact, for shepherds who lived far from pasteurization centres this standard became a trade barrier to sell their milk (even though selling "illegally" still continues, one can more difficultly make a living out of it. Brining milk to the closest pasteurization centred also meant higher costs for some. In other words, the institutionalization of this practice has resulted in social differentiation.

This European regulation imposes the limit of the microbial law and also requires the milk to be conserved to temperatures lower than 8° C if the conferral of the milk to the processing plant happens after two hours of the milking. In order to facilitate the implementation of such legislation, Sardinian regional government, set up an operational program, with EU and private funds, of 'rationalization' and 'modernization' of the farms through loans and financial incentives (Nuvoli and Parascandolo 2013: 141). Some of this included the introduction of milking machines, refrigerators and so on. Numerous shepherds are still repaying those debts. Many have gone bankrupt because unable to solve them (the debt of the pastoral sectors vis-à-vis banks amounts to euros 800 milion).

Another way in which pasteurization has reduced shepherds' capacity and autonomy is what Van der Ploeg (2008: 173) calls the "elimination of deviation and specificities". The pasteurization of milk in fact implies boiling down the

¹³ Giving a down payment to shepherds at the beginning of the production season has always been one of the main strategies to insure supply to industrialists and one of the main incentives for small producers to sign a contract with them.

milk at high temperatures to eliminate all the bacteria and living microorganisms. This means eliminating the potentially bad bacteria but also all the good ones that make the milk 'unique'. It also means that Sardinian milk and milk coming from Romania (important European sheep milk producer) become the same. The only difference is that Romanian milk is much cheaper for industries to process. Therefore, with the gradual (and selective) liberalisation of trade, it also became more convenient for cheese industries to buy cheap milk and use it as a basis for comparison to push down the price of Sardinian milk.

Through phytosanitary procedures milk from Sardinia and elsewhere become the same (at the organoleptic level). This increases the oligopsonistic power of processing companies. Given many shepherds' and cooperatives' low capacity to delink from the processing node, costs are externalised onto small farmers (both in Sardinia and the underpaid small farmers in Romania) and onto the environment, allowing processing companies to sell their products at a competitive price while maintaining their profits high.

The mechanisms described above meant that everyone had to confer their milk to a plant where it could be stored and pasteurised if they wanted to commercialise it. Initially private industries had a monopoly on cheese processing because of their ability to invest capital. The first coops started forming right at the beginning during the 1900s but the boom only came during the 1980s when, to ameliorate the concentration of power in the hands of privates, the region incentivised the formation of cooperatives with positive outcomes. Many shepherds organise in cooperative to have a greater bargaining power by negotiating the price directly with distribution and retailing companies. Even with the establishment of coops, the majority of the milk was conferred to private cheese industrialists (55-60%) while 40-45% of the milk was transformed in cooperatives (Nuvoli, 2013).

Since the beginning of the dairy sector in Sardinia, milk industrialists (regional, national and international) have had and still have an oligopsonistic power over price making because the number of buyers is quite small compared to the number of shepherds in the territory. For those who are tied to cheese industrialists, negotiation of milk prices is done in the middle of the year, around summer time. During this period, newspapers in Sardinia are always flooded with articles about the struggles around price negotiations and decreasing prices (Mannia, 2014).

Considering these cyclical crisis of production, the different exchange rate between the Italian Lira and the dollar, and the broader protectionist CAP policies during the mercantile-industrial food regime (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989) the producers of Pecorino Romano cheese were supported through price subsidies. These however, were progressively removed after the Marrakesh agreements in 1994 (Nuvoli, 2013). After this, only the 'strongest farmers' remained in the sector and many were caught into a debt trap that further contributed to social differentiation and restructuring in the rural countryside (Nuvoli, 2013; Gerber, 2014).

This concentration of power in the hands of processing companies, as it happens in the upstream markets, is further exacerbated by processing companies increasingly being driven by financial motives and values, what Isakson calls the 'shareholder value'.

Milking money: the financial turn and shareholder value

Processing companies are engaging increasingly in financial tools to maximise their returns and reduce their costs. Parmalat *finanziaria* is a great example of this. But global expansion happens also ‘in-house’ with Sardinian dairy industrialists now investing in Eastern Europe, inter alia in Romanian dairy companies, to source cheaper milk and sell it as Pecorino cheese (non DOP).

As Isakson (2014) argues in his paper, processing companies are majorly driven by what he calls the “shareholder value”. Hence, processing companies are less driven by quality values such as producing healthy food or remunerating fairly the input producers, and are increasingly driven by financial motives to maximize their financial returns with the lowest possible costs. The Italian dairy company Parmalat provides an interesting example that helps to understand the prevalence of ‘shareholder value’ motives that increasingly drive processing companies, and the increasing distance between commodity producers and those who determine the exchange value. As Ploeg (2008) argues Parmalat, before going bankrupt, was not producing any value added but was only centralizing control.

Firstly, this becomes evident by looking at Parmalat’s growth strategy. Parmalat ‘finanziaria’ has created a ‘food giant with feet of clay’ (Ploeg, 2008:91). Essentially, its goal of profit maximization has led the company to expand through debts and mortgaging. As the majority of dairy companies that have grown and expanded globally; Parmalat has expanded (through acquisitions) in more than 30 countries throughout Europe, Latina America and the USA. Its mechanism of expansion followed the template of mortgaging enterprise one in order to buy enterprise two and mortgaging it to buy enterprise three and so on... These companies were therefore bought by incurring debt upon debt. The loans taken to invest in further acquisitions were transformed into commodities and then sold in the stock market. In this way, the risk was moved away from the banks and towards shareholders. Shareholders invested with the expectation that the company would grow and gain higher returns for them. This was only the case until the bubble burst and 2014 Bank of America’s former chief admitted to involvement in a financial fraude. Parmalat’s CEO then sued Deloitte&Touche, City Group and others after the USA creditors started a class action suit against the company (Chalkidou, 2011). What is interesting to note is that Bondi, the CEO appointed to rescue Parmalat from the financial catastrophe was also the minister appointed by the Monti administration¹⁴ as responsible for spending review and sovereign debt.

As Ploeg (2008) argues, Parmalat was concentrating control but not necessarily creating new value. Together with the company’s growing market shares, their debts were increasing as well. Everything stuck together because of the trust shareholders and banks had in future growth.

¹⁴ The Monti cabinet was appointed as a so-called ‘technocratic government’ explicitly selected in order to introduce austerity measures.

With the financialisation of Parmalat's business the company increased its links with banks, politicians, made risky investments, mortgages and got involved in bribery – a trend that became prevalent for many processing companies (Isakson, 2014). The company's principles moved away from producing high quality, genuine milk products. Indeed, before the Parmalat , Parmalat introduced a new product: "Latte Fresco Blu" – Blue Fresh Milk. Made by importing raw milk from Poland to a microfiltration plant in Berlin, it would be later sold in Italy deceptively as "fresh milk" (Van der Ploeg, 2008). A legal loop-hole made it possible to use the words "fresh milk" as a name by adding the adjective "Blue" to it. Van der Ploeg calls this food without a genuine identity as a "lookalike" food.

Parmalat's growth *modus operandi* exemplifies a clear disregard for producing authentic, wholesome, fair products with real added value. Rather than adding value, the company extracted it from both the consumers and the producers, and exploited it in the centre to favour profit maximisation – it "simply takes over (expropriates) and accumulates value produced at the lower level and at the periphery of the system" (van der Ploeg 2008).

Similar cases are also noticeable in the Sardinian case. Even there, processing companies are increasingly moving where easier profit can be made. A similar case is the one of Pinna, a Sardinian company (mentioned in the chain overview) that has bought 75% of LactItalia a dairy processing company based in Timisoara, Romania (Unione Sarda). The Pinna brothers make pecorino cheese in Romania and sell it as 'La Dolce vita' creating direct competition for the Pecorino produced in Sardinia. By using the traditional name Pecorino, Pinna as well as others within Sardinia create what Ploeg (2008) calls 'lookalike'. Podda, another relatively small Sardinian dairy industry was bought (65% of the company) by Granarolo the bigger Italian competitor. This was for Granarolo a strategic move to enter the market of hard cheeses. Many other Sardinian companies merged with bigger Italian ones such as Auricchio and Granarolo (Unione Sarda, 2010).

Chapter 5 Partial delinking and better terms of integration in the chain

Chapter 3 and 4 have provided a relatively detailed analysis of shepherds' context. This has give an understanding of the lack of relative autonomy and capacity, rooted in the negative terms of incorporation into the dairy chain. The different mechanisms both upstream and downstream are leaving shepherds squeezed between two markets where power is increasingly concentrating into fewer hands. The way markets¹⁵ are regulated favour this concentration of power (through liberalization, financialization and all the mechanisms explained above) and the extraction of value from the periphery to the core of food empires (Ploeg, 2008). Then the question that arises is: why does not the MPS strive for partial or total delinking?

In this last chapter, I will argue that the MPS frames its demands as better terms of incorporation in the dairy chain. These demands -when seen as specific to the context analysed throughout the paper- can be understood as the manifestation, in practice, of shepherds' struggle for autonomy.

As argued above, delinking is not an either or question. Autonomy is understood as something that overlaps with, but is not the same as, delinking. Therefore, the fact that the MPS does not frame its struggle in terms of delinking, should not be equated with the movement being against delinking and in favour of subordination to capital forces and in favour of the market as it is regulated now. Rather, the MPS does not have enough relative autonomy and relative capacity to delink from more powerful actors in the dairy chain. Therefore, their demands for better terms of incorporation in the chain should be seen as inherently linked with their autonomy and capacity vis-à-vis capital forces.

Interpretations of contemporary peasant movements that process them through the lens of capitalist modernity and/or view them as a romantic phenomenon may render them historically redundant, even as they collectively reveal the crisis of neoliberalism (cf. Bernstein 2004; Petras 1997; Otero 1999). In arguing that *Vía Campesina* 'does not entail a rejection of modernity, technology and trade accompanied by a romanticized return to an archaic past steeped in rustic traditions [but is based on] ethics and values where culture and social justice count for something and concrete mechanisms are put in place to ensure a future without hunger', Desmarais emphasizes its critique of capitalist modernity through its engagement 'in building different concepts of modernity from their own, alternative and deeply rooted, traditions' (2002, 110). But this alternative modernity [...] is fully engaged with addressing, rather than simply revealing, the crisis of neoliberalism.

(McMichael, 2008:224)

¹⁵ At least those markets in which commodities are formally sold in exchange for money.

In light of McMichael's quote, autonomy is not fixed but is rather lived and shaped through constant struggles that address subordination in context specific settings. Structural constraints as well as institutional settings limit the MPS' agential power and capacity to bring about desired changes. Yet this does not make the MPS a *passive* actor. Rather, within the same settings the MPS creates spaces for manoeuvre and for political action. Shepherds' *capacity* to de-link from powerful actors in the chain is relatively limited. It greatly depends on concrete constraints -ultimately connected to the concentration of power within the chain that I have analysed throughout.

The movement has numerous different demands compiled in a written document which they presented to the regional institutions (included in the annex). I have analysed this document thoroughly before talking to some of the MPS members. The analysis below results from an examination of written demands and their lived experiences which I have tried to examine in relation to shepherds' context –and in conversation with the food sovereignty literature. In order to discuss some of the main demands that I believe are connected with the analysis carried out in the above chapters, I have grouped shepherds' demands in three broad categories: the first one is the reclaim of efficiency and markets' embeddedness¹⁶ in different paradigms, the second one is price and the third one is environment.

Reclaiming efficiency and embedding the market in different paradigms

At the beginning of their official document, the MPS demands warranties on milk prices although within the boundaries of the market functioning and in 'respect of market mechanisms'. This point is telling in two ways. Firstly, it tells that they are not against 'the market' per se. What they claim for is that the market should be regulated differently, not according to paradigms that facilitate profit accumulation and concentration of power. Secondly, the emphasis on the 'respect of the market mechanism' stresses that they do not want excessive state subsidies to keep them alive but they rather want to be considered as economic *efficient* actors.

Subsidies were central during the productionist-protectionist era. These ended up distorting supply and demand mechanisms (creating huge surpluses and dumping) and disincentivising sustainable production. Some shepherds even considered production as secondary since EU subsidies provided almost a stable income (interviewee). But the MPS stresses that they do not want to be 'state's parasites' (interviewee, X). They are asking for more than that, they want the state to consider shepherds as efficient economic actors and as a val-

¹⁶ I am following here Friedmann's (2014) understanding of the Polanyian concept of embeddedness. Her understanding is also in line with Lang and Heasman (2004) call for a new paradigm (ecologically integrated) to guide policy-making, and with Schutter (2014) call for food democracy.

uable productive force, and by doing so, they are recasting the concept of efficiency as a contested one.

Lipton (1993) supports a New Institutional Economics (NIE) perspective, according to which the market does not function perfectly on its own and therefore state intervention is needed when market imperfections prevent economic efficiency from being realised. Moreover, the state should also create social policies and a public safety net for those marginalised from market interactions. The weight placed by the MPS on price warranties and the 'respect to the market' should be seen under this light. On the one hand, they stress the importance of price warranties to attack the extraction of profit by powerful actors. On the other hand, they stress that shepherds that are squeezed by this condition, are not marginalised because 'non-efficient'. They are marginalised precisely because the way the market is regulated facilitates value extraction. Hence, what could at first seem a contradictory statement –'price warranties while respecting the market'– is in fact a very clear critique to the way markets are regulated and to the paradigms they reflect.

The MPS does not want social policies to insure shepherds' smooth transition from small producers to farm or industrial labour. Hence, the MPS demands policy makers to reconsider shepherds as efficient actors (their idea of efficiency include environmental and social sustainability). As it can be noticed in the document they presented to the regional ministry of agriculture, the emphasis is very much on the elaboration of a new rural development plan that consider shepherds as a productive force (page 2 and 3) rather than on increase subsidies only.

Shepherds denounce the negative terms of integration into global commodity chains through policies such as the CAP. The first round of reforms provides a clear example of sectorial developmental policies which incentivised high production to provide food security and cheap food for urban classes (Belo Moreira, 2015). This 'productionist paradigm' (Lang and Heasman, 2004) was of course mirroring the dominant ideologies and priorities of that epoch (Shutter, 2014). As noticed in the previous chapters, trade competition and capitalist development were central in the Cold War context. The environment and the reckless exploitation of natural resources were secondary as it was also secondary the exploitation of labour and small farmers and the submission of agriculture to trade (Shutter, 2014).

Behind the spectre of productivism (Shutter, 2014) there is an idea of efficiency strongly entrenched in the rational individual understood as an investment-prone, profit maximising individual that seeks access to the market (Popkin, 1979). Starting from this assumption, inclusion into global commodity chains results as the most efficient way for the state to foster development (Akram-Lodhi, 2009). To this end, policies aim at creating a market where large agribusinesses concentrate on input provision, transformation and retailing and where the production of primary commodities is left to small farmers. Those who are excluded, dispossessed, not competitive enough should be the target of social policies that ameliorate the externalities of the system without necessarily tackling the causes of it.

By appropriating the word efficiency, policy makers, such as agricultural ministers of the European Union or the Sardinian regional government, they depoliticize the meaning of efficiency by equating the word to profit maximiza-

tion. Especially in the neoliberal period, efficiency is equated to the functioning of free market mechanisms. This allows for the normalization and institutionalisation of norms and regulations that reflect in fact deeply political matters. The market is currently embedded in this understanding of efficiency and this understanding of development.

Yet this understanding of efficiency is not the only one. Peasants are indeed very rational and efficient economic actors (Ploeg, 2013). They strive to increase their autonomy and diversify their income in multiple ways ranging from the creation of cooperatives to multiple jobs to new ways of commercialising their products and so on. Yet profit, is not the main variable of peasants rationality and efficiency. Arguing that they do not take profit into their calculation could also be wrong and problematic, but being driven by profit is certainly another matter. Producing in respecting the land and the environment is very much an important variable of an efficient and rational way of producing. Maintaining social cohesion within the community is also relatively important, not, or not only for community values but also because the community judges and respond to its members' behaviours (Scott, 1976). So, despite this can still be read as a cost and benefit calculation, what constitutes a cost and what constitutes a benefit varies widely across contexts. Popkin's (1979) view of the rational peasant as profit maximising individual which is also reflected in the rationale behind new institutional frameworks is very deterministic.

So, what shepherds reject, is not participation in the market itself and inclusion in the chain. They rather reject the underlying assumptions and principles behind the institutionalised rules and norms that regulate the market. Shepherds' demands can be summarised in a demand for a more democratic dairy chains where power is not concentrated in upstream and downstream markets. Therefore, the central frame that brings shepherds' struggle together is not their demand for delinking but different rules of integration in the market. These new paradigms should treat environmental and social degradation as fundamentally costs, not mere externalities. "[T]hese huge externalities have been borne by the collectivity rather than accounted for in the price of food" (Shutter, 2014:232). Lang and Heasman (2014: 31-32) propose an "ecologically integrated paradigm" in opposition to the old productionist one and the emerging "life sciences integrated paradigm".

Friedmann (2014) and Shutter (2014) stress the importance of democracy and control to be put in the hands of farmers and the collectivity rather than following a doomed-to-fail top-down approach. All these understandings stress the importance of avoiding opposition to the market, commodity chains, and international trade (Burnett and Murphy, 2014) *per se*, as these do not have an intrinsic nature. This of course does not mean that farmers who struggle to have better terms of inclusion (like the MPS) or scholars who stress the importance of nuancing are opposed to the idea of delinking. It rather means that shepherds in the Sardinian context do not have the capacity and autonomy to delink, and for this reason their struggle for autonomy manifest in the negotiation of better terms of integration into commodity chains.

If decontextualized, these demands could be read as 'more subsidies' and 'more money'. But looking at the context, can give a better appreciation of how these demands connect to broader debates.

go deeper than that. Request for more financial resources to be channelled in certain sectors and to support small rather than large farmers should be understood as a demand to create markets that are bioculturally embedded rather than embedded in profit maximization and productionist paradigms (Friedmann, 2014).

Politicizing price within the neoliberal corporate regime

The MPS puts great emphasis on the fact that the price of milk that does not reflect its costs. In response to this, the movement essentially demands fair compensation for their milk.

Within the CAP neoliberal phase milk quotas and subsidised production are gradually being removed. This new CAP phase entails a decoupling of price and costs (McMichael, 2005) whereby risk is privatized (Isakson, 2014). To counter this trend, the MPS demands a round table of discussion to be instituted by the government where all the stakeholders participate to price negotiation in a transparent way. This of course meets the resistance of cheese industrialists that benefit from non-unionised shepherds. Given the strong resistance from industrial capital to set a more stable price on milk, shepherds have partly invested their efforts into demands for diversification.

The majority of the milk is transformed in Pecorino Romano but over-production drives its demand down resulting in lower milk revenues. For cheese industrialists diversifying is not a priority since they are in a position to capture profits and reversing the squeeze onto shepherds when demand is lower. On the other hand, diversification for small farmers is key to maintain a stable source of income. Yet, when shepherds sell their milk to industrialists they do not have the control to determine in what type of cheese the milk is going to be transformed into. For this reason, the MPS had pushed the regional governments to implement a mechanism that could incentivise diversification of cheese production away from Pecorino Romano.

Following this push, and the demand for a more comprehensive rural development plan, the legislation 15/2010 was passed. This legislation was interpreted as both a small victory and as a co-optation by capital forces (within Coldiretti). The legislation called for a financial incentive to be given to each farm that sold its milk on the condition that this was used for any cheese production apart from Pecorino Romano. The fact that a long fight as a result resulted in a law, was a small victory for the MPS. However, there were several amendments that the regional council member for agriculture issued in order to re-adjust this law (Sardegna e Libertà, 2012) so that those infringing it could still benefit from the financial subsidy. The council members knew that Coldiretti was selling its milk to Brunelli, an important buyer in Rome. But since Brunelli was not interested in diversifying production, several shepherds - part of Coldiretti- were not going to benefit from the financial subsidy. Therefore, the law was tweaked in order to include the Coldiretti members in the benefits. Before, one had to demonstrate that the milk was not intended for Pecorino Romano, that it had been turned into milk powder or other destinations (i.e. other types of cheese) (ibid.). After the tweak, it was added to the requirements of the resolution that the incentive was destined to those selling Sardinian milk to markets external to the regional one.

The strong emphasis on price should be interpreted within the broader context of financialization and the distance that it creates (Clapp, 2014). Clapp argues that through the liberalization of financial markets more actors are involved in influencing commodities' final prices. Food is abstracted into complex agricultural derivatives and small farmers have less access to influence the price making mechanisms. "The new forms of distancing, in other words, have expanded the opportunity for powerful agents within commodity chains to shade costs" (Clapp, 2014:806). Finding a direct link between speculation and price spikes is difficult and this is precisely the strength of decentralization in financial markets. This creates more spaces for competing narratives where financialization is often portrayed as a solution rather than a cause to the current crisis. This context makes political contestation very challenging for civil society members. It is difficult for shepherds in Sardinia to point at someone specific as responsible for price spikes. Banks, pension funds, government funds, food and non-food corporations are all involved in speculation. Therefore, their demands focus on price stability in opposition to fluctuation which is the clearest manifestation of the neoliberal-financial phase of the food regime.

Yet, opposition to trade liberalization is also a central point of shepherds' demands. Opposition to dumping mechanisms have taken the form of more overt mobilizations. For example, in 2011 the MPS blocked the Sardinian port in Olbia to stop tracks coming from The Netherlands and Spain with lambs to be sold in Sardinian markets. Financial liberalisation is not the only factor contributing to the separation between prices and costs. Trade liberalization in the second food regime is also partly responsible for the creation of international competition among small farmers and between small farmers and subsidised industrial farms. Gradual liberalization has created a price race to the bottom and dumping of cheap products. This is true for European countries dumping cheap commodities in developing economies as well as for more industrialised European countries dumping in areas where industrialised agriculture was less present. Demanding protection from dumping is a direct response to this.

Shepherds also recognize how subsidies to European producers (including them) have damaged small producers in developing countries. Therefore, they put the emphasis on the fact that subsidies have been largely captured by industrial intensive production that create cheap products by externalising costs on small farmers everywhere and onto the environment. As Floris argues, it is those cheap industrial products that are dumped in other markets, not Sardinian cheese. Since shepherds in Sardinia have long depended (and partly still do) on subsidies, and from the sale in external markets, their position vis-à-vis international trade and protectionist policies certainly deserve further exploration. Yet, the MPS explicitly sides with small farmers abroad, and unequivocally frame its struggle to be against subsidised large industrial farms which are those which trap the greatest amount of subsidies -80% of EU subsidies go to the richest 20% of farmers (farmsubsidies.org; Kay, 2014:14) (interviewee). It is in this challenging context that shepherds demand better terms of incorporation, fairer prices and more access to price decision-making mechanisms.

Environment and the greening of capitalism

"Pastoralism [in Sardinia] is a democratic economy that produces in harmony with the environment and it is for this reason that it should be incentivised".

(Floris, 2001)

As illustrated from the above quote, shepherds' demands are increasingly framed in terms of environmental demands. Pastoralism in Sardinia has been described by anthropologists' as a very extensive rather than intensive method of production, where the knowledge and respect for soils' has generally characterised shepherds' relationship with land and animals (Lannou, 1979; Bandinu, 2006). Shepherds' are considered as the guardians of woods and public lands which they take care of as these provide pasture for their animals (Bandinu, 2006). Sardinia also ranks among the first regions in Europe for animal welfare (REF) given that animals still graze in big pastures. This respect for the environment and sustainable production has recently become a central point for the MPS' struggle for autonomy. The MPS is pushing at the regional and national level for the state to allocate more CAP resources to environmentally sustainable production. This is a strategy This emphasis should be understood within the context of the 'greening' of the CAP and more in general the greening of capitalism.

The European Union (and the world in general) is shifting towards greener, more sustainable policies and investments (Belo Moreira, 2015). This translates in increased incentives for afforestation, diversification and new incentives for sustainable farming (Belo Moreira, 2015: 181). Friedmann (2005) has argued that the current food regime is in a transitory period. The features of this transitory moment are evident in the 'greening of capitalism', or, as she calls it, 'the corporate-environmental food regime'. Leaving aside the important debate on whether a third food regime has emerged or not, it is interesting to note that the green and environmental component of the current restructuring are visible both in the CAP (Belo Moreira) and in the increased attention given to green investments. The greening of the CAP and global investments in general has many problems related to it as Friedmann has discussed. Nevertheless, this same shift has also opened up new spaces for contentious politics (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) that social movements are exploiting by shifting their strategies.

The MPS stresses the damages of GMO feed and inputs in farming. In order to reduce the environmental impacts of GMOs on the environment the MPS stresses the importance of incentivising feed production in Sardinia. Since what is lacking is the general infrastructure to produce feed and forage, the movement emphasises the creation of a favourable structural context. This includes fair access to resources (including land, water and energy), access to credit facilities, and good infrastructures among different nodes of the chain. Therefore, the MPS' demands concentrate more on creating the favourable structural pre-conditions to re-institute the production of feed in Sardinia. Buying inputs from closer producers (geographically speaking) would reduce their costs significantly and increase their autonomy vis-à-vis international, mainly foreign inputs/feed producing, processing and distribution companies to which now they are subordinated.

In order to free up funds that can be invested in the sustainable production of organic, local feeds, environmental subsidies open up a space for manoeuvre that shepherds take advantage of and push for.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

How does the struggle for farmer's autonomy, taken within the broader context of the construction of food sovereignty, occurs in practice? How does this look like against the ideal vision of autonomy and food sovereignty?

The struggle for autonomy, when looked at in practice, is something that can overlap with, but is not necessarily the same as partial or total delinking. This is because it is fundamentally related with farmers' capacity -understood as the ability to carry out specific goals to increase their relative autonomy vis-à-vis capital forces.

Where farmers find opportunities for partial distancing –and when partial distancing will actually result in higher degree of autonomy- then they exploit political opportunities to do so. Where they do not find opportunities for partial delinking –and when this will not result in higher relative autonomy- then they try to negotiate better terms with powerful actors within commodity chains. These negotiations are essential to open up new spaces for engagement. In order to understand the struggle for autonomy in a meaningful analytical way (as opposed to an idea) one needs to explore the specific context and how this changes –within shifting global contexts- because struggles for autonomy are always a manifestation of small farmers' constraints and perceived spaces for manoeuvre.

Given the need to answer this question in practice I used autonomy and capacity (borrowed from Fox's dimension of organizational power) as theoretical lenses. These allowed me to look at demands for autonomy as dynamic and fluid processes rather than static goals. *Capacity*, understood as the ability to carry out a movements' goals was useful to analyse shepherds' specific contexts and to understand their struggle for autonomy as a reflection of specific situations that took everyday struggles as a departing point.

These analytical tools, when used to look at farmers' struggles, can help move beyond binaries and better understand autonomy as always relational rather than being an 'either autonomous' 'or subordinated to market forces'. In this paper, I have looked at the subordination-delinking binary in the context of commodity chains that is often portrayed as an either or situation in the food sovereignty struggles against corporate concentration of power. This partially mounts as a response to Shattuck et al (2015) and their call for frameworks that help to move beyond dichotomies and to appreciate processes.

Moreover, Fradejas et al (2014:433) underline the importance of “contextualising the changing global context [that] food sovereignty increasingly confronts” and to be more explicit about farmers' engagement within the market according to their class position. I have attempted to do that by looking at the changes that financialization has created and how these changes have affected local political economies and shepherds' struggles for autonomy.

When looked within the changing global contexts, shepherds' demands cannot be simplified as 'radical' 'progressive' or reformist'. Their struggle to improve the terms of inclusion in the change range from attempts to politicize neoinstitutional understandings of efficiency and embed markets in different

paradigms, to attempts to reduce the distance between producers of commodities and those who determine commodities' exchange values.

“Understanding the obstacles to and opportunities for convergence and the re-politicisation of the food movement are perhaps the most immediate political challenges facing the food sovereignty agenda in the global North” (Fradejas et al, 2015:437). In order to truly understand spaces for convergence and tensions within this broad alliance, struggles for autonomy must be always understood within specific changing contexts. Starting from the practice (and not from the idea) is very important to appreciate movements' strategies and potential for alliance-building. This is demonstrated by the fact that small farmers often go beyond ideological goals and look for practical opportunities to improve their condition (Burnett and Murphy, 2014).

Moving beyond the idea of food sovereignty and grounding the analysis to the practice of how food sovereignty is constructed, is useful to bring to light nuances of every day struggles and practices. In order to understand the position of actors -which are currently not fully represented by the movement's main pillars- within the struggle for autonomy and food sovereignty should therefore start from the practice rather than the theory.

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Appendix 1

MOVIMENTO "PASTORI SARDI"

Richieste del Movimento Pastori Sardi

Premessa

Il Movimento Pastori Sardi non ha alcuna caratterizzazione politico-partitica e si "muove" esclusivamente nell'interesse dei pastori della Sardegna, andando a colmare il vuoto lasciato dalle organizzazioni di categoria e dalle istituzioni.

Oggi non si contesta il governo regionale di centro-destra, ma il "Sistema" nel suo complesso, che troppo spesso è stato disattento, inefficiente ed inadempiente nei confronti del mondo agro-pastorale e dell'agricoltura in generale.

Così come oggi si critica l'assessore regionale all'agricoltura che, nonostante le sue affermazioni risentite, solo dopo il nostro decisivo intervento ha ritenuto opportuno concretizzare alcune delle nostre richieste, altrettanto abbiamo fatto con l'assessore del governo di centro-sinistra

Abbiamo iniziato una battaglia che sta iniziando a dare i suoi frutti (gli articoli dei giornali sardi, nazionali, europei e gli interventi delle televisioni italiane e straniere dell'ultimo periodo ne sono una dimostrazione), ma che non cesseremo prima di aver ottenuto, pur nel rispetto del mercato, precise garanzie sul prezzo del latte per la prossima campagna lattiero-casearia e sui punti della nostra piattaforma.

Non siamo d'accordo sulla cosiddetta "camera di compensazione" poiché non è chiaro cosa si intende fare. Riversare sulle scuole 40-50 mila quintali di pecorino romano, con le caratteristiche attuali, non sembra un'idea vincente per il futuro.

Sulla base delle ulteriori discussioni avute all'interno del movimento ribadiamo e precisiamo in sintesi la nostra piattaforma sulla quale, da subito, le istituzioni regionali e nazionali potrebbero immediatamente assumere impegni precisi.

Sintesi dei punti della piattaforma immediatamente realizzabili

1) **Aiuto De Minimis 15.000 euro per azienda.**

Su tale provvedimento, che così, come indicato anche dal Presidente della commissione agricoltura del parlamento europeo, Paolo De Castro, è attuabile in tempi ragionevoli, è necessario un impegno preciso delle istituzioni regionali con il reperimento di fondi certi in grado di soddisfare tutte le richieste.

2) **Inserimento dei Comuni cosiddetti avvantaggiati nell'elenco dei comuni svantaggiati, per dare a questi la possibilità di beneficiare dei provvedimenti su menzionati.**

3) **Rimodulazione del P.S.R. (piano di sviluppo rurale) spostando le risorse dall'Asse 1 all'Asse 2. Dagli investimenti produttivi agli interventi delle misure Agro-Ambientali.**

In questo contesto si inserisce il ruolo sociale del *pastore*. È il pastore che è presente nelle campagne, che svolge già oggi il ruolo fondamentale di "presidio" del territorio e che adeguatamente incentivato potrà essere determinante nella tutela del patrimonio ambientale della Sardegna, soprattutto per quanto riguarda gli incendi, ma non solo.

In questo caso le istituzioni regionali, potrebbero dare una risposta in tempi brevissimi.

4) **Ritiro immediato dal mercato delle eccedenze del Pecorino Romano.**

Si chiede l'intervento delle istituzioni, regionali in primis, per il ritiro immediato dal mercato delle eccedenze di Pecorino Romano. La cosiddetta "camera di Compensazione, come già evidenziato, non ci convince e chiediamo, perciò, che il prodotto possa essere dato in beneficenza e, come viene puntualizzato successivamente, si inizi un percorso per individuare mercati alternativi.

L'impegno delle istituzioni regionali per il ritiro del formaggio in eccedenza dal mercato deve però essere affiancato da un impegno preciso degli industriali del latte in merito al prezzo dello stesso per la prossima campagna lattiero casearia. Su questo punto non ci possono essere equivoci o fraintendimenti.

L'assessore ritiene che la produzione di latte ovino, in Sardegna, sia elevata e che bisognerebbe ridurla, noi siamo convinti del contrario. Il latte ovino, oltre ad essere una risorsa di primaria importanza per l'economia della Sardegna, è una goccia nel mare complessivo di latte che si produce in Italia. **Il problema vero è il Pecorino Romano.** Avendo trasformato storicamente, *per convenienza*, la maggior parte del latte in Pecorino Romano ed essendo questa tipologia di formaggio non consumata né in Sardegna, né in Italia, né in Europa, ma quasi esclusivamente in America e solo perché costa poco, è necessario risolvere questo nodo.

Un nodo che, nel breve periodo, gli imprenditori da soli non sono in grado di risolvere.

Noi prospettiamo un'ipotesi da mettere sul tavolo della discussione che, adeguatamente sviluppata, potrebbe avere il vantaggio di essere una soluzione alternativa e forse anche risolutiva:

❖ si potrebbe ipotizzare la costituzione di una struttura mista pubblico-privato, efficiente (non il solito carrozzone), con il ruolo di acquistare direttamente dai pastori il latte ovino (es. 30-40 milioni di litri), ad un prezzo concordato e trasformarlo nei caseifici già esistenti.

Il formaggio prodotto, non Pecorino Romano, ma formaggi alternativi, nell'immediato potrà essere destinato parte in beneficenza ed il resto esclusivamente in nuovi mercati (Cina, India, Medio Oriente, etc.), al fine di non alterare la concorrenza.

I nuovi mercati saranno ricercati da Società di commercializzazione internazionali che solo una struttura di tale tipo potrà essere in grado di pagare.

Gli uffici competenti e gli esperti troveranno le soluzioni tecniche necessarie.

In tempi brevi è però possibile dare una risposta sull'idea progettuale ed iniziare a lavorarci da subito.

Si evidenzia che tale iniziativa è la sola che potrà portare ad una diminuzione delle produzioni di Pecorino Romano, senza diminuire le produzioni di latte (una follia solo pensarla) e senza alterare gli attuali mercati del formaggio ovi-caprino.

È evidente che progressivamente il "pubblico" diminuirà la sua presenza nella società sino a lasciare tutta l'organizzazione in mano ai privati.

- 5) **Impedire a tutti coloro che hanno ricevuto agevolazioni finanziarie per la trasformazione del latte ovi-caprino in prodotti derivati (formaggi, ricotte, panna, etc.) l'utilizzo dei propri impianti per lo stoccaggio e la bonifica del latte ovi-caprino destinato all'esportazione.**

Gli uffici regionali, statali e comunitari potrebbero verificare, in tempi reali, l'effettiva destinazione d'uso degli impianti per i quali hanno ottenuto, a qualsiasi titolo, agevolazioni finanziarie e chiederne la restituzione.

Il Movimento Pastori Sardi non è contro il mercato, ma è per la legalità.

Se un'azienda ha ricevuto agevolazioni finanziarie per una finalità, non può destinarle ad altro, poiché questa è una distorsione del mercato non accettabile e, di conseguenza, le istituzioni hanno il dovere di vigilare con molta attenzione.

In questo contesto è anche opportuno fare altre considerazioni:

- è assurdo, pur nel rispetto del mercato, che i sardi che commercializzano latte nel continente o all'estero facciano la "guerra dei prezzi al ribasso";
- portare il latte fuori dalla Sardegna, anche se a malincuore, porta ad ottenere una remunerazione dello stesso molto più interessante, ma se gli industriali commercializzano il latte a prezzi più bassi, utilizzando impianti finanziati per altre

finalità, determinano un crollo dei prezzi, con tutte le conseguenze facilmente immaginabili.

L'attuale assessore all'agricoltura un anno fa sosteneva l'ipotesi che il latte ovino, in uscita dalla Sardegna, dovesse avere un unico prezzo ed aveva assunto un impegno preciso in merito. Chiediamo che le istituzioni regionali si facciano promotrici di un tavolo operativo per discutere e codificare tale aspetto. La *Moral Suesion* ha dei poteri strabilianti e chi non vuole stare ai patti potrà imparare cosa significa, se le istituzioni regionali ne hanno la volontà. In merito a questo punto la risposta può essere immediata.

- 6) **Finanziare, esclusivamente, ai produttori diretti, la costruzione nel territorio regionale di 5/6 centri di stoccaggio- bonifica-refrigerazione del latte.**

Tale azione, collegata anche a quella precedente, potrà costituire un importante strumento operativo e di forza contrattuale, dando ai Pastori la possibilità di offrire all'occorrenza il latte nell'intero mercato europeo, liberandoli così dal monopolio dei trasformatori locali che da sempre impongono le loro inaccettabili condizioni.

Anche per questo punto la risposta potrà essere immediata.

- 7) **Ripristino immediato, per un periodo limitato di pochi anni, del meccanismo delle restituzioni comunitarie destinate al mercato Americano e Canadese.**

Chiediamo che la Regione Sardegna e lo Stato italiano mettano in campo tutte le loro forze per rendere possibile tale significativo aspetto. È evidente che le difficoltà non sono poche, ma come in altri casi, per situazioni di emergenza e legate a periodi di tempo limitati, una soluzione può essere trovata.

- 8) **Abbattere i costi di trasporto del latte applicando la continuità territoriale già riconosciuta dall'Unione Europea.**

Su questo punto le istituzioni regionali possono dare una risposta immediata.

- 9) **Intervenire finanziariamente per incrementare la coltivazione di foraggiere ed alimenti per uso zootecnico (medicai, sorgo, mais, etc.), condizione indispensabile per ridurre i costi di alimentazione del bestiame.**

Un'azione di tale tipo, oltre a ridurre considerevolmente i costi di produzione del latte, potrà incidere in misura determinante sulla tutela del patrimonio ambientale fungendo, in molti territori, da valido baluardo contro gli incendi.

Le istituzioni regionali potrebbero intervenire, nelle aree irrigue sul costo dell'acqua e/o direttamente sui costi di impianto delle coltivazioni.

10) **Ristrutturazione dei debiti delle aziende nei confronti delle banche.**

I pastori non vogliono la cancellazione dei debiti, ma chiedono di non poter perdere le aziende che sono costate generazioni di faticoso lavoro, diluendo la restituzione dello stesso in 20-30 anni.

L'intervento della Sfors potrebbe essere la soluzione ideale.

Anche in questo caso le istituzioni regionali possono dare una risposta adeguata in tempi ragionevoli.

11) **Realizzazione e ristrutturazione di piccoli mattatoi comunali o zonali e utilizzo mattatoio mobili.**

L'attivazione di mattatoi comunali o zonali o mobili potrà permettere di vendere in proprio le carni e limitare il danno derivato dal monopolio dei commercianti, che hanno di fatto azzerato il vero valore delle carni sarde. Questa operazione richiede, però, molta attenzione e deve assolutamente esserci un'azione coordinata dell'assessorato all'Agricoltura e di quello alla Sanità. Le norme igienico-sanitarie impongono regole molto restrittive, che potrebbero essere rese più agevoli, nel rispetto della salute dei consumatori, con delle deroghe specifiche e mirate. Per i primi anni la regione dovrebbe anche intervenire finanziariamente anche nella gestione di queste strutture.

12) **Moratoria, per almeno due annualità dei contributi previdenziali.**

Tale azione è stata già chiesta ed ottenuta dalla Francia.

13) **Utilizzo delle energie rinnovabili.**

Questa iniziativa ha necessità di essere affrontata con molta attenzione. I conti economici riferiti all'impianto di pannelli fotovoltaici evidenziano, infatti, che l'investimento è conveniente esclusivamente per le aziende che hanno liquidità. L'utilizzo di mutui, anche a tasso agevolato, non determina alcun vantaggio economico, ma solo costi aggiuntivi. Le istituzioni regionali devono, perciò tener conto di questo aspetto ed agire di conseguenza, al fine di dare a tutte le aziende la possibilità di avere energia a costi ridotti per le effettive esigenze aziendali e non solo alle grandi aziende che attuano l'investimento esclusivamente per lucrare.

Un'ipotesi potrebbe essere la costituzione di una società pubblico-privato con il compito di realizzare gli impianti fotovoltaici nelle aziende che ne fanno richiesta, trattenendo i proventi del "conto energia" e contemporaneamente consentirebbe alle aziende di avere l'energia necessaria al fabbisogno aziendale a costo zero.