

Scaled-up Alternative Food Networks in developing countries: a case study of Slow Food International in India



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Abstract

The current trends of intensification and globalisation of the mainstream food system have a negative effect on environmental, economic and social factors, generally considered. Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) have arisen (and are still rising) to oppose these trends and to impede or reverse one or several of the associated side-effects. In order to have a more extended impact, some AFN decided to scale up, having both an international and local dimension.

This research focuses on Slow Food International (SFI) as scaled-up AFN simultaneously operating in both the global North and the global South. Since 1992 SFI has been developing local networks all over the globe, by managing them with a top-down approach. Its actions focus in preserving local food cultures and traditions, by opposing the standard way of production and consumption. Its actions in multiple ways and on multiple levels appear as a promising base.

This research is specifically conducted in India, where SFI has been creating three local chapters. India, with its intense population growth, with bias towards big-scale monocultures and the long traditions in food consumption and production, creates the good justifications for the network to spread. The potential of the network of networks in India has been underlined by the funder SFI himself, Carlo Petrini. This thesis wants to research how the situation on the ground really is.

In order to get an overview of the spread of SFI semi-structured interviews of producers, consumers and leading figures of the organisation were performed. Those interviews were later analysed and compared by using a framework of social practices. The conclusion of the analysis is that, although the main values of SFI fit very well in the Indian context, the organisation doesn't have a strong foothold yet. The top down approach of the two-levelled network is structured in a way that might jeopardise the full development of the network itself. Different approaches on this growth inhibiting factor have been analysed in this thesis and, if concretely applied, they might restructure the focus of the SFI action of expansion in India. Moreover, this can represent a multitude of different side effects in India, where people are looking for alternatives to the conventional way of production and consumption of food.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Intensification of the production and consumption of food

This process of intensification started after World War II, when the slogan "never a hungry winter again" became the justification of the intensification of agricultural practices. This phenomenon has been taking place mainly in the global North, the most touched by the consequences of the war (Donkers, 2014). In the following decades, the system became more and more mechanized, until the one we are facing today (Donkers, 2014). With almost 8 billion people to be fed, intensification of the production of food has become a major tool in order to provide enough food to the masses.

Therefore, the production has been decentralised and the use of pesticides and fertilisers has been increasing by prioritizing the production in quantity terms, with low consideration on the possible side effects (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). Even if the side-effects started to be noticed just after the initial years (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001), nowadays the downsides of the policies adopted after the WWII cannot be ignored anymore. These limits are evident in many dimensions of the food system and even outside of it (Wiskerke, 2009).

As they are multidimensional, the downsides of the post-war agrarian development are intensely influencing the agri-food debate (Wiskerke, 2009). The effects of this condition are tangible and the food, economic and environmental crises are issues that cannot be ignored (Touri, 2016).

1.1.1 Social level

On a social level there is a growing distance (both physical and abstract) between producers and consumers (Donkers, 2014). The geographical distance has turned in a social distance too, in which consumers may just have vague ideas about the origin of their food. People know less about what they are eating and this process may have an impact on their identification with a specific place or country (Pietrykowski, 2004). Another side effect is that there is a general decrease of awareness of and care about food quality: many people prefer to buy cheap and processed food rather than paying attention to sustaining local farmers and local varieties (Donkers, 2014).

This socio-cultural disembedding process is hard to concretely detect (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001), but the end implications become more and more evident. There is an erosion of networking and provisioning activities in communities which is the mirror of a growing dependence on international markets for basic survival and material needs (Shiva, 1991). As a tangible result, there is a general sense of anonymity. Consumers have less perception of who is producing the food and how it is done. One way they access information is by way of third party certification and labels (like organic, Fairtrade...). However, this can be viewed as adding an additional layer of distance between consumer and

producer (Wiskerke, 2009). This disconnection increases the dimension of a general loss of food culture, knowledge and awareness (Donkers, 2014).

As mentioned before, this has an impact on the sense of belonging of people. The sense of place hardly fit in a world in which “capital, goods, people, and ideas travel more easily” (Barca, Mccann, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012) and consequentially the sense of belonging to a place or to a food culture is slowly disappearing (O’Hara & Stagl, 2001). The moral embeddedness is diminishing leaving space to a utilitarian approach which leads the decisions concerning what to buy and where. As stated before, this may lead to growing insecurity and mistrust (O’Hara & Stagl, 2001).

One of the main results of these trends are that places become interchangeable and there are not specific connotations belonging to one single environment compared to others (Wiskerke, 2009). This trend is reinforcing the concept of “placeless food” in opposition to the “place-based”. As the word itself underlines, a place-based food is produced in a specific cultural and natural environment, fundamental in order to obtain a certain kind of product. This is being substituted by a food which can be produced everywhere, maintaining the same organoleptic characteristics (Wiskerke, 2009). The terroir is replaced by a place without connection to the final product (Wiskerke, 2009).

1.1.2 Environmental level

Concerning the natural environment, the choices made in the last decades by governments and large corporations concerning food production and consumption have negatively influenced natural resources and the environment.

It is possible to affirm that one of the biggest negative effect of an intensive way of production and consumption is a general loss of biodiversity (Donkers, 2014, Visser, 1998). The conventional food system implies a massive use of pesticides and fertilisers, which threaten ancient and weak varieties of crops and breeds of animals (Donkers 2014). The partial loss of soil fertility allows just the genetically stronger varieties to grow (Colborn et al., 1996). To grow crops in the most efficient way many genetically modified varieties have been adopted in the last decades (Donkers 2014) even if they have “uncertain long-term effects of irradiated and genetically modified foods” (Colborn et al., 1996).

At the same time, the soil has been impoverished due to the heavy use of these substances. These practices of over-fertilisation are leading to a pollution of land and water, as never before (Colborn et al., 1996). If the fertility of the soil is threatened, the biodiversity of small animals and insects living in the very first layer of the ground will also be. The agricultural intensification is “forcing” the rhythms of nature by setting the cycles and trying to reduce timings (Donkers, 2014). A tangible consequence

is that the quality and the nutritional value of the food are diminishing, and people can taste it. Moreover, what has been destroyed, takes a long time in order to go back to the initial conditions. In other words, this come at the expense of traditional knowledge and cultural (food & social) practices, most of the time linked to local animals and crop varieties (Wiskerke, 2009) and villages, regions and social structured had to start dealing with it (Shiva, 1991).

In addition, greenhouse gas emissions should be mentioned while listing the environmental downsides. The massive use of pesticides and fertilisers lead to a general increase of the GHG (Donkers, 2014). This higher amount of emissions is incremented from the so-called “foot-print” of conventional food (Edwards-Jones, 2010). Final goods are produced by polluting more and they are sent in places far from the original place of production in order to fit the market’s demand. This has as an overall effect an increasing of the total GHG emissions and as a consequence to consider this conventional way of production/consumption harmful for the environment.

1.1.3 Economic level

These two aspects are the mirror of what is happening in the economic sphere, where an oligopolistic power, in which big corporations are leading, forces small-scale farmers to compete with an industrialized system in which they cannot fit (Donkers, 2014).

The priority of global markets is to be efficient in time management and availability of the product, paying less attention to the social aspect of the process (O’Hara & Stagl, 2001). Food is therefore seen as an economic good, which can be traded as any other. This vision implies that food is associate with an economic value more than a social one. Producers and products are mostly associated to the profit they can bring more than their social position. The justifying theory behind this, is the one which considers free trade as the optimal way to approach the food system (Donkers, 2014).

The undeniable aspect of the increasing production is that the amount of food is increasing while the prices are decreasing, but at the same time there are consequences to the intensification of the conventional agriculture (O’Hara & Stagl, 2001). The lower prices are possible because of the increased scale of the production which makes the position of small scale producers controversial. In economic terms, if the industry has been able to (over)produce so much in the last decades, it is mainly because of an increased technological knowledge to apply in every step of the supply chain. This equally means that many small-scale producers struggle to fit in the system and in many cases, they are cut out of it (Holt, 2005). The industrial who sells at low prices, bought for a low price from the producers, which, knowing the market rules, would try to produce by cutting the costs as much as possible (Liberti, 2017). This implies an increased use of fertilisers and pesticides to avoid losses and ensure a constant growth at a cheap price. As a consequence, consumers’ uncertainty about

production and distrust of food started to rise. Since the production is really far from the consumers' reality there is a growing uncertainty in food provisioning. People started to trust brands, labels and certifications (Wiskerke, 2009).

1.1.4 Health-related issues

Moreover, many health problems are connected to the actual food system. The number of obese people and the number of malnourished ones is equalising (Wiskerke, 2009). In particular, the rising number of obese children is critical (Lobstein et al., 2005). As a side effect a lot of money per year is spent in campaigns of prevention and by individuals in order to access adequate cures (Wiskerke, 2009). Scholars affirm that the change of dietary patterns has been contributing a lot in this phenomenon (Wiskerke, 2009).

On the other side, malnutrition is playing an important role too. Cases of micronutrient deficiencies and undernourishment are increasing and, as mentioned before, production is not the only discriminating factor (Wiskerke, 2009). It is also important to mention that a massive spread of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides, may provoke toxic reaction in humans (Donkers, 2014).

1.2 Alternative Food Networks

This situation led to different levels of malcontent among people who disagree, partially or fully, with the food system. As a result, new counter movements are growing to contrast this trend (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). In some cases, they are based on a return to the past, to the know-how of our ancestors with a specific focus on the quality of food (Wiskerke, 2009). In many cases the alternative approach implies that a global way of thinking in problem solving creates vulnerability and unsustainability, while a local-based approach is able to have a more precise and clear perspective, and to provide a more consistent solution (Horlings, 2015). An even more general assumption behind it is that the region has a potential value, able to shape people and things belonging to it (Horlings, 2015).

Most of these counter movements can fall under the definition of "Alternative Food Networks" (from now on referred as AFNs). They represent a way of escaping the visions prospected from an industrialised and intensive production. Goodman (2009) affirms that "*In these networks, it is claimed that the production and consumption of food are spatially, economically more closely tied together.*" In fact, AFNs could be seen as movements with the aim to find a new economic and social space in the agro-food system (Renting 2012).

Because many networks and systems fall under the definition of AFN, several subcategories can be defined. This thesis will be focused on AFNs that “scale up” and become a bigger network of AFNs, acting on different levels of the food system. By scaling up they gain more visibility and power of action. It becomes particularly interesting to investigate the dynamics of this process, especially if the two levels of the network develop in two different parts of the world.

1.3 Slow Food International

There are many networks of networks, the one taken into consideration in the coming pages is the one of Slow Food International (SFI). This organization can be classified as an AFN, because of its strong statement of defending the “good, clean and fair food” in contrast with the fast and cheap way of eating belonging to a more standardized system (Pietrykowski, 2004).

Slow Food seeks to position food as a key constituent in the development and maintenance of community. It seeks to de-center the identification of food with its status as a commodity (Pietrykowski, 2004).

Its position is specifically relevant because it approaches the problems related to the conventional food system in a holistic way. Not only it aims to create a new sense of community, but its goal is to improve the position of food in the life of people, recreating a link with traditions from the past and local varieties. With this way of operating, its action can spread in many directions, aiming to approach the issues of the conventional food system in several ways (Siniscalchi, 2013; Tencati & Zsolnai, 2012). Due to its promising position and its dual (international and local) way of action, SFI can represent a valid alternative to the conventional food system and it can operate in order to overcome the downsides of the current food system, while still providing access to food.

In an interview Carlo Petrini, the founder of the movement affirmed that SFI could be able to feed the Indian population. He focused his attention on local practices that create jobs and on a sustainable growth from which not only local scales can benefit, but also the national economy. According to his words, India is the perfect environment to develop Slow food presidia, but as mentioned before, only two have been created so far: the Dehradun Basmati Rice and the Khasi Mandarin. Quoting Petrini:

India has a large population and, in comparison, it is short of land. That is why Indian people need to exploit their resources in the best possible way. Slow Food believes that the slow trend

could feed the Indian population, since it encourages the local production of food, particularly in ways that also protects local heritages, including knowledge and artisanal skills passed down through generations.

Sustaining local production creates jobs in local communities, helping to benefit not only individual economic security, but also advance regional and national economic growth. India has a great culture and it would be a pity if the new trend of standardizing typical Indian dishes in fast food chains overcomes the real food culture and the biodiversity of Indian products.

Livemint, 5/12/2015

In these few sentences, the potential of the network of network is clearly expressed. If SFI can feed the Indian population in a way contrasting the standard one, it would have a chance of overcoming the downsides of the intensified production, while still reaching the main goal: produce enough food to feed everybody.

1.4 Aim of the thesis

To recapitulate: current trends of intensification of the mainstream food-system, as described above, have a negative impact on both environmental and social factors. Alternative Food Networks have arisen to oppose the changes in the system and focus on one or several of those negative impacts. SFI is a network of networks, a AFN working on different levels (international/global) of the food system. One of its strengths lies in its wide impact on several downsides of the current food system. Combined together, these two factors, its wide approach and its scaled-up structure, the network can have a considerable impact in the food system.

On the other side there is India, the case site of this thesis, with its complexity as country. Because of this complexity and its size, it has to deal with complicated system of food production/consumption. At the same time, it has many traditions and practices to safeguard, especially concerning food consumption.

The aim of this research is to determine how well SFI fits the Indian context.

Understanding how an alternative that seems promising adapt to different circumstances compared to the ones it has been create, can provide inspiring perspectives in the development of AFNs.

As found in the literature, the network has many linking points with India. Working side by side with local structures however has a significant probability of rejection by the local population. It is

interesting to examine the spread and acceptance of an AFN like SFI because it could have a major impact on the evolution of the agricultural system. With this research, I want to show what aspects of SFI connect with the local practices and values and what interferes with this process.

In the coming chapters the thesis will be developed following a path. In chapter 2, a literature review will be provided in order to revise in depth the concepts presented in this first introductory section. By doing this, it will be possible to have a clear picture of what has been analysed by scholars and researchers on the topic of the thesis, in order to provide some background knowledge and spot the gaps in the existing information. Moreover, more details will be provided on the context in which the thesis develops.

The research question will then have a clear and stable structure to lay on and it will be formulated in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 and 5 will be dedicated in presenting the tools used in order to answer the question: the theoretical framework and methods of data collection and analysis. The theoretical framework represents some “special lenses” throughout which see and interpret the data. It can be used as a guidance in developing the interviews as well as presenting the results. On the other side, methods highlight the modalities in which collect and make a selection of the pertinent information.

in chapter 6 results are presented and analysed by following the theoretical framework, while in chapter 7 space will be left for the discussion section.

2 Literature review

The objective of the literature review is to research what has already been written in the literature about the topic. In this case, firstly, a literature analysis has been done in focusing on benefits and limitations of the activity of AFNs. In a second place, a more in-depth overview is provided on SFI and its existence as a network of network. The last part describes the decisions which lead to the India as the chosen field of research.

2.1 What is an AFN

2.1.1 Definition of the concept

As mentioned, Alternative Food Networks are hard to define. Originally, in this description, could fit everything concerning niches of social innovation, based on reciprocal trust and equal relations between producers and consumers (Barbera et al., 2014). Nowadays, some decades after their appearance, these boundaries have been growing bigger and, since many more examples are available, it has become harder to provide a consistent definition (Barbera et al., 2014). They are shaped in contrast to the conventional system of production and consumption and this creates; in other words, this network embraces all the *“newly emerging networks of producers, consumers and other actors that embody alternatives to the more standardized industrial mode of food supply”* (Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003).

2.1.2 Possibilities and gaps of AFNs

Many scholars underline the potential benefits of AFNs, while others focus on their gaps. Presenting these two aspects is necessary in order to understand if the situation is common to all AFNs or is just an aspect occurring in specific cases and situations. It is important to mention that this literature review doesn't aim to present a critical analysis on the efficacy of AFNs, but instead to provide some background information in order to make build consistency around the research question.

2.1.2.1 AFNs – possibilities

In the coming review, mainly the aspects connected to the problematics stated in the introduction, will be taken into account. The reason behind it, concerns the topic of the research itself. It is hard to make a selection of the topics while talking about AFNs, but the characteristic selected are the one that pertains the most the research itself.

There is a growing amount of literature concerning the failures connected to the mainstream food production system and how the AFNs can represent a concrete solution to the problem. As O'Hara and Stagl (2001) state "this alternative, like others that have emerged over the past decade, may provide a vehicle for re-connecting and re-embedding food markets into their physical/spatial, social and ethical context." Their importance lies in that fact that they enrich and complement current concepts of localized food systems by focusing on more politicized forms of food engagement including non-market practices and values. The concept also provides an analytical framework to understand sources of innovation within agro-food systems in contemporary dynamics (Renting, Schermer and Rossi, 2012). The shared features of these networks are most of the times concerning a new spatial and/or social proximity, by giving priority to specific territories, traditions and food cultures. The "placeless" global food, disconnected to the is contrasted by a "place-based" one, which is *embedded* in a specific place (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). The concept of *embeddedness* starts from the idea that social relationship shape economic behaviour and that "most behaviour is closely embedded in networks of interpersonal relations" (Granovetter, 1985 in (M. K. Goodman, 2009).

From the second half on the 90's onwards, a large number of AFNs have emerged all around the world and, as a consequence, people have started to play a more active role in the food production/consumption: producers and consumers have built new relationships between them and the public awareness on this topic has increased. People start to pay more attention to issues like food safety, the healthiness and quality of food and environmental concerns (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). In most of the cases, this consciousness goes beyond food provisioning (Renting, Schermer, & Rossi, 2012). The idea is that, with a closer relationship between producers and consumers, the food production will protect the interests of both groups and also the environment.

It is fundamental to specify that a lot of different connotations exist within AFNs. They can be classified according to their extension: *face-to-face* (with a direct contact between producers and consumers), *spatially proximal* (on a local/regional level) or *spatially extended* (the values of locality belong to the product itself and they are exported outside the region) (Barbera et al., 2014). Moreover, they can also be defined by the focus they have on different topics like preservation of biodiversity, protection of local traditions and varieties of crops, environmental sustainability, democracy in the socio-economic relationship between producers and consumers, the care of specific *terroir*, etc. Generally, these characteristics vary by changing location or context. In general terms, it has been noticed that in the North of Europe AFNs are more associated with a quality standard which is based on a commercial value and sustainability, while in the global south everything is more connected to small

family enterprises and the quality turn is more derived from cultural than from commercial aspects (Barbera et al., 2014).

Although many differences between AFNs are discernible, some general tendencies can be noticed. They are hereby summarised as an alternative to the downsides of the current, conventional food system as described in the literature review.

2.1.2.1.1 Social level

From a social perspective, there is a tendency of going beyond mere economic reasoning and give more relevance to relationships among the actors.

New people from different background are involved in the process of production and consumption of food and as a consequence, social integration can become stronger. There is a general ambition to change what is wrong in the food system and social movements become integrant part of the process. As mentioned above, the spatial and social distances tend to reduce and new spaces for trust start to exist again. Supermarkets turn into local/farmers' markets and brands become certifications which truly certificate the proximity (O'Hara & Stagl, 2001)

2.1.2.1.2 Economic level

Economically speaking AFNs have created a space in the market, or totally new markets, for food producers who were marginalised in the food system (Tregear, 2011). By investigating new forms of production/consumption, the alternative they offer is both in terms of equality and consciousness, but it also allows people to stop financing a system of oligopolies.

A second characteristic claimed for AFNs is their special capability to increase the economic viability for the people involved. Farmers may benefit because the margin of products will increase and they will be involved in alternative activities in which they play a more active role with the consumers (markets, farm shops...)4 (La Trobe, 2001; Pretty, 2001). This can lead to new entrepreneurial opportunities (Morris and Buller, 2003; Bentley et al., 2003) and to the possibility to discover new skills/capabilities (Brown and Miller, 2008; Higgens et al., 2008). On the other side, consumers would have the chance to access to food with a higher quality at a reasonable price (La Trobe, 2001; Little et al., 2009). The benefits, as ultimate effect, can produce new opportunities and new forms of employment, even for actors not directly involved in the agricultural system (Tregear, 2011).

2.1.2.1.3 Environmental level

One of the main claim of AFNs, is their ability to reduce the impact of production/consumption, by using more environmentally friendly approaches (Tregear, 2011). If producers are investigating new

perspective on a sustainable way of production, consumers, by purchasing in a more critical way, have the feeling of having a smaller footprint. Normally, AFNs promote the so called “short food chain”, in which food is produced and consumed within short distances and the concept of “locality” becomes key in the whole production/process/consumption process (Tregear, 2011). Many certifications like PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) regulation are increasing, in particular in areas with a strong food culture (Wiskerke, 2009). The main objective of these labels is the one of creating a special (quality) value of products coming from a specific place and nowhere else. By doing so they strengthen the sense of identity of people living the area (M. K. Goodman, 2009).

2.1.2.2 AFNs – gaps

If it is common to find examples and case studies, it is rare to find studies that present a punctual and complete definition of this phenomenon (Barbera et al., 2014). The notion of AFNs may be controversial. Renting (2009) finds the definition of “alternative” in AFNs unsatisfactory, because it is connected to a way of shaping the concept by opposing it to a mainstream system. What is alternative? In which ways can a network be alternative? What can define the limit between conventional and alternative? Furthermore, without a regulating system, there is no clear boundary and as a matter of fact this connotation can be applied to a social or economic level, as well as to a shift to food with a higher quality and a more specific focus on environmental issues. This way of defining AFNs is based on the binary separation between mainstream and not conventional, which can help in understand the phenomenon, but it reduces the space to develop. It might be the case that there is not such a clear separation and the concept might result foggy. Definitions like “Fairtrade”, “organic”, “local”, can all fit in the definition of “alternative”, but they don’t specifically add consistency to the concept. It can be the channel structure to be different, like in the cases of the short chain approach of box schemes and farmers markets (Renting et al., 2003), or sometimes it can be defined as alternative because of a specific product, generally attributable to a specific place and food culture (Tregear, 2011).

Harris (2009) states that shaping AFNs just as “alternative” to something else, would reduce their chance of developing in a creative way. The idea of AFNs has been developing for almost two decades and what was “alternative” once may not be considered as such anymore (Renting et al., 2012).

Since this way of developing is impossible to trace and map, there is a risk that by trying to escape from the neoliberal system AFNs inevitably become integrant part of it. The local is not as a-political as it seems and it reproduces political subjectivities in which the willingness of consumers is called to decide which product to buy at which price, by stressing different levels of responsibility (Harris, 2009).

It is difficult to know what is neoliberal and what is not, but this dichotomy leads again to the strict binary separation of local and global. As Guthman affirms, *“projects in opposition to neoliberalizations of the food and agricultural sectors seem to produce and reproduce neoliberal forms, spaces of governance, and mentalities* (2008).

A move to a more corporate model, taking distances from the mere focus on capital is in contrast with those tendencies of building big alternative corporations, undermining the original values of the AFNs (Touri, 2016). In this case AFNs will just result in another possible choice for consumers, within the neoliberal market (D. Goodman & Goodman, 2009).

Nowadays there are debates whether to classify as “alternative” phenomena that are considered as “mainstream alternatives” to the conventional way of production and consumption. Jaffee and Howard (2010), in their article, describe the dynamics through which the certifications “Fairtrade” and “organic”, by focusing on respectively concepts of “moral economy” and “turn to quality” (M. K. Goodman, 2009) start to lower their original standards in order to increase their market share and find a secure place within the system.

Another critique posed against AFNs is “the local trap”; “The local trap refers to the tendency of food activists and researchers to assume something inherent about the local scale. The local is assumed to be desirable; it is preferred a priori to larger scales”(Born & Purcell, 2006). In other words, the identification of all the “local” with “good”, in comparison to the “placeless global” (Harris, 2009) which belongs to a more conventional food system. A lot of food activist tend to prefer the local scale, assuming that it is a synonym of sustainability, fairness and better nutrition (Born & Purcell, 2006), but there are a lot of other factors that should be considered before judging an AFN. As AFNs are spread all along the food chain, from production to retail, locality cannot be the only criteria of analysis. A way to do it, could be a previous consideration about the outcomes and the benefits and participants of an AFN. Locality shouldn’t be the only value; the success of an AFN should be measured taking in account several other aspects. Moreover, it is interesting to mention that this sense of locality that adds values to products, started to create an economic value (M. K. Goodman, 2009), in this sense the pureness of an AFN may be put on a second place as compared to the profit coming from the adjective “local”.

As written above, the adjective “alternative” can lead to misunderstanding and confusion. To all the people sustaining AFNs as the only chance humanity has to escape the conventional way of production, there is another category labelling AFNs as part of an élite, buying products at higher

prices. This privileged class is the one having the chance to choose a higher quality product than the one offered by the conventional system (M. K. Goodman, 2009).

2.1.2.3 Conclusion

AFN has been rising as alternatives to the conventional food system and they have been shaping themselves according to that. On one side, this fact has been creating new opportunities in the food system. Under several perspectives, these alternatives have been providing solutions to the downsides of the current food system. On the other, the definition of these network as alternative might interfere with their natural path of development and create confusion among the actor of the food system.

2.1.3 Alternative Food network in the global South

In the introductory part of this thesis, it has been underlined how the recent trend of intensification of food production and consumption could be linked to the growth of the global population. This trend of growth has been more significant in the global South compared to the North. Nevertheless, the literature concerning AFNs as networks contrasting the standard food system, has clearly been focusing more on the European/American conception of them (Abrahams, 2006; Freidberg & Goldstein, 2011) rather than observing it in southern contexts and circumstances.

AFNs in other regions of the world develop by following different paths (Abrahams, 2006) and these paths are determined by the contexts in which these networks are developing. This is the reason why the dynamics in which AFNs are developing in the South can't be referred to a parallel situation in the North. In the global north, as mentioned above, the main driving factor for AFNs to rise, mainly link to an activist effort to (re)create the condition for a just, safe and environmentally friendly production. The same can't be said for the global south in which rurality is still the major physical essence of food production. For economical/social reasons there are still many peasants who grow following the traditional way. The "conventional" food network has been taking place in urban areas, more than rural ones. Quoting Abrahams (6:2006): "*AFN in the south is defined as the entire food supply system that, in part or fully, contests or opposes the dominance of conventional food networks within urban areas of the developing south*". The standard food system in developing countries is developing in different paths and spaces compared to the North of the world and that lead to an even less obvious the meaning of the word "alternative"(Freidberg & Goldstein, 2011).

2.2 Scaled up AFNs as networks of networks

Several authors (e.g. Touri 2016, Hassan 2013, Guthman 2004) affirm that it is advisable that AFNs try to build wider networks in order to have a stronger impact on the food system. It is too early to decide in which measure AFNs will contribute to a consistent change in the global food system, but it is certain that, due to their small dimension, they need an aggregation in order to make a concrete difference (Touri 2016, Guthman 2004, Hassan 2013). An example is the way in which the “Fairtrade” and “organic” labels and certifications were created in order to protect common principles recognized worldwide (Touri 2016). This necessity is not mandatory for AFNs, but it is evident that this would be a relevant chance for AFNs to have a significant effect on the global food system. The valid alternatives they promote have more chance to have a strong political footing if they scale up.

Johnson et al. (2016) affirm that, as a lot of scholars argue, a process of scaling up may lead to a general loss of the main values of the AFNs. The contact between producers-consumers may be broken by the presence of middlemen or/and the willingness to expand can make them compete with the rule of the market which are dictated by the conventional way of production. Nevertheless, there are a lot of reasons why an AFN can decide to scale up. For example, coordination and infrastructure improve, and, as mentioned before, the weight of the AFNs in national negotiations increases. The farmers and farmland have better safeguards and protections (Beckie et al 2012) and in certain cases, an added value can improve the potential of some products.

The process of scaling up can happen following two opposite paths. In the first case, AFNs can scale up by grouping several existing realities under the same “flag”. This phenomenon is commonly defined as “bottom up”. On the other side there is the “top down” approach, where an existing AFN can decide to operate internationally by creating others satellite AFNs in other countries/places. Both the approaches have, as a final result, a multitude of small AFNs coordinated by a bigger one (Duncan & Pascucci, 2016).

Nevertheless, scaling up may present several cultural, logistic, legislative and economic limits. It is not easy to keep growing as an alternative system to find space in the mainstream food system.

2.2.1 Example of SFI as a network of networks

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis is a study is a case-study on Slow Food International, as an example of a network of AFNs, a so called “network of networks”. With its top-down approach, SFI creates small and local networks that fall under an international instance. The tie between networks of different scales may be key to both the preservation of the identity of the local realities and at the same time the reinforcement of coordination, organisation and marketing opportunities.

SFI is an organization founded by the Italian Carlo Petrini in 1986. It started as an opposing movement to the “fast food” movement that was growing in the 90s (and still is), but at the time it developed other goals as well. Nowadays the association is engaged in issues like the promotion of biodiversity, the upholding of traditions and the fairness in the process of food provisioning. SFI collaborates at a grassroots level, with local food producers in order to connect them with a niche market in which they can sell their products. Furthermore, shops, restaurants and famous cooks use Slow Food (SF) products in order to add a special value to the item they sell (Myers, 2013).

The structure of SFI is divided in three levels: international, national and local. A president with the collaboration of an Executive Committee which fix the four-term goals of the organization. On a national level, there are several associations that coordinate the actions in the country and the local representation of SFI is done by Convivia, groups made up with trustees, committee members and regular members (SFI, 2016).

Convivia can been seen as one way SFI uses in order to promote the concepts of good, clean and fair food. They are over 1.500 spread in 150 countries and they count a total of 100.000 members worldwide. These initiatives, are deeply rooted on the ground and most of the time they develop around an activity which emphasize the traditional and historical context of the place in which it is (Seyfang, 2007). Convivia are the part of SF acting to preserve the organisation consolidating the concepts and ideas on local level and at the same time they are part of the organisational structure to the growth of the movement. They are the physical places in which members can be involved and engaged in activities that represent the ideals of the movement. The activity developed in the Convivia, defined as “Taste Education”, focuses on the engagements with local producers and turns and the food they can supply (Pink, 2008).

The work as leader of the Convivium can be paid or can run on voluntary basis. The figure of the leader has the duty to meet strategic outcomes and deadline in order to be aligned with the organisation. “The ideal then, is also about creating an awareness of conflicting temporalities and providing pathways of positive deflection” (Bowers, 2007). Convivia organisers identify producers within their locales who cultivate foods that are endemic to the region; preferably those produced using traditional methods (Bowers, 2007), by doing so, they become promoters of values and organisers of activities related to that (Littaye, 2015). As an end result, Convivia conducts business linked to the movement (Pietrykowski, 2004).

There are a lot of discordant opinions concerning the actual relevance of SFI and, at the same time, its

“alternative” position. A contrast exists between the scholars who identify the organization as the promotor of a production which cares about the preservation of ancient and rare varieties of crops and the ones who underline the existence of marketing and business behind the promotion of these special goods, thereby recreating the exact same system they claim to oppose (Myers, 2013).

On one side, there are academics (Bowers, 2007; Seyfang, 2007; Siniscalchi, 2013) who completely agree in classifying SFI as an AFN, mostly as a network of networks. They argue that SFI is both innovative and traditional, a real and feasible alternative to the socioeconomic paradigm, by going back to the cultural heritage of local communities (Tencati & Zsolnai, 2012). Furthermore, SFI can be seen as a collaborative enterprise, which “care{s} about others and themselves” (Tencati & Zsolnai, 2012). In particular, it is the clear example of how the formation of collaborative enterprises is possible and feasible. Far from being naïve, collaborative enterprises have as a goal the creation of values for all the participant in the network and the success of it is measured with a mutual benefit, not just with an economical growth (Tencati & Zsolnai, 2012).

On the other side some scholars state that, even if the norms and values behind SFI are focusing on biodiversity and preservation of ancient varieties, the organization itself is developed in a neoliberal context, perfectly fitting in the pre-existing system it wants to distinguish itself from. According to Lotti (2010) the progresses that SFI made so far is undeniable but at the same time it is evident that the organization reproduces the structure and techniques from the conventional agricultural system to promote its products (called Presidia) (Myers, 2013). SFI doesn’t completely fit in the definition of “alternative”. By creating strict parameters that need to be followed by producers, SFI “facilitate{s} the commodification of the products”, so they can more easily access to the market (Lotti, 2010). Moreover, the taste is commoditized: SF uses it to save rare and traditional products, but the discriminant of the taste may exclude part of the biodiversity too (Lotti, 2010). The production is focusing on the original values, but the fact is more connected to monetization (Myers, 2013).

It is curious to notice how the Slow Food movement is indeed a very hierarchical organisation, with an international headquarters and regional subgroups, within a very formal and rigid structure (Seyfang, 2007).

The majority of these critiques are addressed to the organisation itself, not to the principles as they were written down by Petrini (Myers, 2013). Petrini, in his several books, presents arguments to support the SFI original cause which is based on “the ability of the people of an area to live on their own resources...first and foremost think of feeding itself” (Petrini 2007, p. 173) and “the interests of self-sufficiency, giving all peoples sovereignty over their own food supplies; people must be able to

produce their own food by themselves" (Petrini 2007, p. 137). These original principles fit completely with the paradigms of gift economy but contrastingly SFI acts in a way that doesn't match the pure values that are expressed; instead of creating an alternative to capitalism and focusing on self-sufficiency, SF is embedding itself in the neoliberal system it is trying to oppose (Myers, 2013).

According to the point of view expressed by the association in its literature, SFI is the only movement able to act at every level of the food chain, from the support and sustainability of the production for small, local communities, to the rise of public awareness and the shape of new connections between producers and consumers (Tencati & Zsolnai, 2012). Moreover, environmental goals are part of the production of each presidium (Siniscalchi, 2013). Every (Slow Food) product specification asks producers to eliminate or reduce chemical treatment, ensure animals' well-being, safeguard local races and native varieties whenever possible and prioritise the use of renewable energies (R.P. 23/11/2010). According to Petrini, Presidia can be interpreted as "the means SF have to transform the movement's philosophy into something concrete" and in this sense Slow Food wants to offer a solution to the "environmental and existential degradation caused by the fast life" (Petrini, 2001). Presidia follows really strict protocols for the production of food. The protocols are the result of many negotiations between the producers and the association and most of the time the production is that small that the "certification" Slow Food (instead of Organic, Fair Trade..) is the only one they can afford (Siniscalchi, 2013).

2.3 India as the research site

In the quote of Carlo Petrini (see introduction) India was reported as an interesting place for SFI to spread. According to his perspective, due to its "*real food culture and the biodiversity of Indian products*", India could be in line with the core values and ideas SFI is preaching and, on the top of it, it could benefit from the network as an alternative to the intensive way of producing and consuming food that is becoming more and more popular in the country.

2.3.1 Agricultural situation

In India, the situation concerning AFNs is slightly different than in western countries. While the public concern and awareness of the damage of an intensive food production starts to interest a considerable amount of people in the western realities, India is facing a more complex situation: the realisation of food security is still threatened, although there is the general hope to increase the production through a neoliberal path (Shiva, 1993). In India, there is a coexistence of inadequate calorie intake caused by

under-nutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and excess of food leading to obesity and overweight problems. These three factors combined are better known as the “triple burdens of malnutrition”(Narayanan, 2015). The challenge of India is not to arrive to food security by producing more, but by widening the access to food to more people (Narayanan, 2015).

The process of agricultural intensification, better known as the Green Revolution, brought the national government to invest massively in the large, industrialized form of agriculture. Productivity has been rising, but only in these terms (Patil, Reidsma, Shah, Purushothaman, & Wolf, 2014). Productivity, even if it can be considered as the only factor which influence the access to food, is key in order to fight food insecurity, especially in a country of more than a billion people like India is (Sarkar, Patil, Hugar, & vanLoon, 2011). Nevertheless, the downsides of the Green Revolution are becoming problematic (Sarkar et al., 2011).

In India, the large majority of the cultivable area is rain-fed and a small amount of fertiliser are used. The majority of the production is done by small-scale farmers who own relatively small field (Makita, 2011). During the years the number of these small-scale farmers has decreased in order to make space for modern, more extensive, agriculture (Sarkar et al., 2011). As a consequence, around a 150.000 farmers committed suicide in the country from 1997 and 2005 (Kumbamu, 2009) due to the impossibility of competing with the conventional production sector. This specific aspect influenced a big number of counter movements which rose in order to challenge the presence of the capitalistic system in the everyday life of Indian people, due to the failure of the democratic state which was exploiting, dominating and repressing (Routledge, 1993, p. 16). Furthermore, a recent engagement of food producers, local activists and religious leaders in South India, to reduce the dependency of farmers on cash crops and chemicals, helped to raise several AFNs, mainly concerning organic agriculture (Touri, 2016).

In addition, agriculture in India started around 4000 years ago. In this long period a huge amount of knowledge and cultural practices have accumulated (Patil et al., 2014). This history of food culture is getting lost in this new trend of production. AFNs could represent the opportunity to start to focus on those values again, by rediscovering or protecting the ancient ways of production and consumption of food, in specific regions, with specific products.

Nevertheless, Touri (2016) confirms that there is a consistent lack of support from the Indian central government for alternatives to the conventional food system. It rather focuses its attention on a more conventional way of food provisioning. At the same time, banks are willing to give loans to big

corporations, producing monocultures, in order to buy chemicals, pesticides and machines. This is due to the fact that small farmers cannot guarantee a fixed income (Touri, 2016). Small farmers face social marginalization due to their low income, they are not progressing because their income doesn't increase exponentially and the society, or other farmers tend to not understand their choices. From the literature, it is understandable that single farmers have difficulties in promoting themselves and their sustainable, higher quality products (Touri, 2016).

2.3.2 Indian food culture

If the agricultural situation provides a background, the main reason behind the decision of focusing on India for the fieldwork comes from its diverse food cultures. This characteristic makes India a perfect ground for SFI to spread. The potential behind the organisation, combined with a strong food culture creates perfect opportunities for AFNs to emerge (Makita, 2011).

India, among other countries, has a very developed food culture (Nandy, 2004). This is based on thousands of years of traditions, which have been moving through generations (Marie-Vivien, 2016). (Nandy, 2004). Food is more than just nutrition; during the centuries, food has been a social and cultural marker in India, it is the mirror of the history and the development of one of the oldest societies in the world (Nandy, 2004). Some specific food and dishes have been and are still connected to special religious practices while others have a symbolic meaning and they are eaten just for specific occasions (Nandy, 2004). After its independence, India has been developing a new pride; the desire to show the many treasures of the long and varied culture. At the same time a spirit to preserve it developed. For this reason, India has created several products with a designated geographical area.

In India, a large biodiversity has been always linked to a vast cultural diversity. The Indian horticulture exists of many varieties of crops that are cultivated in small amounts (Marie-Vivien, 2016). Many of the ancient varieties produced in India are still being actively produced. The effects of globalisation did not influence crop diversity in India as much as it influenced for example Europe. Another aspect that is still present in India is the effect of seasonality and locality on the availability of food (Marie-Vivien, 2016). Nowadays these concepts are more and more associated with the "alternative" way of food production (in Europe) and consumption, while in India they are still a vibrant part of the culture.

3 Research question

SFI was born and has developed in Italy as a countermovement to the mainstream system, the one connected to the fast food way of eating, people have been adopting recently. This is not the case of India, in which the majority of the production/consumption happens on local basis, due to extreme poverty that local people face.

How should then SFI approach a reality which is different from the one it aims to change in Europe? As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this thesis is to understand a network of networks like SFI, acting on two different levels, in two different parts of the world. Can such a system have a concrete impact? It is interesting to investigate whether the network, by keeping its dual structure, is able to function efficiently on both the international and national/local scale. In other words, SFI has an interest in spreading in the global South, and India specifically. If SFI would be able as successful in spreading through India as Petrini stated (see the introduction) a more sustainable way of production could be the result and the traditional and cultural values of the food production and consumption would be preserved.

This research is therefore centred around the following question:

Given SFI's interest in India, what is the potential of the movement in the country?

This is the starting point for the research to develop. In the coming chapter a theoretical framework is presented. This is the “special lens” through which to analyse the data that has been collected. Having a sociological framework allows to create a structured way to analyse the interviews and select the relevant information to answer the research question. The theoretical framework presented in the coming pages has the function of providing a base for the data to develop and, at the same time, it can be used as a justification for the answer and conclusions which will be taken further on.

4 Theoretical framework

The relevance of a conceptual framework lies in its adaptability to the case study and the help it can provide in the analysis process. In order to have a scientifically relevant analysis of the data collected during the fieldwork, a sociological framework is used. By doing this, the answer to the research question will have a clear structure behind it; easy to consult and defend.

In order to have a clear perception on the data, in this thesis the Theory of Practice has been chosen. In the coming chapter a definition of the Theory of Practices is presented, followed by strengths and limitations of it. The last part is for the presentation of the social model and its application to the case study.

4.1 Definition of the concept

The theoretical approach used in this the research relates to theories of practice. It is hard to present the theories of practice as an overarching theory, instead, I would define it as “special lenses” through which to analyse the collected data. Practice theories are included in the bigger category of “cultural theories”, which, by definition, move away from the economic approach of the purpose-oriented theory and the norm-oriented theory personified by the “homo sociologicus” (Reckwitz, 2002). Cultural theories, and consequently practice theories, take in consideration the symbolic structure of knowledge, in other words they study the “routinized behaviour of interconnected elements” (Reckwitz, 2002).

A ‘practice’ (Praktik) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002).

This is not the unique definition of “practice”, the meaning is overall similar, but different authors use different approaches and words to describe it (Schatzki, 2001).

Practices results like a basic unit of analysis in order to understand phenomena. The role of individuals as “practitioners” is shifted. People are not as active as they have been and their role is re-discussed at the point that Nicolini (2012) arrives to define the theory of practices as a “Copernican revolution”. Individuals are taken away from their centre-stage and the become what Reckwitz (2002) defines as “carriers” of social practices (Hargreaves, 2011). Far from explaining all the social phenomena in terms of individual actions, practices go beyond the pure idea that language and discourses can alone explain

all (Nicolini, 2012). On the other hand, it is important to specify how practices are more than simple descriptions of what people do.

Nevertheless, these individuals, described in Luhmann (cited by Reckwitz, 2002) as “agents”, belong to a common social system. The way in which agents process it outside mind and body create differences within social practices. This is the reason why these single activities cannot be labelled as “individual”, while “unique crossings of different mental and bodily routines in one mind/body and the interpretative treatment of this constellation of crossing” (Reckwitz, 2002). The intellectual and rational human mind is in this case shaded by higher social theories (Reckwitz, 2002), but it still play a considerable role in the definition of social practices themselves.

As routinized behaviours, practices will be fundamental in understanding in which terms values from above have changed the local society and, on the other hand, how local traditions impact the everyday activities. It hasn't yet been analysed how much the social practices might influence the participation in a network of network. According to Røpke (2009), society can be interpreted as a result of several social practices which are produced and reproduced across time and space. It is normal for practices to change according to the passing of time, but when new practices arise, a whole process of innovation is required to make agents “integrate elements of meaning, material and competence” (Røpke, 2009). The emergence of a new practice requires a link between existing and new elements, and this is what happened when Indian producers and consumers decided to join an AFN, which was related to his specular international projection.

As mentioned before, this conceptual framework can be considered as the equivalent of some “special lenses”. These lenses provide a deeper vision on reality, they are able to analyse the hidden aspects of decisions and apply them to specific situations.

4.2 Strengths and limitations

A considerable strength of practice theory lies in the chance of escaping the “agent-based individualism of economics” (Whittington, 2006) which would invalidate the result of this thesis. If individuals are considered as such, not as members of a society that shapes their attitude and behaviours, the economic factor will be the only measurable variable in their final decisions. The answer to the RQ cannot be based on this information alone. In the way it is formulated, it implies that the answer focuses on the Indian context, in its different aspects. If just the actions of individuals would have been taken into account the RQ wouldn't be answered in a complete and correct way.

Using the theory of practices, allows to expand these boundaries and analyse the situation on a wider level.

However, if stretched, this might cause a situation in which individuals are no longer considered as influencers of practices, because “performances will always differ between individuals and social groups” (Røpke, 2009). By focusing too much on the context it is possible to treat the individuals like a group of people, without considering their personal agencies, but simply seeing them as the actors of the practices.

Moreover, there is a risk of forgetting about the institutional context, by considering it as “routinised body/knowledge/things-patterns of which discursive practices are components”(Reckwitz, 2002). This, in a situation like the one present in this research, can deviate the right answer to the RQ, by presenting a situation in which the context is not a real picture of the situation. Institutions are there, not as routinized behaviour, but as active players who shape the actual Indian food system and they can't be taken out of the picture.

4.3 Overcome the limitations: Framework of analysis

In order to move beyond all these possible threats, I will analyse my ethnographic data by using what Crivits and Paredis (2013) present as the “Three-tiered framework”. This approach considers social practices as an area between material and functional structures, socio-cultural structures and agency. By shaping this framework to the research, I am able to map the three factors that create social practices in the relationship with SFI as a network of network. This decision will be represented as a presence outside the model that influence the three categories (material and functional structures, socio-cultural structures and agency) and as a result it would change the outcome of this interaction. By doing it, I will be able to move past the possible limitations of the research.

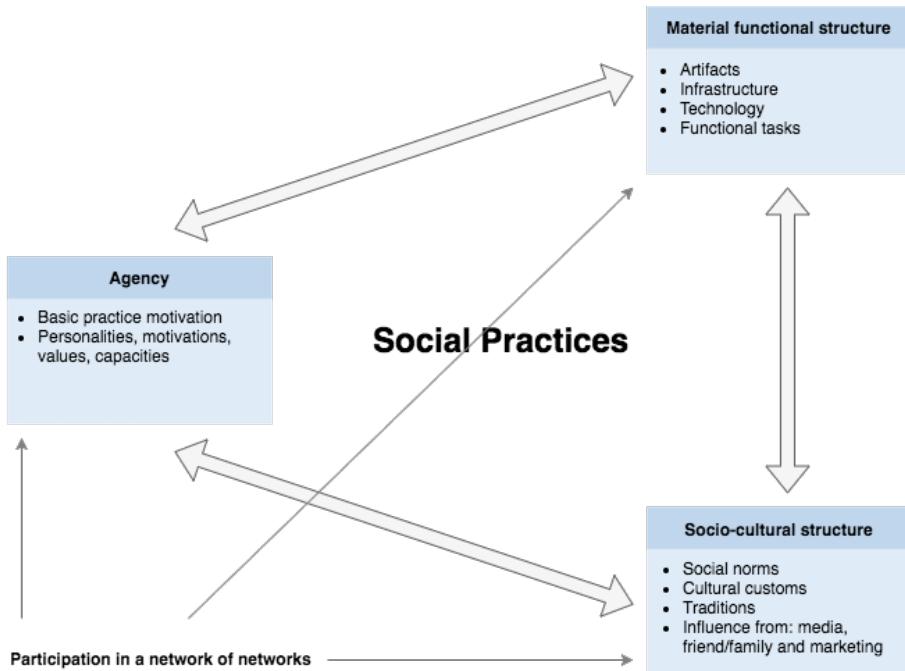


Figure 1: Three-tiered framework, adapted from Crivits and Paredis (2013).

The model has an intuitive structure. By looking at the visualisation, it is evident that Social Practices are the results of the interaction between agency, a socio-cultural structure and a material-functional structure. This implies that both the material (material-functional structure) and the immaterial (socio-cultural structure) are present in the model, with the addition of the individual agency.

The agency implies that the “routinized behaviour”, which defines practices as such, is present in this model as the justifying factor of individuals’ decisions to join the network. This is far from considering individuals as a “social group” and it gives space for personal opinions and explanations. For the material aspect, it is important to say that it includes infrastructure and other artefacts which have an impact on the practices. In the case study a big role is played by the government as an institution and the its decisions on the topic. As mentioned before, in using social practices as a theoretical framework, there might be the risk of not giving enough space to the institutional context, while applying this framework these problems are smoothed out.

5 Methodological approach

5.1 Inventory and preparation

The research has been conducted in three different areas of India, with different cultures, practices and values. The common characteristic of these places is the presence of a SFI Convivium. At the beginning of the research these locations were the only ones with the presence of a Convivium, nowadays a fourth one is developing in the South (Tamil Nadu) and the Chef Alliance is consolidating in Delhi.

The starting point was Delhi and the research continued in Udaipur and Mumbai, in order to develop the analysis in all the three (at the time) Indian Convivia.

This decision has been made in order to create a relevant and complete analysis of the situation of SFI in India. Since it is a relatively small reality, in four months I was able to see all the three Convivia of SFI and to have an idea about their local development. The decision of focusing just on Convivia comes from their reachability and their “local representation of SFI values and principles” (Siniscalchi, 2013). Since my RQ focuses on this topic, a visit to the two Presidia would have resulted both complex in terms of time/feasibility and not particularly relevant.



Figure 1: Map of the three Convivia in India

The total number of active Convivia has been checked on the official SFI website and consequentially a first contact has been done by email with the head of each Convivia. The process of data collection took place where the activities affiliated to the SFI Convivium develop, there producers and consumers of SFI have been interviewed. This context represents the physical essence of the relationship between consumers and producers, the place in which the exchange happens.

I divided the respondents in four categories:

- Local manager of the Convivium
 - Active members of SFI

- Consumers of SFI
- External members – people belonging to SFI, but not directly connected to a Convivium

Table 1: Structure of the data collection

INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED	NUMBER OF INFORMANTS
Head Convivia	3
Members of Slow Food Convivium	11
Consumers Slow Food	11
External members	2
	= 27

The total number of interviews is 27, developed in a period of 4 months. All the interviews conducted are semi-structured, with an interview schedule, but a lot of space for interaction. The template used to develop the interviews, starts with a small introduction of the person and the context in which the respondent came in touch with SFI. This has been necessary to asset whether the person knew about SFI or not, his/her opinion about the network and the role he/she played in it.

In the next steps of the interviews, basing myself on the theoretical framework, I tried to reconnect the answers to at least one of the three structures of the framework of C&P. By doing it, extra attention has been paid in not interfering with the data, no information has been provided if not necessary.

5.2 First research question and the fieldwork in India

The original research question was formulated assuming that SFI was actively working in the field. This assumption was deducted from the literature available, or the lack of it. The research question before the fieldwork was:

How does membership in a network of AFNs influence/impact the values and practices of local AFNs?

An explanatory case study about the presence of Slow Food International in India

Once the fieldwork started, I realized that the situation was far from what I was expecting. SFI in India is barely developed and therefore doesn't influence the local realities. The answer after the data analysis could have been that local practices are not influenced by the presence of a network of network. This happens not because of the low profile of it, but mainly because of its small impact. This made the research question less valid and it seemed necessary to change it.

From this starting assumption, I decided to focus majorly to the potential of the network, not assuming its advanced status of development, like I did on the earlier stage.

5.3 Methods of data collection

Before the fieldwork only four interviews were planned. As mentioned, I was able to find online the contact of the three heads of the Convivia and of the representative of SFI in India on the official website of SFI. Once I arrived in India, in order to make the results more relevant and complete, I interviewed the head of each Convivium. This gave me the chance to both double check my data (at the end of the data collection) and to get access to personal contacts of other participants to the Convivium for my following interviews.

The path followed has been the same in each of the three places. After a first meeting with the head, I kindly ask him/her to provide me other contacts of people belonging to the Convivium, mainly phone numbers. This second round of interviews developed in a period of two/three weeks after the first one, according to the priorities of the respondents. With this information, I was able to build both an idea on the Convivium and on SFI in general as an international organisation. Moreover, it provided me the data in order to answer my research question in a complete and consistent way.

Almost all of the respondents were producers selling their items, while a small part (2) were made of satellite people with other occupation, having a specific sensibility to the topic and deciding to engage in the cause. The interview selection criterion was driven to the relevance/availability of the people, according to the information the head of the Convivium shared. After the first interview, I had a clear idea of the structure of the Convivium and that helped me in making relevant and consistent choices.

The last interview session was dedicated to consumers, people who voluntarily decide to buy food in a different way and from different sources, in this specific case in the activities organized by SFI members: organic sops and farmers' market. I was interested in understanding their reasons behind this decision to have a perception about the concrete possibilities of SFI to approach the Indian reality and to create its own path in the Indian market. I tried to select the consumers by paying attention to age/gender, in order to create a diversified sample of the population.

All the respondents have in common an interest in producing/consuming in an alternative way, not following the path of the standardized food system. Not all of them have the same definition of "alternative", the reasons behind these decisions are several. What is important to mention is the

detachment from the conventional food system, which create new room for alternatives to rise. By interviewing different categories of people the aim was to relate pitfalls and strengths of SFI in the Indian context and, at the same time, to combine them with people practices and traditions.

I did not include in my research people completely outside the SFI network for two main reasons:

1. It would have been hard to find a relevant reason to select them
2. The conversation would have been too vague. Collecting information about the association would have been hard since even among the consumers there are people not aware of SFI, and that would have reduced time and effort for the other (necessary) interviews

The decision of focusing just on people related with SFI to a certain extent was necessary. In this big category I decided to have respondents from both the perspectives: the one of the person from the outside approaching the organisation and a vision from the inside of people who are (sometimes even unofficial) members of it. I thought it would have been important to explore this duality to better understand the current situation of SFI in India and at the same time to explore the direction in which it could develop. the two categories are like two sides of the coins, talking about different aspects of the same topic, while the heads of the Convivia and the external members are the one able to contextualise and create consistency.

As a result, the chosen criteria helped me in have a more complete overview on the spread of SFI in the existing Convivia in India.

The physical place in which the majority of my data have been collected is where the activity connected to the Convivia took place; in Delhi and Mumbai the park where the market was taking place and the organic shop of Udaipur. In all of the cases I went to visit the activity before in order to schedule arranged meetings with the producers without interfering with their selling activities, and to have an idea concerning the time in which I could have had access to more respondents on the side of the producers. I presented myself as a university researcher on Alternative Food Networks in India, in order to avoid the mental association with SFI. It was important for me to make clear to my respondents that I wasn't a promoter of the organisation and that I was not trying to convince people to join it. Ideally that would have allowed people to frankly share their opinion with me. Nevertheless, it is important to mention how several times this distance between me and SFI was not extremely clear to everyone and I had to remark the concept of my independency.

5.4 Methods of data analysis

The data collected have been recorded with a mobile phone with verbal consent from the respondents. The length of the single interviews varies according to the individual and the circumstances. As a tendency consumers didn't spend a lot of time in answering questions, while people related to the organisation took the chance to spread their beliefs and ideas. The 27 complete interviews have been transcribed during the fieldwork, with the addition of field notes for each of the three locations. This gave me the opportunity to work on the data right after the collection, with a "fresh memory" of the interview itself. As a consequent step, the material has been analysed on a sentence level and out of this, 5 main categories have been created.

Table 2: Categories of data collected

CATEGORY	INFORMANTS (n)
Health issues	17
SF doesn't present new concepts → Indian traditions	13
Nothing to give in return → SFI provoke a sense of belonging in its participants	12
Government	12
Western ideas → India is hard to understand → cooperate with cooperatives	7

These categories helped me in understanding the low relevance of the RQ previously formulated and they inspired me in the creation of a new one.

I had to take a step back and start to investigate the Indian "ground" in relation to the association, in order to fully understand how and in which ways SFI developed and which are their limitations and future perspectives.

At the beginning, my literature review presented a gap in the analysis of the situation of SFI in India. Many articles were referring to SFI as an international organisation, some of them are focusing in the situation in Europe and just few are considering the spread of SF concepts in developing countries, like India. In my mind, this lack of information was a consequence of a lack of researches developed in the area, but as soon as I started the fieldwork I realised how much this was connected to a relatively small presence of the network on a national level. This brought me to reconsider my initial hypothesis.

When I started, I was interested in investigating both the general perception people have on SFI and, at the same time, how practices influence their decision to join the network. Of course, when speaking about practices, several aspects of the life of a person are taken into account, maybe even unconscious ones. Structuring the interviews too much would have meant driving the conversation into specific

topics, by leaving on a side the spontaneous ones. This is the reason behind the decision of letting people talk with an open-end, following the discourse where they wanted to take it and I was particularly interested in the ways cultural and social practices penetrate and shape the active participation to the SFI network. Therefore, I asked people to describe their connection with the organisation, but also to focus on their habits and everyday life. As a tendency, people started to speak about what they felt most confident about and it was interesting to notice the direction of the conversation. This allowed me to investigate directions far from my original idea.

English is one of the two official languages in India, but a small amount of people –around 10%– speaks it fluently. There wasn't a big issue in many cases because the majority of the consumers and the SFI members belong to a middle-upper class and that implies a higher education. Just in 2 out of 27 interviews I used a translator in order to access the data. It happened in Udaipur, when I started to interview the consumers coming to the organic shop. Two of them felt in need of a support with the language because they wanted to be able to better express their thoughts. The main problem with having a translator was that I had to choose between a non-professional one with knowledge on the topic or a professional translator with low or nonexistent awareness of the contents of the conversation. In both cases, for economical and practical reasons, I choose the first option. The impression I had was that part of the conversation was deviated from the original path and extra information were added all along. This might lead to an alteration of the original interview.

In one case, the translator belonged to the same category (consumer) of the respondent and he could have added data to the final answer, in order to complete the information required.

In the other interview the translator was a respondent belonging to another group. The translator, in these cases, was the owner of the shop, who participated in one of my interview as the head of the Udaipur Convivium. In this case, I found more pertinent the first part of the answer and in the second part it is easy to recognise whether the information was belonging to the first respondent or to the translator. The translator knew the respondent personally and he felt like adjusting the answer with some extra information on the person itself. Nevertheless, I decided to include the interviews in the database anyhow. By trying to do specific questions requiring a straight forward answer, it was possible to understand the respondent's intention. In order to arrive to a satisfactory and pertinent result, I structured the interviews more than I used to do, on the making. The results are shorter interviews, with less space for interpretation. Clearly this arrangement has been done on the making, but, with the help of the field notes it has been possible to access to the real data in an effective way. Things could have developed differently, but the lack of resources and time didn't allow me to find better solution than using as translators, people from the network.

In the following chapter the data collected will be presented and analysed. This is the outcome of the data analysis done right after the fieldwork. After a work of transcription, classification and analysis of the data, the material will be presented following the social framework of chapter 4 in order to strengthen them.

6 Results and analysis

As described above, social practices are the result of several factors combined together and routinized. In this section, results of the research will be presented according to the different components of the framework as composed by Crivits and Paredis (2013): agency, material-functional structure and socio-cultural structure. In this analysis, not only the social practices of SFI are taken in consideration, but also the ones connected to context and circumstances of India. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, by doing it, it will be possible to overcome one of the major limits of the theory of practices, which is not taking into account the conditions in which social practices develop. In order to provide a consistent answer to the research questions, it is necessary to explore the conditions in which SFI is developing in India and in which terms this can impact its presence and its development there and not only refer to the network as such.

At the end of this section of analysis, a combination of the two social frameworks will be provided to have a full picture and the research question will be answered on the basis of that analysis.

In order to add relevance and consistency to the statements, quotes of the interviews have been included. These parts have as ultimate goal to clarify and implement the concepts presented and guide through the presentation of the result. In most of the cases the interviews can help to get an idea of the feeling of the respondents beside their importance in terms of information provided. Information can be dry and aseptic, while the way of expressing feeling given by copy-pasting extract of interviews can be useful to have a better picture of the context.

6.1 The areas of the data collection

As mentioned in the methodological part, the research has been done in three different urban areas where a SFI Convivium is active: Delhi, Udaipur and Mumbai. These three places have a similarity in the way the Convivium started; a group of activists began to create awareness and link it to some activities (farmers' market in the case of Delhi and Mumbai and in Udaipur an organic shop) and they get in contact with SFI. The whole process in India became more and more connected to SFI because Anandi Soans, an Indian student in the SF University of Bra (IT), started to work for SFI and became the representative of the organization in India. This was the starting point of a relatively recent process of spreading.

Anandi Soans is currently the only person working for SFI in the country and she is in charge of bringing different realities inside the network as part of the organization. Because of bureaucratic issues, this process is rarely as smooth as expected and therefore almost impossible to officialise a new

Convivium. The existing ones are not yet certified as such, so they claim to belong to the organization, although the official label is in fact still missing.

Nevertheless, the respondents, which are part of the movement, really feel like belonging to it, but they do very little in terms of promotion of the movement itself. The majority of the “consumers” weren’t aware of the association of the market or shop with an organization called “Slow Food”. The main reason for them to approach the network is the presence of the product they would like to purchase, not the connection with the network of network.

6.2 Social practices influenced by SFI

To understand what and how social practices are influenced by Slow Food, I make use of Crivits and Paredis framework for social practice. By doing it, I will refer to the categories of Chapter 5, and I will place them in the framework. The result of it will be a description of social practices coming out of the three different structures of the framework.

6.2.1 Agency

In this section, the agency of the respondents will be analysed as part of the phenomena shaping social practices. Agency turned out to have a big impact on the decision to join the network of networks. As showed in the following pages, many factors might impact the active decision of joining the network of networks and many of these depend on the way SFI is promoting itself inside the Indian society. Agency is the most extended section of the analysis because when respondents spoke, the conversation was most of the time connecting with their personal experiences and information.

6.2.1.1 *SFI provoke a sense of belonging in its participants*

Many positive aspects actively influence the will to approach the network of networks. When it comes to agency, a lot of respondent stressed the point that being part of SFI provokes in them a deep sense of belonging, which reinforces them in their daily activities. According to their point of view, the fact of being part of a big network (not just circumscribed to their local reality, but with international roots) creates a feeling of hope. They feel motivated in pursuing their values and ideas because they feel like acting in a bigger frame. They feel connected and supported by knowing that they are not alone in defying the global trends of intensification. That is especially true for the people that went (once or more) to the biennial meeting of SFI in India, the so-called “Terra Madre”. More than tangible benefits it is the sense of community that regenerates the will to go against the conventional way of production/consumption of food in order to improve the current situation.

An example of this can be found through an analysis of Rohit and his activity. He is the owner of the only organic shop of Udaipur and head of the SF Convivium of the city. He started as a farmer, but he soon realised that what was really missing was the link between producers and consumers; reason why he decided to open its shop. At the beginning, he could provide an income just for few farmers of its village, but the activity has been growing during the time and nowadays it is a structured way to access market for over 90 farmers. The Convivium of Udaipur is recent compared to the other two, but very active. What Rohit does is never easy, but by joining the network he has been finding even more motivation and passion.

If we do our work separately and isolated, when a change should be done it will require more time, and we may get disappointed and frustrated, but if you are connected with energies all over the world, people who are like us, who are doing a lot of work, we get energy and motivation.

ROHIT, Udaipur, 26-10-2016

This energy coming from this sense of belonging becomes fundamental, especially when “fighting a battle” as Sneh, a small Delhi-based producer, said. She runs her activity by trying to grow local and seasonal varieties of crop without the help of chemical fertiliser and a lot of manual work. It can be tiring, but she feels motivated in her decision and she loves when new consumers are interested in shifting their eating habits and they chose her products. Nevertheless, the situation in which small-scale (alternative) producers are operating in urban and semi-urban areas of India is not easy and they have to make their own space among the conventional production. Therefore, the idea of being part of “something” helps in having an extra dose of motivation which is necessary in order to pursue their goals. Sneh, in her interview, spent some time in explaining how this feeling help her in her everyday life:

Earlier I was thinking that I was fighting this battle alone, against big corporations, against industries, but after joining SF I realized how many people are fighting this battle, how this movement is so big...It gave more confidence to myself, it gave me courage to stand against this industrialization of food. Now I feel proud of myself, that I am doing something great.

SNEH, Delhi, 25-09-2016

This feeling is shared by people involved in SFI as producers/members while none of the consumers interviewed mentioned it. It is curious to notice that this benefit from joining the organization is, so

far, the only one they can achieve. SFI in India is not powerful (and spread) enough to create other benefits to join the network. In other parts of the world a SFI association might mean more access to market, more power, more income. In India, this phase is not there yet, but the sense of belonging people feel is enough to actively participate to the network. They have connection with people, know-how and a community support, intangible benefits which are enough for many, but not for everyone. This can be seen as a concrete element that interferes with the expansion of the network. In most of the cases, as stated by Kumud Dadlani, the spokesperson of the Convivium of Mumbai, this is the only resource SFI in India:

We are not founders, we just trying to help to connect people. I think that it is something we try to clarify when we become members: we don't give you money, honestly, because we don't have any at the moment and we connect you to other people whom you may benefit from.

KUMUD DADLANI, Mumbai, 22-11-2016

In Delhi, the situation is very similar: it is hard to convince producers to join the group because they will obtain “just” this strong sense of belonging. As all the three spokespersons of the three Convivia said, the question “What do I get in return?” keeps reoccurring while promoting the network. People reason in terms of how much economical value they can have out of an activity more than anything else and they are not tempted by operating for “higher values”.

The activity of small-scale farmers is never too profitable and the best offer has to be taken into account before to take a decision. Accessing the conventional food system is a “relatively easy” option, due to the large investments the government is doing in that direction. In order to join SFI, there is a need of something catching, which can match with already existing values. Himanshu Kapoor, the wife of the spokesperson of the Delhi Convivium and producers in the farmers’ market, tried to express this concept by talking about her personal experience in trying to attract new members:

“What do I benefit if I become a member of SF?” The answer is nothing. Right now, SF is really small, we cannot speak about “giving new market to farmers”. When we will be bigger we could organize markets for them, it will take time, maybe another 5 years to spread. [...] But for a farmer, what does he get? He just what? Do we say to him “we will give you the know-how?” He will say “I have the know-how” and what he will say “I want market, I want quantity, I know how to grow”, but who's going to give him market? He will sell it to a middleman, in which they know the price. That's the problem. HIMANSHU KAPOOR, Delhi, 9-10-2016

It is interesting to notice that all the producers participating in the farmers' market of Delhi associated with SFI, are educated people who decided to dedicate themselves to the promotion of healthier products and a different way of producing/purchasing food. In other words, the income coming from this activity will not be enough to support the whole production. In the Delhi farmer market the producers are the ones setting up the Convivia, while in Udaipur and Mumbai, they have been recruited by the members of the network. In Delhi none of the producers makes a living out of its activity and both producers and consumers come from a social class which is higher than the one of common people. This is in line with one of the major critiques moved to SFI: the organisation is developing within an élite and for the élite, without leaving space for the majority of the people. In the other cases of Mumbai and Udaipur, the producers are just connected to the market, but they are working in order to make their living out of it and not to promote ideas and values. Specifically, they are not related to SFI directly, they have someone who intercede for them. This is the reason why it was harder, as a researcher to create a direct link with them.

Assuming that the aim of SFI as a network of network in India would be the one of acting in a larger scale, it would be limited if the target for the production would just refer to wealthy people. The real potential of the organisation lies in the producers who, for economical or ethical reason, didn't join the standard way of production yet. In other words, for many producers the sense of belonging mentioned in the previous paragraph is enough; it makes them feel protected and strong. In some other cases the priorities are primarily economical and the sense of belonging can be a nice side effect, but it doesn't appear as the main motivational point.

6.2.1.2 SFI is hard to understand because it refers to western concepts

One factor that could promote an actor to join the network, as part of their agency-based practices, might be the presence in SFI of concepts which are far from the local people. Better said, the concepts SFI is preaching can be applied in many parts of the globe, but the way of presenting them SFI uses, may lead to misunderstandings and distances. For example, SFI is using definitions derived from Latin in order to describe entities and internal divisions. Words like *Presidium* and *Convivium* might find a background of knowledge in Italy and in European countries, but are really far from the Indian reality. As a result, people don't find it intuitive and extra time and effort are needed in order to spread the message in a clear way.

The only spokesperson of SFI present in India, Anandi Soans, was addressing the topic with resentment, because she, more than others, found herself in this situation. She is the person in charge of selecting possible activities in India which might be part of the bigger network of SFI. In her recruiting action, she often is in the situation in which she has to convince people of the validity of

joining the network and sometimes she finds it challenging. From her perspective, the terminology plays a big role in it, and specifically in confounding her interlocutors, who might not be perceive the similarity between their activity and what SFI claims.

One, India has been colonized in the past, this whole thing of missionaries coming and converting people has been an issue. And suddenly now an Italian organization with all this Presidia, Convivium words and stuff like that...you need to be careful, people will think that it is a new religion trying to convert everyone. We have to keep in mind that as well, we have to watch out how to talk to people. [...] Even Ark of taste, the name here it doesn't make sense because it is such a Christian name. I have first to tell them the whole story of Noah, and people might understand it, but most of the times they don't. So, we just say "look it's about biodiversity".

ANANDI SOANS, Mumbai, 20-11-2016

It is interesting to notice how she made the association between SFI and a “new religion”, which people are persuaded to follow even if they don’t fully understand it. The controversy of it lies in the fact that people could easily get along with the pillars on which SFI is based, but due to the choice of words and information availability in general they find it hard to relate. This confusion created by the use of western words and concepts makes the message hard to assimilate and it doesn’t create the perfect base for a stable and proficient relation.

Another example of it is provided by Pallavi, former student of the SF university in Bra, Italy. Based in Delhi, she is an active member of the SF chef alliance and she operates in order to create a connection between producers and consumers (in this case chefs of restaurants of Delhi). In this sense, she finds hard to apply some concepts belonging to the network, but far from the Indian way of behaving, to the India society. For instance, she questions the validity of the short-chain approach, in her opinion more a problem than a solution in India.

In India when you live in a regular house, a vegetable women comes with a cart, door to door and she has a selection of seasonal vegetables and all the other stuff that everybody wants to eat. So, you just have to pick the seasonal stuff from her cart. The fact is that I don't want her to go outside the society. Everybody forgets that if in India we say let's shorten the supply chain, a lot of people in between who are making a living, cannot anymore. We are not a country of 2-3 million people, we are over a billion, so you cannot suddenly cut out all these people from the food chain, you have to include them somewhere. So, this all concept that we

learned in Europe about cutting the middleman and go directly to the producers, is not practical for us. PALLAVI, Delhi, 15-11-2016

The approach SFI is adopting in India refers to a way of thinking that belongs to the global North. As seen before (chapter 2), AFNs in the global South develop following different paths. It is hard to link the international and the local (Indian) networks by stressing the same arguments. Having a short food chain and belonging to a Convivium might sound less appealing in India than in Italy and consequentially the network might have difficulties in grow. If SFI uses Western ideas and values to catch the interest of local Indian people, there is the chance of reducing its possibility of expansion.

6.2.1.3 SF doesn't present new concepts

This section might look in contrast with the one above, but as a matter of fact is just the other way to see the situation. If on one side many aspects belonging to SFI are explained with a different property of language, on the other one they are not adding something consistency to the knowledge previously existing. Most of the times, the scepticism of local people comes from the fact that what the promoters of SFI are trying to present to them, is a "western" vision on topics which have been known and applied for long time at a local level. This, instead of creating good conditions for a cooperation between people and the networks tends to tear them apart. They are reasoning on the same level, but, due to a bad communication system it looks more like an imposition from the outside, like a foreign institution coming from far away with the presumption of teaching local people how to act better. Pallavi, in her contacts with producers who might be interested in collaborating with the network, finds herself in facing this problem many times:

When I try to explain SF as a philosophy, they turn and they say: "We know that, we have been doing it for our entire life" and this is exactly what they do. They grow locally, they eat locally, they have all the biodiversity, they do this, so why do they need to align with a foreign body?

PALLAVI, Delhi, 15-11-2016

This might cause feelings of mistrust and consequentially reduce the chance that people will voluntarily decide to join the network. The agency of the people lies in their active decision to be part of an international network and the fact that they don't see an added value in doing it, might interfere with their final choice. Even if these similarities of values and ideas could lead to an extended and favourable collaboration, it is hard to move forward. This, combined with a long history of colonialism, makes the connection really hard to establish. Kumud Dadlani is the head of the Convivia of Mumbai

and in the past 5 years she has been questioning herself about the correct strategy to use in order to expand the network. She shares the values SFI promotes and she clearly sees the link between them and the Indian ground. Nevertheless, she has been encountering difficulties in underling this link without picturing it as redundant in the society, but this is not easy as it might seem:

I think that when it comes to SF as a concept, it is a bit hard to explain it to people of India, because they feel like they have been doing it anyhow, you know...trying to source locally, trying to eat right, healthy, each region is...has its own food system for a reason, so you will get particular ingredients in the north, but not in the south because of environment, seasons and all about it. So, when you explain it to them they don't see why it should come from a western country rather than coming from us because they have been doing this work SF is. So, I think again that in explaining the concept they will miss a bit, but it is a bit tricky, so simplifying as much as possible, get into the Indian context it is very important. KUMUD DADLANI, Mumbai, 22-11-2016

In many cases, like in Rohit's activity, the definition of SFI with all its difficult names and western ways of presenting itself, is skipped in order to propagate just the pure philosophy of it and try to get the best out of the situation. What is happening in Udaipur is that a passage has been removed and they have been trying to underline more the similarities than differences and consequentially the benefits. The base to work with is the same, no matter how it is called and it can be the gluing factor between the two parts. As Rohit explains in his interviews:

Farmers know about this thing, that we are connected to the network, but the "Slow Food" word, they don't. For them Hindi is also a very tough language to speak, they have their local dialect, they don't write, so you understand, they don't know about Slow Food. They know the concept, they philosophy and they know that in the world there are people that believe in the same philosophy who are working on this. ROHIT, Udaipur, 26-10-2016

SFI strength in India lies in the special link between the core values of the organisation and culture and tradition of the country itself. When it comes to build up and reinforce this link, there might be a risk for SFI to interpret the "foreign body that wants to teach us things that we already know". So this similarity, if not approached in a good way, might turn from the strongest linking point to one of the reasons of failure in developing SFI on the ground.

6.2.1.4 *Agency sum-up*

In the cases analysed before, agency plays a very important role in shaping the social practices of SFI. Individuals can actively decide their position not just in terms of joining the network or not, but also according the values it shares and its relevance in the context they are living. By going back to the definition of agency provided in the theoretical framework, it is possible to see that this structure is more focused on the personal decision. This is present in the analysis while talking about the “benefits” individual would have in joining the network and the evaluation done before to take such a decision. The economical factor is very present and the routinized behaviours might be interpreted as the motivations and the personalities of the respondents, willing to go in a direction more than the other.

6.2.2 Material functional structure

The material functional structure wants to approach another aspect of social practices that might be left on a side while making the analysis: the one connected to the infrastructures that shape social practices. As mentioned above, this section takes some distances from the “social” part of social practices and analyses the “fixed” part of it. In this case, by analysing social practices of SFI, it is important to understand the structural way of operating of the network. This concept is strictly connected to the definition “network of networks” itself and refers to the tools and organisational system SFI uses to approach local realities.

6.2.2.1 *Cooperate with cooperatives*

The idea presented in this subchapter is connected to the point described above: the ideas of SFI might seem “westernized” even though it largely advocates the same principles as the Indian culture and traditions. A topic the respondents stressed a lot is that the complexity of these “western” ideas combined with the complexity of Indian reality can’t produce any consistent results. India is big and contains many different realities which are hard to understand for Indian people themselves and even more for a foreign body like SFI.

Anandi refers to the problem by addressing the many different realities existing among India itself. According to her perspective, it is hard to relate to India if you are an Indian citizen, for a foreign body it is even harder, if not impossible. SFI can’t think of applying a blueprint approach in the approval of Convivia and other local structures, because it is necessary to understand these realities first. She explains,

India is just too huge, to complex, too many levels, you know...I mean we are talking about the size of Western Europe, we have 23 official languages, so how many hundreds unofficial? Different dialects, different script you know...it is not just about languages, also practices, then there is the caste system, the socio-economical system, it's crazy. [...] We can always sit here in India, take another model for example of Germany, we cannot adapt to that. If that it is understood a lot can come out of it. But again, this is the problem we face. ANANDI SOANS, Mumbai, 20-11-2016

Due to this multiplicity of realities, the cooperation with local entities becomes necessary to make the ideas pass through and to have a more active impact on the system. As mentioned above, this concept belongs to the definition “network of network”, but according to the data collected, local networks are not working in an efficient enough way. The people managing the Convivia are facing complications in accessing and building trust among the small-scale producers. This has to be at the bottom of a well working system. According to some respondents (4), this could be the only option for SFI to develop a bigger network than at present, a network able to positively respond to the activities and able to understand the reasons and values behind them. As Anandi underlined in her interview, since SFI as an international network is stressing the importance of localities, it needs to be able to approach them in a constructive way, through its local networks.

SF is wide enough, flexible enough...is preaching local, so it has to make sense for the local people. [...] If you want to work in different countries you need to have local workers, because it's impossible to have the cultural sensitivity for each. ANANDI SOANS, Mumbai, 20-11-2016

Anandi, as the only spokesperson of SFI in India felt this issue very strongly, but also other respondents, while talking about SF, considered its difficulties in reaching local realities in an efficient way. There is a big difference between one Indian state and the other and within single states there might be considerable cultural differences too. Therefore, a standardized national approach would be hard to implement in different parts of India. Like Kumud underlines:

India is such a huge country, what works in Delhi doesn't work in Bombay, so we have to reinvent, the mentalities of people are different. [...] But I think that we will better be indirectly working with individuals, working with another organization instead of having our own cooperatives. If we give them this autonomy I think that thing will work better. It took to the

years and years to build their trust and now they are finally able to work together. There is also a language barrier and culture barrier within India. We here in Bombay, the head cannot move around in the South, not speaking the language. I don't think that it will be the most intelligent thing to do from our side. KUMUD DADLANI, Mumbai, 22-11-2016

This is the reason why involving local people is very important in order to proceed into a more effective form of operating inside the organization. Being represented by people in contact with the customs and the geography of a specific place can improve the spreading process of SFI and create stable and more operative conditions. An interesting comment related to this, is connected to the concept of "influence". Gajender, a producer of the Convivia in Delhi, mentioned it explicitly, but it is possible to find it all along other interviews too. According to his point of view, the validity of the local network lies in the fact that people are linked to each other by real contacts,

In India, we need to have more people on the ground. We have to get in contact with organic farmers in different regions. Let's say that tomorrow I will go to Udaipur, for example, and I try to convince people but it's not so easy. But if I know someone from there or close by, who is an organic farmer, pretty much known around the geography in a 100km radius, he will be better in organisation than me. In my geography, I can be an influencer, but outside I cannot be. So, this is one of the approaches that SF India can adopt. GAJENDER, Delhi, 2-10-2016

Probably more than elsewhere the physical connection between people is synonym to trust. SFI, as a network of networks, approach the problem in the right way, but due to the vastity of India, it might not be as effective as planned.

[*6.2.2.2 Material functional structure sum-up*](#)

As presented above, the structures in which SFI operates can make the difference in the effectiveness of the operation of expansion. Local people need to be approached in a way that is familiar to what they know. In other words, it is not just the message that need to be clear and interesting, but also the way of delivering it counts in the final result.

[*6.2.3 Socio-cultural structure*](#)

In the socio-cultural structure, the message of SFI will be taken into account. It is important in defining social practices because it underlines the similarity (or distance) of social and cultural values between

SFI and India. The position of SFI is interpreted in a positive or negative way according to the contents the organisation promotes.

6.2.3.1 SF doesn't present new concepts

As mentioned before, in the part regarding Agency, the concepts promoted by SFI are not something new in the Indian context. This can be said in general terms, since it is possible to frame SFI as a movement that would like to recover the values of the past. In the chapter dedicated to Agency this fact was presented as a possible interference in the development of the network, while here it is important to underline why this similarity creates the basis for the network to spread. Without this connection, the preconditions for SFI to spread would not exist. Even if the way of presenting these principles is not fully understandable for local people for the reasons expressed above, it is important that both the organization and Indian people are swimming in the same sea. This principle came out in several occasions during the data collection and people used to motivate their own participation to the network. Ashish Gupta for example shared his personal point of view basing it on his activity as member of the Delhi Convivium. In his everyday life Ashish collaborates with small producers in the mountains around Delhi in order to provide them extra access to the market in the capital. In his perspective, the distance between SFI and the reality of India is very small, easy to overcome. He states that what SFI is preaching, is already there, no need for changing social and economic structure.

People don't have to change their traditions, they just have to stick to them and be part of the network. What I mean is that currently there are farmers who are changing their crop patterns to suit the market. When they do that they lose their food security. You see, we have few cucumbers here in the market, they look a little weird, they have a strange colour, but this is exactly how cucumbers grew in the mountains. When you talk to farmers you understand the importance of these cucumbers, anything else is available for you in a warm summer except these cucumbers. ASHISH GUPTA, Delhi, 25-09-2016

Again, the connection with the network as such is not there yet, but the similarities of visions are present, and, as a matter of fact, those similarities are the fundamental basis in order to grow bigger. Sunny is sharing the vision presented by Ashish, even if he has a different background. He is member of the young Convivium of Udaipur and he is an active supporter of the SF philosophy. He owns a vegetarian restaurant that bases all its recipes on local varieties of crops, following seasonality and ancient cooking traditions. He sees more and more Indian people interested in his restaurants, not only for his delicious food, but also for the values he offers on a side of it.

People who are not part of the philosophy yet, but they have the SF concept in their mind. There are people who are not too used to fast food and all these things, they are still connected with local food and recipes and they are doing very good things with local foods also. Surendra GANDHARVA, Udaipur, 25-10-2016

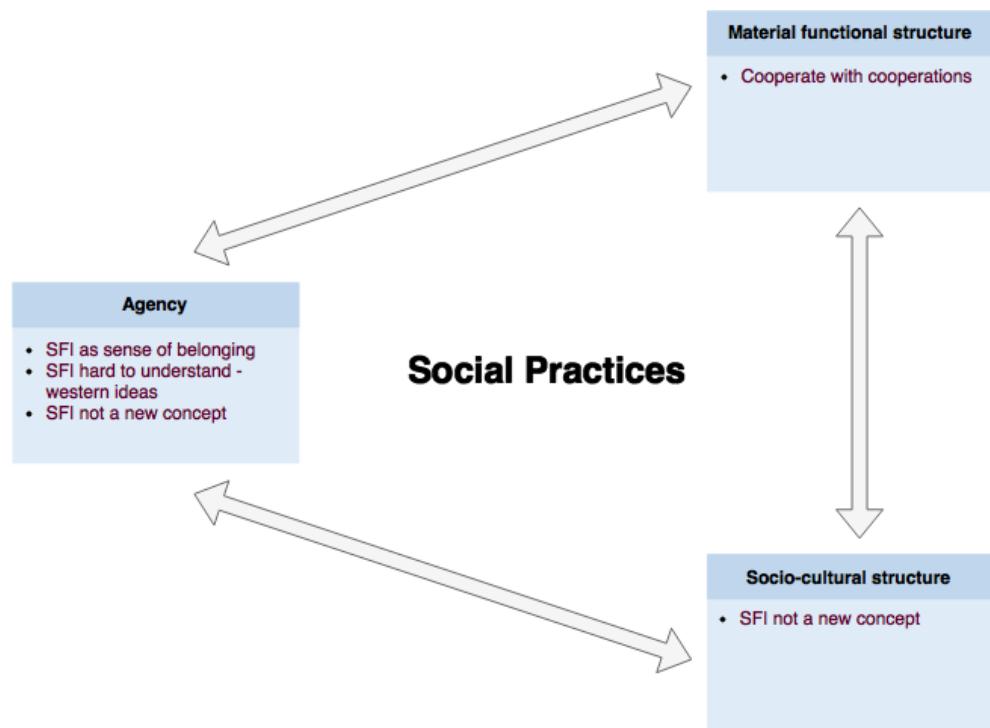
Sunny and Ashish provides examples coming from different contexts and both of them relates with the philosophy of SFI very well. As mentioned, there is already a very good base to operate in India and respondents to make the network grow.

6.2.3.2 *Socio cultural structure sum-up*

The previous paragraph is particularly important in defining social practices of SFI because it underlines the similarities between what the network preaches and values and believes of local people in India. This is the main existing link between the two parts and the reason why SFI has an interest in developing a network in India. It is important to understand that this link is key in the presence of SFI in India and if it is missing there is no space to develop it.

6.2.4 Conclusions

Based on the analysis presented above, it is possible to recreate a modified version of the original framework of Crivits and Paredis.



It is possible to notice that the social practices of SFI present several interesting points that might be used in order to answer to the RQ. The message SFI promotes is in line with many local realities in India. In some of the cases people are already applying it, even without being associated with the international network, just because part of the cultural and traditional background. In order to spread the message in an effective way, the communication between the main network and the localities need to take into account the differences between the different places. Even if two localities might look geographically close, they can present differences, mainly connected to language and cultural barriers.

SFI spreads in ways that not always are perceived as useful or advantageous for local people and as a matter of fact that is strictly related to the chances of spread it has.

6.3 Social practices influenced by context and circumstances

Having a picture of the social practices of SFI is fundamental to answer the RQ in a complete and consistent way. Nevertheless, it is equally important to fully understand also the social practices connected to the context and circumstances. SFI is not developing in an aseptic and plain place in which every of its measures will lead to direct adaptation. To make a better prevision on the aspects that facilitate or interfere with the presence of the network in India, the same framework of above is applied now to the country itself, as it is without the presence of the international network. This framework refers mainly to the context which is around SFI, without being influenced by SFI directly. This means that all the data collected refers to general circumstances in which the international network is somehow present, but in this section a selection of the information related to the situation in India has been done.

6.3.1 Agency

As seen before, agency connects to individuals and their active decisions. This section analyses the reasons why people feel some personal motivation in approaching a different context (of which SFI is part) than the conventional one. These circumstances have relevance because by knowing them, it is possible to better shape a way of acting which might lead to better results.

6.3.1.1 *Health issues*

In this context, the main argument for people to join the network (mainly as consumers) has been concerning health issues. Almost the majority (10) of the respondents addressing this topic, stressed the point that in recent times many concerns about new diseases and pathologies have been rising.

Part of them are conductible to food and the quality of it. The adjective “healthy” combined with the word “food” has been occurring many times as a motivation (in most of the cases the main one) to join the network. According to the respondents in the more developed areas of the country, people tend to get sick more easily compared to places in which an “old” way of production and consumption is still adopted. In Udaipur, the interviews to consumers have been mainly done in Rohit’s shop, to people coming there to buy their groceries, while in Delhi and Mumbai the data collection happened on the farmers’ markets. These people have made an active choice already in deciding to go, and in many cases, they felt happy in having the opportunity of explaining themselves. As stated above, the major concern is connected to health-related problems:

You have people who are more aware and you have people who are suffering more of some disease, this is the reason why they become more aware of chemical free food...in smaller places you have less diseases and, let me tell you, they are by default using no chemicals.

PRODUCER, Delhi, 25-9-2016

This happens for two main reasons: the presence of different diets than the traditional Indian one and the recent trend of intensification of agricultural practices. A combination of these two factors leads to a condition in which health is not as given as it used to be and it is necessary to pay more attention to the quality/source of food. One of the strongest interviews I have been collecting on the topic, belong to a consumer of Rohit’s shop in Udaipur. In his point of view, nothing should be put before health, the ultimate value for him.

Nowadays they are putting a lot of chemicals in the crops. This is the main reason of these diseases. I think that health is wealth, health is platinum, health is gold for me. Health is everything for me. In order to preserve me and my family, organic food is a necessity for us. This is why I am here. This is why I like to purchase here only. CONSUMERS BANYAN ROOTS, Udaipur, 8-11-2016

In several cases the respondents weren’t aware of all the other characteristics of the SFI organization and they were in contact with it just because of this reason.

6.3.1.2 Agency sum-up

Agency in actively deciding of stepping out of the standard way of consumption/production for a lot of respondents means stepping out from an unhealthy way of living and eating. Many of them believe

in the validity of a seasonal, local sourced food as a source of healthy nutrients for the family. They have been facing the increased number of diseases and pathologies connected to eating habits and they are exploring new paths to overcome them.

6.3.2 Material functional structure

In the section above the material-functional structure was referring to the way of operating of SFI, in this section the institutional context is taken into account. The governmental actions of the past decades (see chapter 2) had a considerable impact on the actual circumstances. This structure creates the limits of action in which it is possible for SFI to operate.

6.3.2.1 *Government*

The Indian government plays a role in the material-functional structure as the major institution that can shape social practices in the processing of joining the network. There have been few cases in which one of the respondents was referring to the government with a positive attitude. In contrast, most of the data collected on this topic is about respondents blaming the way of ruling of the past decades from the Green Revolution onwards. What people affirm is that this booming of production has caused several problems on a socio-economical and personal level.

The two main “faults” of the Indian government are strictly linked to the process of the Green Revolution, in which a general intensification of agricultural practices is promoted. Consequentially, India started to follow a path of increasing production with an extensive use of chemicals, pesticides and fertilizers. The respondents claim that all these expenses to intensify the production led to a lack of money for any other kind of agricultural activity and nothing has been done to preserve the traditional and original structures. This process makes it difficult to take a step into an alternative way of production (and consumption). The producers interviewed have been expressing all their concerns and resentment for the situation in which they daily act. It is hard in taking a decision to step out of the system, and when you are outside it is hard to keep the path straight. As a Delhi based producer told me:

You have no subsidies on seeds. You have high subsidies on chemical fertilizers. You have no market support for people. We are making the market here, we pay the rent for the place. There is no infrastructure support. We have to give part of our profits to pay the rent. So maybe they can work on a policy level. The government should promote it, should promote food with

less fertilizer, they should give more and more benefit to people that are doing that, more and more benefits to farmers. PRODUCER, Delhi, 25-9-2016

Gajender, the previously mention dairy producer, relates this issue with one of the main justification behind the Green Revolution: the ultimate goal of feeding the masses. It is hard to deny the potential of an intensive agricultural production, but what Gajender underlines, is the lack of space that remains after it. There are limited chances for alternatives to the main system to expand.

Even from the government perspective, you may see that this year, they sponsor fertilizer to increase the production. So the focus is to feed the billion people, and to do that you cannot go slow, at least from a governmental point of view. GAJENDER, Delhi, 2-10-2016

With this lack of cooperation people tend to lose their initial motivation in pursuing alternative values. In order to considerably change things, it is necessary to find a meeting point with the governmental procedures, and, according to several respondents SFI could be the best organization to intermediate between the two parts. As Gajender explained:

They (SFI) can convince the government to come down on certain things. Maybe they can help to make some policies. GAJENDER, Delhi, 2-10-2016

This dialogue can be seen as a possible tool to overcome the limits a situation like this is producing, but at the same time it implies that some mutual interest in it already exists. According to the data collected, the chances to open some spaces for alternatives are very limited if the request come from the people, but there is a vague hope that a foreign organisation like SF could have a bigger impact. The only official spokesperson of SFI I met, Anandi Soans, didn't seem to agree with this vision of collaboration. In her perspective, the Indian governmental system is too complicated to approach because of its complex hierarchy.

Our governmental system is crazy, on every level you see the municipality, and of course there is corruption all through, but they have the money, they have heaps of money, but to be able to deal with them you need to be someone who is capable if you are not you will be behind at some point. From the government, we are keeping distance until we know what is going on, also the current government has been anti NGOs. It's extremely complicated and there are so

many hundreds of levels even in the government, from the village to the chief minister. ANANDI SOANS, Mumbai, 20-11-2016

6.3.2.2 Material functional structure sum-up

The situation the government has been shaping in the last years has led to a current intensification of the agricultural activity, a system in which is relatively appealing to get into, because of the intense system of subsidies, and hard to step out from. Many producers claim their right to access the market as their competitors do, but due to the implementation of the latest governmental lines, this objective is hard to reach. SFI could represent the right interlocutor in order to approach the issue on a governmental level, but the governmental system of India is very hierachic and complicated to confront.

The way of acting of the government clearly creates some difficulties for the network to expand, but on the other hand it provides the preconditions for a large consent among the disappointed population.

6.3.3 Socio-cultural structure

The Indian socio-cultural structure might result hard to summarise in few lines. This section has the aim of approaching the values that belongs to India, but are not strictly related to what SFI promotes. There are aspects of Indian traditions, that are interesting rooted in society and claim a version of reality that is really similar to the one promoted by SFI. In this specific case, a focus on Ayurveda medicine and healing power of food is necessary in order to relate health issues with the context.

6.3.3.1 Health issues

If above health concerns have been mentioned as (one of) the main factors leading to the decision of people to approach an organization like SFI, in this context I refer to the socio-cultural circumstances which concern health which have been shaping social practices during the years. It is curious to underline how, some (5) respondents made a connection between ideas and principles promoted by SFI and more ancient habits, like Ayurveda medicine connected to the Indian food culture. According to Sanjay Maheshwari, Ayurveda doctor and member of SF Udaipur: "*Our traditional recipes are much healthier than anything else, Ayurveda medicine also says that local food and local medicines are best for your body*" (Udaipur, 3-11-2016). Traditionally, the use of specific food in specific times of the year had a curative function. A lot of the Ayurveda healing system is based on curative plants and food and tends to give an additional value to them. This is clearly recognizable in all the ancient Indian recipes, some of them still present in the diet of Indians nowadays. Manish Jain, member of the Udaipur

network, in his interviews describes the cultural dichotomy existing between food and health and reasoning why these two concepts, which traditionally used to be strictly connected, have been drifting apart in the recent times.

Interesting thing about food in India was that traditionally needed to be good for the health, food was seen as a way to...all our spices are medicinal basically, it was from the food already that you could get benefit. Turmeric and thing that were part of your life already, well designed in that way. Right now, in this model food and health are so far apart, they actually should overlap quite a bit. MANISH JAIN, Udaipur, 7-11-2016

In his cultural centre Manish does his best in order to keep traditions alive and his approach focuses on concrete social aspects that are rooted in the Indian society. According to him this connection with ancient uses and costumes refers also to tradition and not just active knowledge of people. In India, a lot of festivities are connected with food and specific recipes for specific occasions. In many cases people don't connect traditions and habits to a specific meaning and they just understand their cultural or for that matter nutritional value. Himanashu Kapoor, in her interview, spent time in explaining me her studies on these traditions and the results of them. According to her, the socio-cultural system of India has a lot of connections with a healthy way of living:

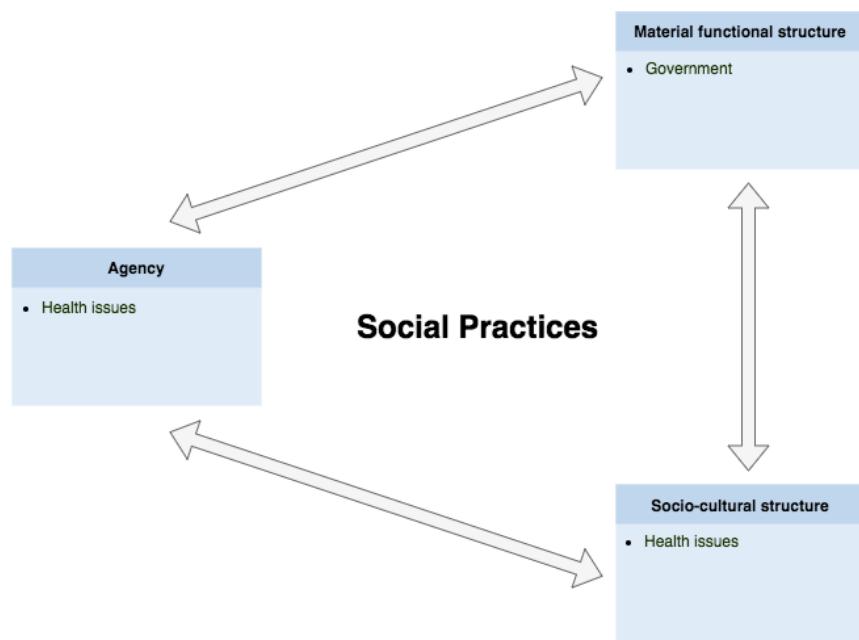
Another interesting thing is this: in India, we have festivals. In every festival is associated with a specific dish, what you eat, as God's food what is given to you and every time it is a different thing. I started understanding, I started breaking it down to the last ingredient and looking for the nutritional value of it. Why do we eat this at this particular time? And the answer was there. Like if during monsoons we have this festival and we eat something with dry coriander powder. Why? Because in that moment the level of bacteria is high and this brings down the bacteria in the body. That is why it was created as God's food. Everything has an answer. Whatever tradition has an answer, if you look at it from a nutritional point of view. HIMANSHU KAPOOR, Delhi, 9-10-2016

6.3.3.2 *Socio cultural structure sum-up*

In the Ayurveda medicine, an old but still dominant medical model, there was a clear link with health and healing power of the food itself. This combination has been passed on through the years and it is rooted in many festivities and celebrations, even connected to religion. The cultural background of India leaves space to this combination to exist and be applied in real life circumstances.

6.3.4 Conclusions

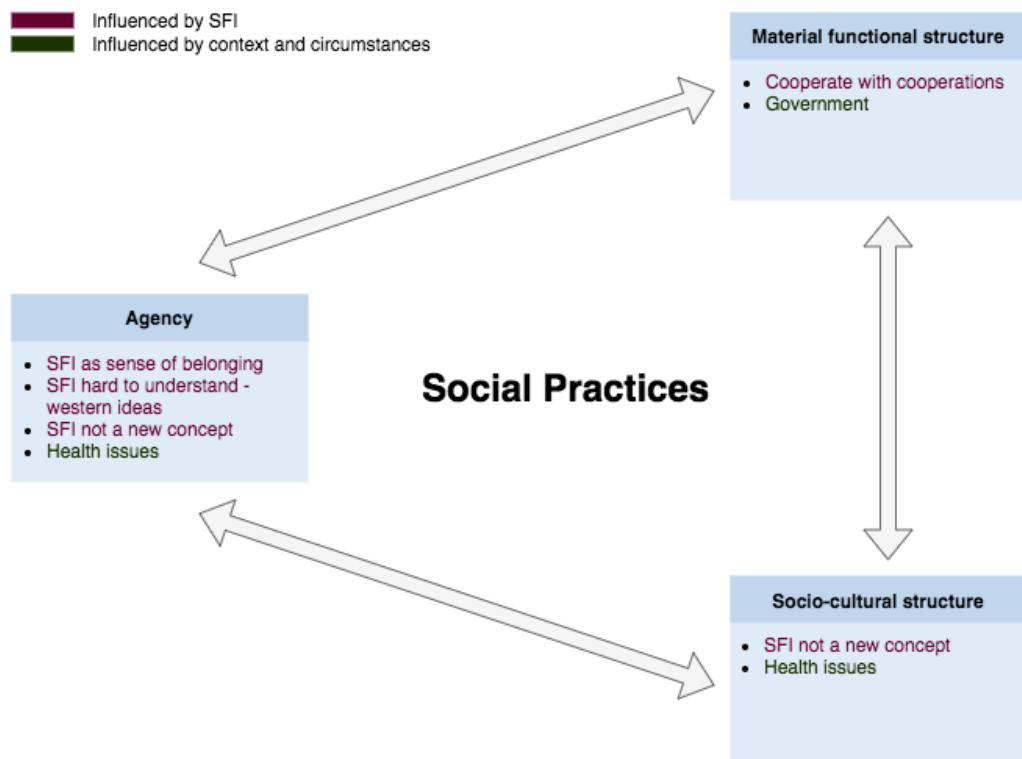
As it is possible to see from the paragraphs above, context and circumstances in India go in divergent directions. The governmental action is creating frictions with the sociocultural background and these discrepancies lead to a general sense of mistrust. People feel the fear in approaching consumption in the sense it is promoted and they reconsider their position by looking at some alternatives to that.



From the framework above it is possible to evince a clear idea of the social practices of context and circumstances.

6.4 Conclusion

At the end of this section of analysis, several conclusions can be made. In order to do it in a more consistent way, a combined version of the two frameworks of above has been created. This framework aims to combine together social practices of both SFI and context and circumstances. A clear picture appears and with this complete analysis it is possible to proceed in answering to the RQ.



First, the sociocultural background of India creates a direct link with the topic SFI approaches, as assumed in the Literature review (chapter 2). Many of the arguments SFI present to defend its thesis, are present in the traditional way of thinking of Indian people and have been shaping the Indian food system during the centuries. People have the know-how SFI promotes, they have knowledge on local varieties of crops, they are surrounded by a culture strongly based on food and traditional recipes handed down through the years. Specifically, the Ayurveda medicines plays an important role in justifying the presence of a network which support the access to “good, clean and fair food”, due to its principles claiming healing properties connected to the food itself.

Second, these preconditions are opposed by the trend the central government has been following since the Green Revolution started. The decision of subsidizing the intensive growers more than the small and traditional one, creates a sense of abandonment in all the small-scale producers who cannot fit and access the system. SFI can play a role in that by filling the gap, but in order to reach local people it is necessary to take into account single realities and situations. India, in its diversity, can't accept a one-cut solution and every situation needs to be analysed carefully before to be approached. In this sense, the local networks need to be able to approach localities by finding a good balance between their internationality and the links they have with the local ground.

Third, these two aspects are the basis of individuals' decisions and personal motivations concerning the network. Again, there are discrepancies among this category too. If to certain extents, there is an important will of looking for an organisation able to catalyse both the traditional precepts and the feelings of distrust for the new assets in the food system; this hope is frightened by the possibility of an opposition from the outside, done by a foreign body, not able to relate with the local people.

All these aspects combined together provide a frame for social practices belonging to both SFI and the Indian context and circumstances.

In the following chapter, these findings will be discussed in order to answer the Research Question. This will be accompanied by a reflection on the role of the major actors who played a role in the development of the situation.

7 Discussion

This analysis above has as its ultimate goal the one of answering to the research question.

The literature review had the task of presenting the potential of AFNs and the scaled-up version of them. In the data analysis, it is clear the way this potential is connected to the context and circumstances of a developing country like India. The aim of the research, as settled at the end of chapter 1, is to understand whether SFI, acting as a network of network as a potential of expansion in India, in order to improve the current situation of alternatives to the industrialised food system.

In this chapter I will link the literature review with the results, in order to create a concrete basis for the answer to the research question. First of all, I will recapitulate the positive and the difficult aspects of the presence of SFI in India and after I will proceed in determine the situation more in relation with the research question. This last phase will imply a reconnection with the concept of AFN and network of networks, especially developed in two different part of the globe.

7.1 What works and why

One of the main starting hypotheses of this research was that India could have been the perfect place for an organization like SFI to develop. The reasons for this statement are better explained in chapter 1 and 2, but the core idea is that what SFI is claiming can find a lot of space in India. This hypothesis has been confirmed all along the data analysis and discussion. There are many aspects of the presence of SFI in India that might recreate the perfect conditions for the organization to develop. This happens because there are many important beliefs of SFI that are already adopted in the traditional Indian food system.

On a social level, SF ideology matches with the one of some people trying to produce/consume in an alternative way, there is a lot of room for it to spread because there are factors which more and more people are brought to (re)consider their approach to the food they eat.

As mentioned above, the concern of people is about health problems and that is the major driving agent in this process. Many people decide to approach an alternative to the conventional way of production and consumption and in this sense SFI can represent a concrete and structured organization to follow.

Additionally, many references to healthy food and locality find a space in the traditional Indian perception on food. There are many occasions in which sticking to cultural habits is following the same

path of what the organization promotes and represents. The positive aspect in acting in contact with rural areas (where the producers come from) is that not all rural areas have yet been affected by the general intensification of agriculture. In order to implement the ideas and principles SFI is preaching, the most important thing is trying to keep things as they are, in their original context.

Moreover, the international structure of the organization spreads a general sense of trust and belonging to the majority of the participant. This is something that SFI has been able to develop by organizing, among the other things, international meetings (once every two years) in order to bring experiences and people together. This phenomenon has a very significant impact on small-scale producers, who find themselves surrounded by people from all over the world facing similar troubles and happiness. One of the major strengths of SFI lies in its ability of grouping people under the same flag of values, letting them feel as a part of a bigger picture. By doing this, it is able to impassion local members and create commitment.

This point is what creates the force of the organization in places, like India, in which it is hard to offer other things to the participants of the network. By acting on an international level, it is even more accentuated and it is an aspect which should be used more, since it can create tangible positive effects.

7.2 What doesn't work and why

Even if ideas and values of the organization can find their space in India, by having a look at the data above, it is evident that there are several limits and barriers to the full development of SFI in India. As seen, many of them belong to the way of operating of the organization itself, others are more related to the way of perceiving it of the local people who should become part of it.

The major inhibiting factor to the growth of the organization to actually happen is the lack of connection between the local network and the potential participants.

On a first level, that happens because there is a weak communication between the international networks and the local chapters. This can be observed in two major dynamics. Firstly, by introducing terminology that is hard to understand for the people in India, SFI creates a barrier that is hard to overcome. Secondly, the lack of promotion of the network among consumers, in almost all the cases, consumers weren't aware of the existence of SFI in the Convivia they were joining. They went there in order to buy local products, to support small-scale farmers, to preserve traditions and habits, but not in the name of the bigger network. This is due to the fact that the name of SFI still doesn't have a meaning for many people in India, like it does have in Italy and Europe and it can't add something

consistent to the activity itself. The possibility of grouping under the same “flag” could be appealing in terms of visibility and access to market, but for the moment SFI has not enough power in India to accomplish the same things.

As a result, SFI hardly have a strong connection with local people and this reduces its power of action considerably. As seen in the paragraph above, the prerequisites are numerous, but the link is missing. The situation becomes even more complicated considering that the central government, in the past decades, adopted a line of intensification of food production that leaves barely any space for alternatives to develop. The respondents mention this problem by referring to the economical side of it. Small-scale producers are most of the time discouraged to act in an alternative way (which in the majority of the situations corresponds to the traditional one), because it is more convenient to stick to the governmental guidelines.

7.3 The presence of SFI as a network of AFN in India

SFI has been described as a network of AFNs, with all the implication of the definition. In this case as it appears both from the data and the literature, not only SFI is an alternative, but it is an organization grouping alternatives. As seen in the literature review, this concept can be applied with a top down approach, like SFI is doing in India. The definition of top down doesn't per se imply a control from the top, but by analysing the literature and the data collected it is clear that the system is strict and doesn't leave much space to freely develop. *"These Convivia are referred to as "grassroots" and "autonomous" in various documents but in practice they are legitimized and formalized by SFI."* (Duncan & Pascucci, 2016). In this case, this strict structure doesn't facilitate the approach with localities and it doesn't create space to move in a more “local” way. A downside of AFNs present in the literature (chapter 2) was concerning the lack of creativity in shaping their position and just acting against the standardised system. It is possible to notice how this can apply to this case too. More than in single network, if this factor is combined with a top down approach like the one of a network of networks, this assumption can be considered as true. Local AFNs in India, are static and not able to develop in an independent way.

It is noticeable that the situation in India needs to rearrange in order to create the conditions for SFI to fully develop. The potential of the organisation has been underlined in several occasions, as its limits in achieving its major objectives.

As mentioned, the fact of SFI acting on two different levels (globally and locally) in two different contexts (global North and global South), creates a lot potential for the network to have a considerable impact in the food system, by empowering ideas and values. In this case the first network is the international organization of SFI, with headquarters in Italy but active in a global environment. It works on the promotion of the ideas and values of the organizations, by organizing and managing events worldwide. The second network is here represented by the counterpart of SF in India, a new born reality which is starting to create its own path in the implementations of the SF values into actions. Nevertheless, if not used correctly, this dual structure might lead to some complications. As seen in the data presented above, there are several positive aspects concerning the presence of the network in India, as well as controversial issues linked to that.

As it is at the moment, the presence of the network of networks in India, seems to lean toward the more International side of the network, rather than the local one. The way of acting SFI is adopting with its top down approach leaves spaces for limits to arise instead of links to strengthen. Petrini, in his interview, justifies his assumptions, linking them to the cultural and traditional background of the country, but this approach to localities is not yet visible in the action the Convivia. In order to function in an efficient way a network of network should to benefit from both its position, without focusing more on one side than the other.

On one side, the position of SFI is to certain extents creating some barriers for the local networks to fully arise. SFI is using the same structure to develop realities far from the original one and as a result the overall message is not perceived by the counterpart. As many respondents underlined, there are aspects belonging to SFI that are hardly understood by the locals. Concepts like “to shorten the food chain”, “the Ark of Taste”, “the local Convivia” don’t find any space in the local way of thinking. People living in the urban areas of India, are looking for alternatives to the conventional food system, but they have difficulties in feeling committed to the SF cause, because they don’t fully understand what it is about. The way SFI is adopting in approaching the Indian reality is more pertinent in Western context and circumstances rather than there. As a result, this blueprint approach hardly matches with the desire of reinforce local cultures and traditions SFI preaches.

On the other side, the local members of SF Convivia in India could have an impact on the development of the organisation too. In several cases respondents mentioned the fact that the “influence” a single person can have, has geographical boundaries which are hard to overcome. They have small power in creating the correct institutional environment for the network to spread, but they can do a lot in terms of helping the network in increasing the number of participants. The local members of SFI have the

benefit (most of them) of having a similar cultural background, if compared to the European one. People operating for the local network could create interest in the activities they are promoting through the network and at the same time spread the concept of SFI among the people. Their role can be fundamental; if SFI adapt its strategies of expansion they need local people on the ground in order to make their plans effective, which is the principle at the bottom of the concept of “network of networks”.

With the perspective of building a strong network all over the country, able to have an impact at the local level, SFI could try to have a constructive dialogue with the institutions. This could happen with local authorities as well as with the central government. The position of SFI would not just represent an organisation coming from Europe, but it will include the voices and the perspectives of the participants directly inside the system and this will strengthen the network itself.

Developing this structure of networks in India, will facilitate the overall development of the organisation, while keeping local identities and having a consistent impact on the Indian food system.

As a last remark, it is important to underline the fact that this paragraph do not focus on logistic issues belonging to the organization itself, rather it aims to analyse the aspects SFI should work on in India, in order to build a stronger network. This clarification is important because in many occasions respondents were mentioning that a lack of money is at the bottom of many structural deficiencies and that a lot more could be done with a bigger flow of finances going to India from the headquarters of the organization in Italy. For evident reasons, this aspect requires a deeper analysis than the one that can be provided in these circumstances

7.4 Strengths and limitations of the analysis

The path followed in the data presentation focuses more on the relevance of the topics mentioned by the respondents. This provides a clear overview on the most touched topics and, at the same time, on the most sensitive topics that people wanted to share. On the other side, the data analysis really pertains the situation as such, and it is presented in a way that leads to the answer of the RQ. The aim is to provide an overview on the situation and a way to answer to it while analysing the data collected.

Of course, a selection has been done in what to consider as part of the framework and what to leave outside of it. This factor might create a limit when it comes to understand the problematics involved.

the framework gives structure, but at the same time it makes a selection of what to involve and what to leave out of the analysis. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, these limits have been reduced by using the framework of C&P, although several things can be added to that. First of all, by dividing the analysis in what is good and what is not good, a black & white picture comes out. This doesn't leave space to, for instance, what is halfway or simply what can be classified as good/bad but it simply exists. Examples of that could be international agreements and policies that are not taken into account. Furthermore, not all the aspects presented in the original model of C&P have been addressed by the respondents. This might lead to a wrong definition of social practices influenced by the presence of SFI. For instance, the role of technology is not taken into account. The selection done takes the most touched topics into account, but it can't provide a full perspective of all the minor ones.

Another possible limitation of this study lies in the fact that SFI has been developing in India for a very short period (5 years) and part of its absence can be connected to that. It was hard to understand if the organisation could have expanded more in a longer period or if this approach will not lead to a wider presence of SFI in India. The Convivia approached were still trying to settle in a permanent and stable way. It is probable that, after this early phase they would be able to invest more in promoting the network both among producers and consumers. The Convivia, at the time of the data collection, were focused in promoting the activities/values of the organisation, instead of trying to spread awareness concerning SFI as a network. As Carlisle (2015), says:

"Good food itself may not change the world; but the embedding and socializing processes it initiates at small scales create openings to both hopeful political geographies and materially effective economic geographies."

Therefore, part of the apparent downsides of SFI in India might be coming from its young presence in the country and not just because of the elements presented above.

By trying to overcome this possible limitation, I tried to focus more on the general attitude of the respondents instead of on concrete actions already done

8 Conclusions

At the end of this research many valuable considerations can be done on networks of networks. As seen in the discussion, the most important finding of the research focusses on the necessity of finding a cooperations between the two levels of the network of network, in order to be able to take an advantage from it in stepping against the standard food system. In the literature review and further on in the discussion it is possible to notice how, if a network of networks is developed in two different places and circumstances, the priority of finding a balanced meeting point is even stronger.

With these elements, it is possible to move back to the RQ in Chapter 3 and answer to it:

Given SFI's interest in India, what is the potential of the movement in the country?

SFI, as was hypothesized by Petrini, has a large common base of practices and values with the Indian people. India has a rich food culture with many traditions and taste is (still) a staple for the Indian population. Indian people, especially the one that are aware of the arising problems around them connected to food, find in the association a possible answer to eat healthier, save biodiversity including old crop varieties and maintain a contact with the producers.

However, SFI seems not able to spread their beliefs in a consistent and convincing enough way and the growth of the network of AFNs is hampered.

By applying the same blueprint for the setup of the network of AFNs in the Indian context creates more barriers than it is helpful. Since the organisation is not very extended at the moment, most benefits of the participation to a network of networks, as in comparison with Italy as the base of SFI, are not present yet. Two main problems that arise with the approach of SFI in establishing itself in India; the top down approach as adopted by SFI creates several misunderstandings and incomprehension (especially the terminology of SFI creates a large barrier for the Indian people). Another problem that is created by the top down approach is the inherent resistance of the Indian people to outside "forces" that try to impose their views and practices on them. Even though the main principles of SFI are already present in India, the fact that it seems to be imposed from outside creates a barrier in the spread of SFI. Therefore, SFI is not able to reach the local realities in earnest and can't reinforce their economical position in order to convince them to group together under the flag of Slow Food International.

A balanced relation between the international network and the local one, will help saving the local biodiversity including ancient crops and preserve the traditions concerning producing and consuming and in the process, extend the niche market of SFI products and thereby increase their economic security.

The ideas that SFI promotes meet the ones of local people. The preservation of food habits and culture would lead to a reconnection with locality. In this sense, the sense of belonging of people will expand and people would recuperate the connection they have been losing with the territory. In the case of India, to achieve this goal is necessary to create awareness about the value of the work that is already being done in order to preserve the efforts in a time in which the mainstream agriculture keeps intensifying. It can't be possible without a deep approach to single places and this can't happen if the organisation is not rooted on the ground.

This research can be applied in many circumstances in which there is a network of network operating with a top down approach in context and circumstances far from the ones it has been settled in. SFI is just an example of it, but the importance of having an efficient way of communicating with local people is key in order to build something on site. I would expect that similar researches on this topic would analyse further in which terms this communication should happen and which are the most effective approaches to have an impact locally. For example, it is possible that a similar phenomenon happens just if the international network and the local one are in two different countries, or continents. It may occur if the local members belong to a higher/lower social class, if there is another political system, if the landscape is considerably different and so on. By spreading future research in this direction, it will be possible to combine the positive perspectives of a network of network, by reducing failures and improve efficiency.

In conclusion, it is important to underline the relevance of the presence of AFNs in order to contrast the trend of intensification of the actual food system. Their activity is key, they are able to operate on different direction and provide solutions. Scaled-up AFNs could be the ones with more power of action, but if they are not able to use this potential in their favour, this is a factor that can turn against them. By showing more connection to the ground in which an impact is desirable, they can link all the elements together and that can allow them to implement the changes necessary to pursue their objectives. SFI is in the perfect position to have an impact, its values and principles are shared by most. By adopting its way of action, it could be the one spreading considerably and have a bigger impact on the food system.

9 Reflection

During the initial literature review I had the idea that SFI was a developed organisation in India. The research questions were formulated accordingly and the first reviews were done with that notion in mind. When I realised that, in fact, SFI is very new in the Indian context and is not (yet) very extended I had to change my approach and reformulate the RQ. Everything that I had planned shifted with this change and therefore I missed some information in the interviews (and final analysis) that would have been available if I would have known about the active presence of SFI in India.

Besides that, the development of this thesis required a lot of patience from the beginning. Having access to information in India is not easy due to the expanded time of reaction Indian people have compared to the one in Europe.

I overall enjoyed the process. Being in India for such a long period has been necessary in order to start to see the phenomenon analysed in this research, with a better perspective. The way Indian people communicate is not similar to the one I am used to. When it comes to interviews, being able to discern what is part of the cultural background of a person and what is purely pertaining the interview itself, is important. My time spent in the country helped me throughout the process of shaping this ability.

The main reasons behind my decisions of undertaking this path to explore AFNs, lies in my passion for food and its local and sustainable production. I truly believe in the validity of the majority of the concepts presented in the SFI manifestos and I share with the organisation the hope they can be applied on a larger scale, all over the globe. I am strongly convinced that some concrete actions need to be taken in order to deal with the actual food system. During my research, I have been meeting many inspiring personalities, who are concretely doing something in order to change the situation. This fact worked as a motivating factor for investigating and trying to understand the aspects of friction with the bigger network. At a first glance, all the elements to come up with a profitable expansion of SFI in India were present and it took me time and interviews to understand the current situation.

Related to this, I really liked the method chosen to collect the data. Semi-structured Interviews have been a good tool in order to better understand the feeling of people, hidden behind the words. What I mean with this sentence is that, in many cases, I had the feeling that respondents were answering my questions with more formality than needed. This is might be due to the fact that for them I was associated with the topic of my research more than I effectively was. I had to explain many times that

I wasn't working for SFI, neither for the local Convivium, and I just was there to collect data for a research.

This "formality" can be done by paying extra attention to analysing the way of presenting concepts, the pauses, the hesitations and so on. I am not a linguistic and I am far from using techniques belonging to that field in the analysis of the data in my thesis, but I am convinced that an important part of using interviews as a method of data collection lies in that.

I could deduce it in two specific cases and for some mirroring reasons. The first one concerns the happiness of people part of the SFI network, the sense of belonging they have been developing since they started to be associated with it. The second is the resentment and the distrust about the dynamics going on in India as at a global level in terms of conventional way of production and consumption of food.

In both cases I have found interesting the power of expression and this is the main reason which drove me in the selection of extracts in the results presentation.

One of the main difficulties in writing this thesis has been building coherency all along the paper. I decided to use the framework as a reference point all along the thesis analysis and presentation. By doing it I knew the path to follow. Although it has been very helpful, everything could have been decided on that and some decisions required more time than others. I found the process of placing the different categories in the framework one of the hardest parts. The final decision has been to place them in where their presence was fundamental and in the case of a repetition to make a clear distinction from one section to the others. Let's take as an example "Health issues"; I decided to fit it under "Agency" because a lot of respondents have been addressing their fear of the growing number of diseases connected to heating habits in the country; at the same time, it needs to belong to the "socio-cultural" section too due to the importance of the health-food relation in Indian traditions.

Recreating a story throughout the thesis has been the next step. I have been analysing many times the path I wanted to follow in order to arrive to the conclusions. I wanted to make clear how approaching local realities is key in order to make an impact against the food system. Many respondents have been making me feel passionate with their stories of hope. They believe that a better world is possible and they are working hard in order to create it. SFI could really well be the opportunity they are looking for in order to improve their conditions and, at the same time, to help

others. It has been frustrating to see how little is the step to take in order to make these things happening and how many impediments that step has.

With my research, I wanted to provide a sense of hope, the same that my respondents have been providing me throughout the data collection process. I wanted to celebrate the diversity of the crop they are growing, the food they are eating.

10 References

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