

Mimetic quality

Quality conventions and organizational levers in the agro-food chains

Filippo Barbera, Joselle Dagnes and Roberto Di Monaco

University of Torino, Italy

Keywords

Convention theory, agro-food sector, alternative food networks, hybrid organizations, worlds of quality

Introduction

Quality-attributes differ on the ease with which they can be unpacked by consumers (Nelson 1970; Tirole 1988). Search attributes can be verified at the time of the transaction (e.g. the color of a wine); experience attributes can be assessed only after the transaction has taken place (e.g. the taste of a wine); credence attributes cannot be verified and are based on consumers' trust (e.g. whether wine is produced from organic grapes). Credence goods are key drivers for quality-based markets, where intangible dimensions of quality play a crucial role (Beckert and Aspers 2011). In such markets, consumers follow *quality signals* and rely on *judgment devices* as actual supports for their purchasing choices (Karpik 2010).

Credence goods strongly matter in the so-called “alternative food networks” (AFNs). These are a wide-ranging body of practices related to food provisioning which differ from the mainstream food systems (Murdoch, Marsden and Banks 2000). The term AFNs is commonly used for grassroots experiments in re-organising the agro-food practices, in accordance with some ethical and moral principles (Honkanen, Verplanken and Olsen

2006). For instance, participants in AFNs may be concerned about the environmental sustainability of the supply chain, or about sustainable living in rural communities, and aiming to help local farmers to protect their profit margins against the aggressive pricing policies carried out by the supermarket retailers. The underlying idea is that consumption is a socio-political act: by eating differently, consumers can change the food market and the living conditions of all those who are involved (Micheletti 20..; Sassatelli 20..). In addition, AFNs aim to provide agro-food goods with high standards of safety, health benefits and organoleptic quality (Onozaka, Gretchen Nurse, and Dawn Thilmany McFadden 2010). Although it is hard to give a precise analytical definition of AFNs, they all rely on different *forms of proximity* between supply and demand: AFNs depend on short production and distribution chains, integrating dimensions of spatial, economic, and social proximity (Kebir and Torre 2012). Proximity is intended not only in a geographical sense, related to how consumers and producers are physically close to one another, but also concerning shared importance given to the economic support of local communities and to the development of fair and trusting relationships between supply and demand (e.g. economic and social proximity).

In this article, we will argue that with reference to AFNs features an all-purpose reference to “quality as credence goods” is not satisfactory. Quality is a fundamentally ambiguous concept and this makes it a contested field (Callon, Méadel and Rabearison 2002; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Negro et al. 2011): the semantic uncertainty about the definition of quality generates an opportunity window where powerful actors can intentionally *manoeuvre* the quality space with *mimetic strategies*. To detect these strategies, we maintain that AFNs should not be analysed in isolation but along a continuum with conventional food networks and, especially, in connection to the new forms of high-end food distribution. We will thus shed light on how the boundaries between conventional and alternative food supply chains are blurred and affected by *strategic manoeuvring* within the quality space. For instance, some kinds of alternative agro-food goods – like organic products or local foods – are increasingly available in the mainstream retail stores, while the attractiveness to consumers of the “alternative” label has led to the proliferation of alternative products directly produced and proposed by the supermarket retailers. These are *mimetic strategies*, through which *hybrid* organizations position within

a quality space to intercept consumers' representations towards specific quality mixes. As suggested by Ponte's literature review of quality conventions in the agro-food sector (2016), the concept of mimetic quality is coherent with the increasing dissatisfaction with neatly allocating empirical phenomena into one or another convention, moral order or stabilized compromise (p. 20). A sharper perspective is to examine how consumers and producers interact through multiple justifications simultaneously, as opposed to selective engagement in a single world. Although this is not a novelty from a theoretical standpoint, since it has been already highlighted in a number of foundational contributions (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991; 2006), as an empirical perspective it has "rarely taken into consideration in previous literature" (Ponte 2016, p. 20). This paper aims to fill this gap with an empirical analysis of different food chains. In addition, from the theoretical viewpoint we will contribute to the elaboration of the concept of *mimetic quality* as a combination not only of different "worlds of quality", but also of specific "judgment devices" (Karpik 2010).

The paper is structured as follows: in the first part we will single out the key concepts of our analytical framework, at the crossroad of different but complementary streams of literature: conventions theory, judgment devices and omnivorism. In the second section, we will illustrate the research design, methods and data. In the third part, we will outline the empirical findings. In the conclusions, we will go back to the research questions and elaborate further on the key concept of mimetic quality at different analytical levels.

Theoretical framework

Quality is one of the most important force leading to the economic growth of firms and markets. Nevertheless, in academic literature quality is defined ambiguously and with many, often contradictory, meanings (Gallarza, Gil-Saura and Holbrook 2011). As Reeves and Bednard emphasize (1994), searching for a distinctive definition of quality just yields inconsistent results. Quality, the argument goes on, is alternatively defined as value, conformance to specifications, conformance to requirements, fitness for use, loss avoidance, and meeting and/or exceeding customers' expectations. They conclude that: "Regardless of the time period or context in which quality is examined, the concept has

had multiple and often muddled definitions and has been used to describe a wide variety of phenomena” (p. 419).

A shared argument across this variety is that in the *economy of quality* the worth of goods cannot be acknowledged only by prices (see Callon, Méadel and Rabeharison 2002). This is particularly so in markets such as art, food, wine and relational services, where the quality attributes of the good are difficult to unpack (Beckert 2009, p. 254; Karpik 2010; Ponte 2016). How supply and demand coordinate in such markets? The so-called “worlds of quality conventions” perspective (Eymard-Duvernay 1989; see also Sylvander 1995; Thevenot 1995; Boltanski and Thevenot 1991; Ponte 20..) provide a useful starting point to answer the question.

Conventions can be defined as: “shared templates for interpreting situations and planning courses of action in mutually comprehensive ways that involve social accountability, that is, they provide a basis for *judging* the appropriateness of action by self and others” (Biggart and Beamish 2003, p. 444; emphasis added). Specifically, Boltanski and Thevenot (1991) develop six “worlds” of legitimate common welfare (inspirational, domestic, opinion/fame, civic, market and industrial worlds) which allow actors to reduce semantic uncertainty and facilitate coordination¹. According to conventions theory², *price* is the main management form of a particular market only if there is no semantic uncertainty about quality. When differences in prices directly express shared differences in quality, *market* coordination applies; but when price alone cannot evaluate quality, actors set up other conventions and forms of coordination. In *domestic* coordination, uncertainty about quality is solved through *trust* (i.e. long-term social ties between actors). In *industrial*

¹ Later contributions add two further worlds: the environmental world and the projects-based world (cfr. Boltanski and Chiappello 1999).

² In the field of agro-food consumption and production, the theory of conventions has been applied to a variety of research problems summarized by Ponte (2016) in two main analytical streams: the worlds of production framework (Salais and Storper 1992; Storper and Salais 1997) and the orders of worth approach (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991, 2006). These studies deal with wine production (Ponte 2009), non-standard food production/consumption practices (Murdoch and Miele 1999), local partnership between producers and consumers (Lamine 2005), alternative food networks (Sage 2003; Goodman 2009), turn to quality in food production and consumption (Murdoch, Marsden and Banks 2000; Barbera and Audifredi 2012), culinary networks (Murdoch and Miele 2004), and geographical indications (Barham 2003). All these contributions converge in the idea that “in reality clear distinctions cannot be made between definitions of quality and that boundaries between categories are often blurred” (Sage 2003, p. 7).

coordination, uncertainty about quality is reduced through the actions of an external party who determines common enforceable *standards*. *Civic* coordination works where there is *collective* commitment to *welfare* and/or *public* interest. In the world of *fame*, uncertainty about quality is solved through public celebrity and worth derives from the opinion of experts. Finally, in the *inspired* world what is worthy is what cannot be controlled, what is felt in inner experience, manifested by feelings and passions and what rejects habits and routines. Following these definitions, two main features of quality conventions thus emerge (Borghini and Vitale 2006): (i) interdependency between the cognitive and the normative dimension; (ii) placement in and dependence on groups, organizations and institutional contexts.

Convention theory maintains that quality conventions can be deliberately and reflexively manipulated by social actors. Quality conventions can therefore be framed as intentional *signals*, unlike *signs* that are pieces of information unintentionally emitted by an agent (Cfr. Gambetta 2009). This difference is key since it opens to the idea of *mimetic quality* as a distinctive organizational strategy embedded in definite judgment devices to support consumer's trust in quality signals (Karpik 2010). In fact, markets characterized by radical uncertain quality (*market of singularities*) need judgment devices of various kind providing to consumers the information to value "singular" goods (e.g. movies, music, artwork, fine wines, luxury goods).

Karpik singles out seven coordination regimes based on judgement devices, each of which: "Is defined by a particular adjustment between the products, the judgment devices, and the consumer. More precisely, because singularities on the market are distinguished not by their generic characteristics but by their types of qualification and because these types of qualification are mainly effects of specific types of judgment devices, each model is a system of relations between particular qualified products, particular judgment devices, and particular forms of consumer commitment. Consequently, each regime of coordination is distinguishable from all others by a particular working logic."
(Karpik, 2010, 96)

Judgment devices are chiefly designed to dissipate the opacity of quality-based markets. As pointed out by Karpik (2010), such devices can be differentiated in relation to the nature of the transmitted knowledge: we will thus have *personal devices* and *impersonal devices*. The first consist of networks of interpersonal relationships based on the personal and multiple interpretations of reality that are spontaneously generated and network-based.

According to their different network composition, three main categories emerge: (i) *personal* networks structured by family, friends and colleagues ties, which convey reliable information by expressive and emotional mechanisms; (ii) *trade* networks, made up of ties between producers and consumers, that spontaneously generate trust if actors share a common symbolic system of reference; (iii) *practitioner* networks made up of professionals, that ensure the circulation of specific knowledge relating to their professional skills and activities. Impersonal devices convey a different kind of knowledge, unmediated by direct experience and therefore homogeneous for all consumers. They include: (i) appellations, certifications, designations of origin, professional titles and brands; (ii) cicerones, guides and critics that assess the quality of a product; (iii) rankings, based on sales (buyers' rankings) or based on criteria of excellence (experts' rankings) as in the case of literary prizes; (iv) confluences, namely all those localization devices and spatial organization of the marketplace. Impersonal devices can be further classified depending on the type of knowledge that they provide to the consumer, being formal or substantial, or on the strength of profit orientation of the market, being critical or commercial. *Formal* devices express comparative evaluations providing criteria for assessing the relative quality; *substantial* devices refer to the specific content of the singularities and hence provide absolute quality assessments. *Critical* devices consist of all those tools that allow a moral/political evaluation of the assets and are typical of relatively small markets with a moderate level of profit. Finally, *commercial* devices are applied to increase sales of products, and they are typical of the large markets with a high propensity to profit. Both personal and impersonal devices generate specific coordination regimes: personal devices support reticular regime, professional regime and interfirm regime, while impersonal devices sustain authenticity regime, mega regime, expert-opinion regime and common-opinion regime.

From the empirical viewpoint, however, borders and divisions are constantly blurred. As we will illustrate in the following, the quality-based strategies of hybrid organizations represent a clear combination of different worlds of quality and judgment devices. This combination defines a *camouflage* strategy, through which conventional food chains (e.g. high-end supermarkets) occupy specific zones of the quality space in order to fulfill consumers' expectation toward "alternative" quality conventions. The quality strategies of

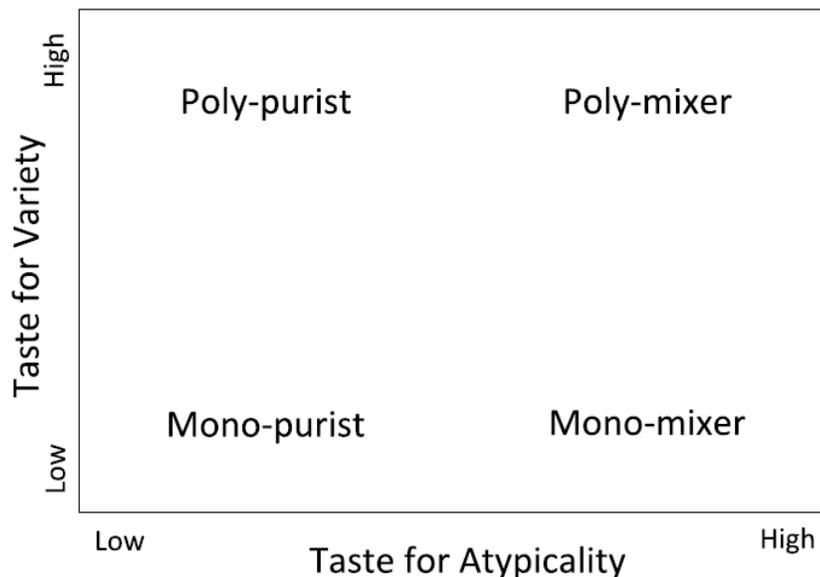
these organizations are therefore explicitly boundary spanning, namely: “instances in which categorical boundaries are traversed” (Hannah *et al.* 2013). Hybrid organizations cross boundaries both by combining elements from disparate quality regimes and judgment devices. Usually hybrid organizations are confined to those enterprises that base their business model on the alleviation of a particular social or environmental issue: “Hybrids generate income and attract capital in ways that may be consistent with for-profit models, nonprofit models, or both” (Haigh *et al.* 2015). We argue instead that the concept of hybrid organization is broader than the one of “entrepreneurship with a social consciousness” and it applies not only to the profit-non profit divide. Moreover, mimesis can strategically imply *camouflage* as a form of negative deceptive mimicry (Gambetta 2005).

To which kind of consumers, are these boundary-spanning quality strategies particularly effective? First of all, to those who purchase not so much and not only through the prices mechanism. In 2015, according to Nielsen research the percentage of consumers willing to buy sustainable brand paying a price differential has exceeded 50% (51% versus 44% in 2013 in Italy and 66% in the world against 50% in 2013). Consumers are increasingly attentive to the product they buy and they seek more and more specific qualitative features. Studies carried out by Eurobarometer show that about 35% of Italian consumers check for certifications of quality in the products, and 82% is worried about the quality of food they eat (versus an average of 68% in Europe).

The strengthening of quality-based consumer choices also serves as a symbolic marker of high status that reproduces cultural boundaries through appreciation for diversity and cultural omnivorism (Johnston and Baumann 2007; Warde, Wright and Gayo-Cal 2008). We argue that omnivorism as such is ill-suited to make sense of the new trends in quality-based market and, for the purpose at hand, of the new hybrid organizations and their strategies. Despite being present in consumers that combine fine wines and fast-food (Johnston and Baumann 2007), the quality profile of food chains require nonetheless a clear positioning in the quality space. For instance, who enters a high-end supermarket does not expect to find a plethora of undifferentiated goods. Similarly, those who turn to a local producer or to a solidarity-based purchasing group do not expect to find tropical fruit of a large multinational. Consumers need always to rely on common definitions of quality (Murdoch and Miele, 1999, p. 468), or uniform standards (Kirva 2006) in their purchasing

choices. The ability to intercept hybrid quality conventions, therefore, must be identified along other dimensions than plain omnivorism.

In a recent contribution, Hannah and co-authors (2016) argue that the categorical mix of consumers can actually cover two distinct dimensions: the variety and atypical. *Variety* covers the enactment of multiple social identities: consumers who prefer indeed fine wine and fast food (Johnston and Baumann 2007), country music and hiphop (Goldberg 2011), or lattes and bird-hunting (DellaPosta, Shi, and Macy 2015), enact incongruent racial, class, and political identities, respectively. *Atypicality*, on the other hand, refers to the concerns noncompliance with cultural codes. Atypicality differentiates those who accept and respect genre codes and like typical, code-conforming objects from those who like atypical objects: namely, objects that mix elements that conventionally characterize categories. From the intersection of these two dimensions, variety and atypicality, four types are identified: on the variety dimension, individuals with a narrow (mono) focus from those with diverse (poly) foci. On the typicality dimension, those who accept and respect genre codes and like typical, code-conforming objects (purists) from those who like atypical objects, that is, objects that mix elements that conventionally characterize categories that lie far apart (mixers).



Building on this fourfold typology, we argue that hybrid organizations are not based on omnivores consumers as such, but on “monomixer” ones that, at the same time, seek a

genre defined by defined borders and, within these, look for mixes that conventionally characterize categories that lie far apart. These consumers simultaneously seek artisanal product quality and food safety, freshness and convenience of purchase, the link with the territory and geographical food variety. They look for the uniqueness of the product and the availability of large quantities, as well as for the personalization of the relationship with the seller and the certification of specific professional skills. As Hauser and colleagues argue: “Today there are not just one or two key values, but a whole series: assortment, quality, comfort and practicality. Products with a high service content (convenience food). Also important is the health and, even more, will be sustainability. In addition there are other values, including: comfort, familiarity, closeness to the place of origin. A real headache for consumers who do not know how to *simultaneously* satisfy all these desires” (Hauser, Jonas and Riemann 2011, emphasis added). Accordingly, to be successful, hybrid organizations need to cover both the new and traditional range of quality conventions, overcoming the divisions among different worlds while maintaining a coherent profile. Quality components would increase their multidimensional nature along the atypicality dimension and thus require the effort to rework different conceptions of quality, which can hold different languages and perspectives, less and less linked to a price role as a purchasing mechanism. In doing so, however, they need to retain a specific profile along the dimension of the variety. Hybrid organizations would be both generalist and specialized, have a standard layout proposal, but be perceived as oriented to meet personal needs, be impersonal but seem capable of strong personal relationship with the consumers, produced using traditional techniques but at the same time ensure clear standards. This, according to our hypothesis, would require to exercise new forms of *strategic mimicry* combining disparate quality conventions and judgment devices, quite differently from the plain imitation of successful competitors as in the customary organizational isomorphism perspective (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Strategic mimicry needs to invent forms of complex imitation, characterized by multi-polarity and combination of multiple orders of worth (Stark 2016). This effort requires a specific strategic action and a coherent organizational structure, able to leverage *situation*-specific meanings, quite independently from individual-level attributes (Kirvan 2006).

Data and research design

In order to shed light on quality-based strategies carried out by social actors in the agro-food sector, we focus on the quality positioning of different supply chains – both conventional and alternative – in Piemonte, an Italian region where there is a particularly favourable local context for food production (Dansero and Puttilli 2014). Considering a continuum between conventional and alternative forms, five supply chains are singled out:

1. hypermarkets and supermarkets: diffusion and concentration of the large-scale system are not uniformly distributed in Italy. In general terms, Northern regions show a greater development than the Southern ones, although there are differences and exceptions (Arcidiacono 2016). In this scenario, Piemonte represents a peculiar case due to the large number of large-scale sales points, nearly 2,000; their average floor area, higher than in other regions (the average surface area is 309 square meters in Piemonte and 279 square meters in Italy) (AGCM 2013); and, at the same time, a low market concentration index compared to other areas, with the leader retailer controlling only about 20% of the regional market (while in several other regions this share is close to 50%) (Arcidiacono 2016). Therefore the large-scale distribution in Piemonte stands out for both a widespread diffusion and a high differentiation;
2. high-end food markets: Piemonte is the birthplace of Eataly, a store and eating-place specialized in quality food. The first point of sale opened in Torino in 2007, on the initiative of the founder Oscar Farinetti. In the following years, several other stores inaugurated both in Italy and abroad, i.e. Germany, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Japan, Korea, U.S.A., Brazil. Eataly has been influenced and sponsored by Slow Food, a movement founded in the eighties, with now over 100,000 members in 150 countries, aiming to safeguard local food cultures and traditions. While being a genuine business project, with annual revenues equal to 400 million euros and a growth rate in sales equal to 28% in 2015, Eataly has benefited from the *aura* of Slow-Food. From 2014 20% of the company is owned by a merchant bank, and in 2017 the stock exchange listing will take place;
3. traditional local markets: traditional local markets have been facing different trends. On the one hand, in some contexts the introduction of a stricter regulation

- concerning commercial licences, tax obligations and sanitation requirements, together with the diffusion of supermarkets and more standardized ways of food purchasing, have led to a relative decline of traditional local markets. On the other hand, in other contexts a long market tradition, the freshness of agricultural food products and a good quality-price ratio have fostered the persistence of markets buying habits in the local population. Piemonte falls within this second case, since about 1,000 traditional local markets are regularly held in the region,³ most of them at least on a weekly basis; the city of Torino, the regional capital of Piemonte, every day hosts more than 40 traditional markets. Part of this revitalization is related to the fact that in recent years in several markets in Piemonte some local small-scale producers have appeared alongside the traditional food stalls (see below);
4. farmers' markets: in the wake of the increasing interest in locally grown food products, a significant number of initiatives have been developed to promote direct sales from local small-scale farmers. These initiatives – in addition to on-farm sales – include both the participation in traditional local markets and the creation of monthly autonomous farmers' markets, frequently promoted by farmers' organizations, primarily Coldiretti and Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori (CIA). In Piemonte the number of local farms involved in direct off-farm sales is high, with a percentage which is nearly twice the national one (Piemonte 9.4%, Italy 5.2%), and 87 farmers' markets take place periodically (Pettenati and Dansero 2015). In the city of Torino alone, nearly 300 local farmers participate in traditional markets daily, while 11 farmers' markets take place regularly;
 5. solidarity-based purchasing groups (GASs): they are self-organized networks of individuals and families aiming to buy food – and sometimes other goods – directly from producers. This kind of community-supported agriculture started appearing in Italy in the mid-nineties and then gradually spread, reaching over 1,000 units in 2011.⁴ They include not less than 170 GASs operating in Piemonte, over 130 of them located in the province of Torino (Pettenati and Dansero 2015). The spread of

³ Piemonte Region Department of Trade (see: www.regione.piemonte.it/gestione/commercio/mercati/dynIndex.php).

⁴ Source data: Retegas, Italian network of GASs (see <http://www.economiasolidale.net/>). Because online registration is voluntary, and on the basis of some researches that were carried out locally, Retegas estimates that there are about twice as many registered purchasing groups (Grasseni 2013).

these networks in this area occurred also thanks to the public institutions, namely the Province of Torino Administration, which promoted collective purchasing groups since 2005 as a resource to contrast the impoverishment of families. Moreover, some self-organized intermediate structures emerged to cope with situations not manageable by a single group, as in the case of the association GASTorino, a network of GASs managing the purchase orders of the products that require a complex logistics, i.e. the order of citrus fruits from Sicily.

The dynamism shown by the agro-food context in Piemonte and the extensive development of the main supply chains – both the traditional and the alternative ones – make the region suitable for a case study that aims to deepen the quality positioning of the different suppliers. Data collection was based on a questionnaire to a sample of consumers (N=1090) from the five supply chains, detecting purchasing habits, quality conceptions, expected quality dimensions and socio-economic features (see appendix for details). The data collection has been carried out from March 2014 to June 2015 by trained interviewers supervised by the research group. To diminish self-selection biases, in each supply chain the interviewers contacted one consumer every five, regularly varied the point of administration (rotating in different locations within the markets or supermarkets), and operated in differentiated days of the week and time slots. Data collection in the large-scale distribution took place from October to December 2014 in one of the biggest hypermarkets in Torino. Questionnaires were administered in different days (from Monday to Saturday) and time slots (distinguishing three different slots: morning, afternoon, and evening). Following the same days and time slots patterns, the gathering of data in high-end food markets occurred from October 2014 to February 2015 in Eataly Torino Lingotto shop. Regarding local markets, municipal data allowed to identify in Torino 29 daily markets where there are both traditional merchants and farmers. Starting from this list, we adopted a stratified sampling method, first dividing the 28 smaller markets in three strata based on their number of farmers' stalls and then randomly extracting from each stratum four specific markets.⁵ Finally, we added to the sample the biggest market in town, Porta

⁵ The three strata included (1) markets with 1-4 farmers' stalls, (2) markets with 5-8 farmers' stalls, (3) markets with 9-13 farmers' stalls. The 13 markets included in the final sample are the following: Barcellona, San Secondo, Campanella, Madama Cristina, Di Nanni, Martini, Cincinnato, Mirafiori Nord, Brunelleschi, Santa Rita, Santa Giulia, Nizza, Porta Palazzo.

Palazzo, which represents a peculiar case being the largest open air market in Europe with around 800 stalls in total, including about 90 farmers' stalls. In this way, we obtained a sample of 13 municipal markets, including both traditional sellers and farmers, where questionnaires were administered from March to July 2014 alternating days (from Monday to Saturday) and time slots (distinguishing three different slots: early morning, from 8 to 10.30 am; late morning, from 10.30 am to 1 pm; lunch time / afternoon, from 1 pm to market closing time). Finally, we selected four different solidarity-based purchasing groups (SPGs) in the province of Torino. The selection criteria were the different location (in the city or in the neighbouring municipalities) and the number of members (distinguishing between small-medium groups, up to 50 adherents, and big groups, with more than 50 members). Once obtained the commitment of the leaders in the selected GASs, the interviewers took part in a meeting for the distribution of the purchased food among members and administered the questionnaire to SPGs members.

Overall, 1,090 questionnaires were administered: 385 in large-scale distribution (35.3% of the total sample), 251 in high-end food markets (23%), 216 in traditional local markets (19.8%), 87 in farmers' markets (8%), and 151 in GASs (13.9%). The dissimilar number of questionnaires in the five supply chains reflects the different weight in purchasing food goods by consumers, as shown by regional official data and previous research. The total number of questionnaires refers to valid cases and for which the supply chain where the administration occurred constitutes the predominant or at least habitual place for food purchasing.

Empirical findings

We put to the empirical test the previously outlined theoretical framework by three thorough hypothesis:

Hp.1) Quality mixes are emerging in the worlds of food consumption. These mixes do not overlap neatly with the “conventional-alternative” dichotomy, are self-contained and do not mirror the random world of omnivorism;

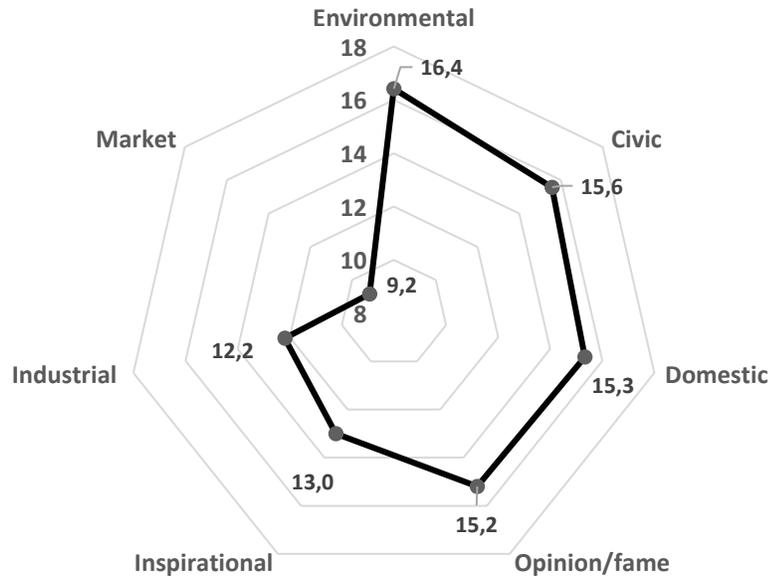
Hp.2) Food supply chains select their quality positioning accordingly. Multipolar strategies to intercept the increasing complexity of quality spaces are evolving, adding new quality conventions without giving up the traditional ones;

Hp.3) New multipolar strategies are built on clear-cut organizational leverages and judgment devices which support the situational production of meaning for consumers within specific food chains, quite independently from micro-level individual attributes.

We measured the level of importance of seven quality conventions by a Likert scale 1-10 (2 items, total score from 0 to 20; see appendix for details). Empirical results show that all conventions are considered important by a high number of consumers, although the less recognized is that of the market in which only 14.7% of consumers score higher than the median value (=14). The most important quality convention is the environmental one, to which the 85.1% of consumers score above the median value. In addition, market and inspiration conventions show greater variability, meaning that they are valued in the opposite way by relevant consumer groups (Fig. 1)

Fig.1 Quality conventions: mean scores and standard deviation

Quality conventions defined important by the customer - mean



Quality conventions defined important by the customer - St.dev.

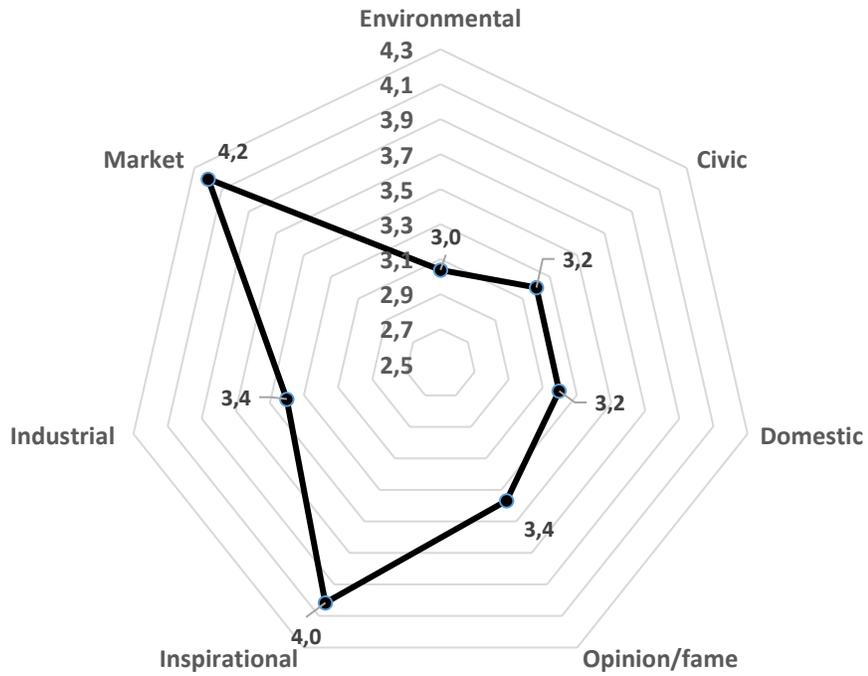
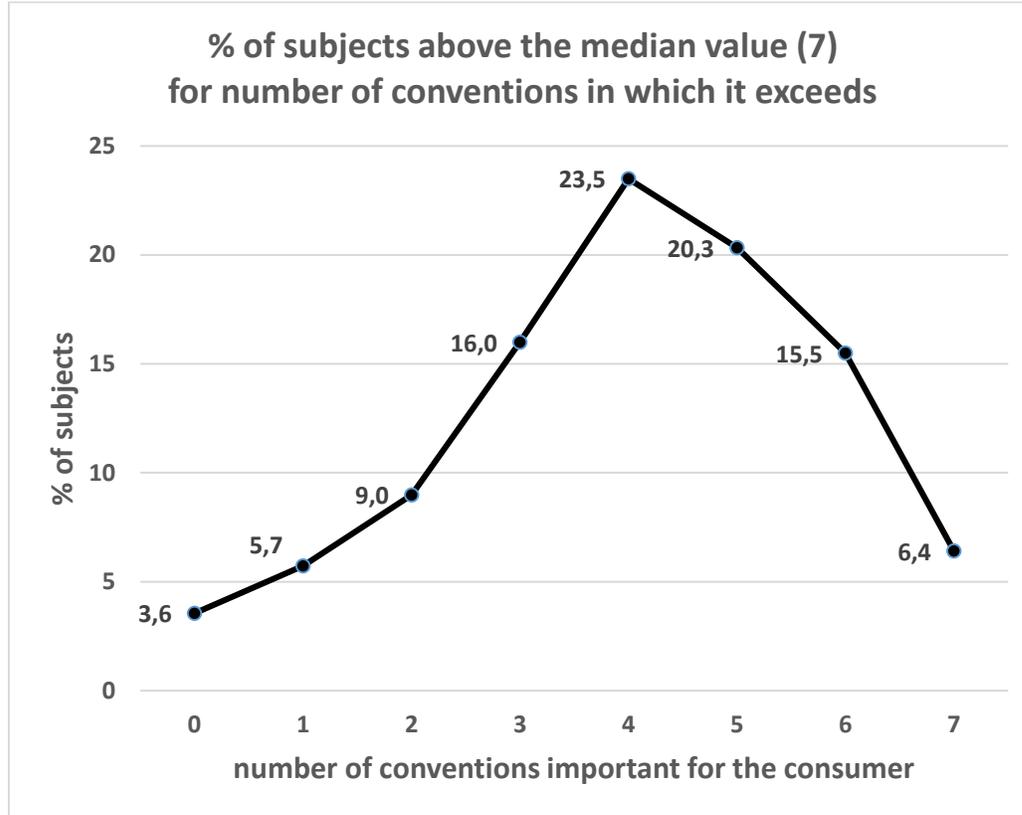


Table 1. Judgement of consumers on quality conventions in the various food supply chains

food supply chains		Domestic	Enviromental	Civic	Opinion	Inspirational	Market	Industrial
Total	mean	15,36	16,56	15,63	15,40	12,78	8,91	12,01
	std.dev.	3,32	3,07	3,26	3,36	4,11	4,24	3,39
	min	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
	max	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	mode	16	20	20	16	14	10	11
hypermarkets and supermarkets	mean	15,40	16,28	15,77	14,87	13,34	9,51	12,20
	std.dev.	2,89	2,88	2,96	3,38	3,62	3,98	3,24
	min	6	5	4	2	2	2	2
	max	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	mode	16	20	20	16	14	10	13
high-end food markets (Eataly)	mean	15,81	16,64	15,74	15,62	13,83	9,52	13,12
	std.dev.	2,79	2,98	3,19	3,08	4,06	4,42	3,51
	min	7	6	2	7	2	2	2
	max	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	mode	16	20	16	16	16	10	15
traditional local markets	mean	15,34	15,97	14,95	14,64	12,74	9,80	12,26
	std.dev.	3,33	3,02	3,36	3,42	3,95	4,10	3,62
	min	5	4	2	2	2	2	2
	max	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
	mode	16	20	16	14	14	10	13
farmers' markets	mean	16,63	17,54	16,48	16,49	12,83	8,62	11,63
	std.dev.	2,94	2,64	3,09	2,90	3,97	4,35	3,35
	min	6	10	8	9	2	2	3
	max	20	20	20	20	20	19	20
	mode	20	20	20	20	16	11	11
solidarity-based purchasing groups (GASs)	mean	13,44	16,36	15,16	15,35	10,97	6,86	10,71
	std.dev.	3,81	3,60	3,48	3,72	4,46	3,65	2,70
	min	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
	max	20	20	20	20	20	20	17
	mode	14	20	15	16	13	2	11

To test the first hypothesis, we checked for the multipolarity of quality conventions. As Fig. 2 clearly shows, many consumers fall under a number of quality conventions: the modal value is four conventions to which the consumers give importance above the median value. The quality space is thus clearly structured along different attractors.

Fig.2 Percentage of respondents above the median value (=7) for the number of conventions



Is this multipolarity organized around definite macro-dimensions? Are these dimensions, as we expect, boundary-spanning? To analyze the underlying structure of the quality space, we performed a Principal Component Analysis applied to 14 items x 7 conventions. The analysis shows that two clear-cut quality profiles emerge, which synthesize both distinctive and boundary-spanning conventions (Tab. 2). As for the first factor, quality is anchored to a set of socially relevant meanings represented by food (environmental, domestic, civic, inspirational conventions). We label this factor as “soft quality”. The second factor includes the dimensions referring to public reputation and price (opinion and commercial conventions). We label this factor “hard quality”. As loading values show, the industrial convention is transversal to these two components. The regime of the industrial world is determined by the centrality of technical standards, it is dominated by a logic of functionality and standardization. The relevance of the industrial convention for the “hard quality” it is not surprising, while it is for the “soft quality” one. As Boltanski and Thevenot argued, the confrontation between the worlds of quality leads to different forms of

compromise: in our case, the role of standards points to the need to settle grounded compromises between the civic/domestic/passion/environmental orders of worth

Tab.2 Latent dimensions of quality conventions.

Item loadings for principal component analysis. Rotated component matrix.		Factor 1	Factor 2
		Soft quality	Hard quality
Domestic	Vegetables and fruits are quality goods when: They are grown according to tradition	,513	,222
	Do you feel comfortable to buy vegetables and fruits from whom? From whom you trust	,598	,004
Environmental	Vegetables and fruits are quality goods when: they are environmentally friendly.	,709	-,042
	Do you feel comfortable to buy vegetables and fruits from whom? From those who respect the environment when producing and trading	,797	-,146
Civic	Vegetables and fruits are quality goods when: They are the product of the work and commitment of many people of a territory	,660	,094
	Do you feel comfortable to buy vegetables and fruits from whom? From those who care not only about their personal interest	,708	-,068
Inspiration	Vegetables and fruits are quality goods when: The product mirrors the passion with which it was made	,662	,104
	Do you feel comfortable to buy vegetables and fruits from whom? From those who do it with passion and believing	,751	-,002
Opinion	Vegetables and fruits are quality goods when: They have a solid reputation due also to awards or experts' opinion	,335	,652
	Do you feel comfortable to buy vegetables and fruits from whom? By whom sells only widely judged high-quality products	,266	,717
Market	Vegetables and fruits are quality goods when: They have an high price	-,050	,767
	Do you feel comfortable to buy vegetables and fruits from whom? From those who sell more expensive products	-,101	,816
Industrial	Vegetables and fruits are quality goods when: They have precise rules of production and processing techniques	,510	,278
	Do you feel comfortable to buy vegetables and fruits from whom? From those who sell products which have followed a standardized production process	-,138	,769

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Equamax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 3 iterations. 50.9 is the percentage of explained variance by the two factors. The sample is weighed every supply chain has the same weight.

Final test: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test: 0,823; Bartlett test sign.0,000.

Note: the variables present in the greyscale belong together

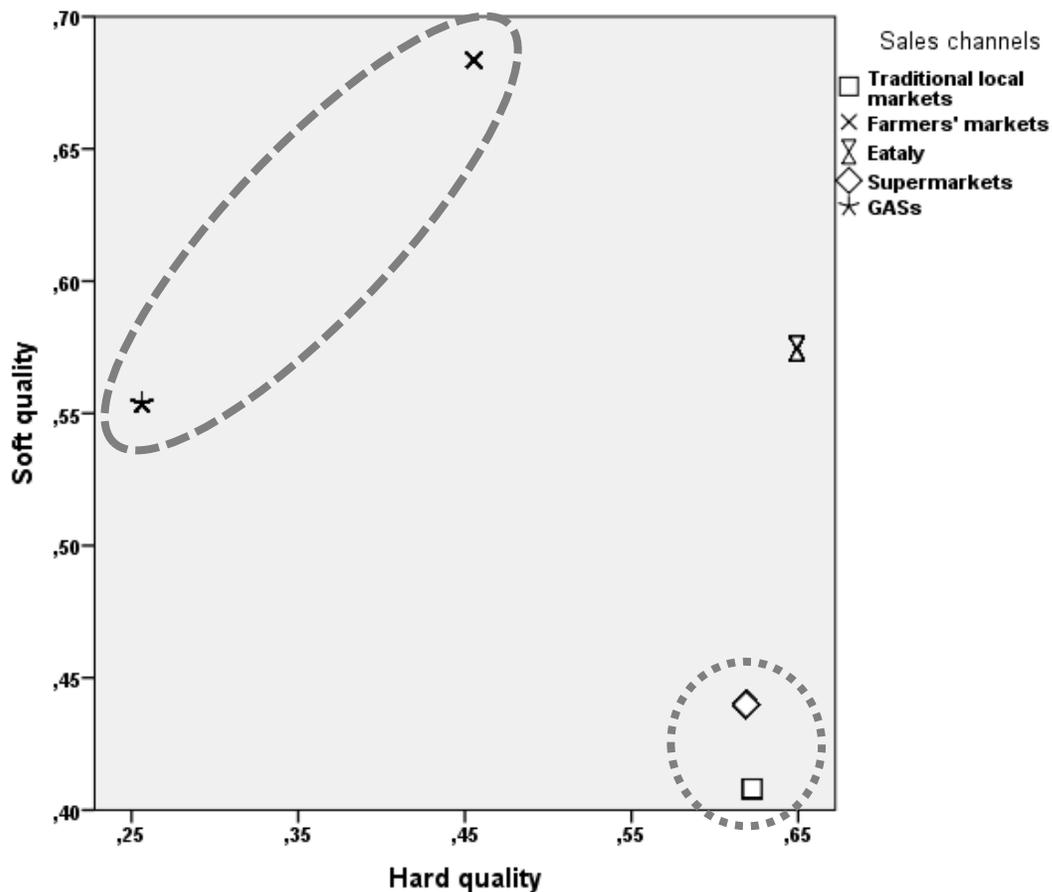
and the industrial world. The empirical evidence support the idea that consumers can not be generically defined as “random omnivores”: albeit characterized by multiple adherences to quality conventions, an ordered multipolarity with boundary-spanning traits is clearly at work.

To test the presence of supply strategies designed to intercept this *ordered multipolarity*, we have analysed consumers' quality representations, distinguishing them depending on the supply chain they most frequently use to purchase food. If the consumers intercepted

by different supply chains have quality representations that are consistent with the chain's profile, this would confirm that operators are able to differentiate their offerings with respect to the emerging “soft” and “hard” dimensions of quality. As stated, we expect that situational chain-specific features matter more than individual-level variables.

First of all supply operators differ greatly from one another with respect to the the quality profile prevailing among the consumers (Fig. 3). Quality representations focusing on hard quality (public reputation and prices) are highly widespread among consumers habitually purchasing in supermarkets and traditional local markets, with more than 60% above the average value. While representations centered on soft quality attributes are less important, with slightly more than 40% of consumers above the average. Farmers’ markets instead maximize the soft quality component (nearly 70% of customers is above average), but to the detriment of the hard quality one. These positioning are overall coherent with the chains’ profiles.

Fig. 3 The Quality Space: Hard and Soft Quality



Note: the axis value is the percentage of consumers over the mean value of the factor by sales channel

As we will discuss more widely in the next paragraph, the positioning of Eataly within the quality space in Fig. 3 stands out as a hybrid strategy. Fig. 3 shows that Eataly leverages on both dimensions of quality: it scores slightly higher than Solidarity Purchasing Groups on the soft quality dimension, outperforming to some extent Generalist Supermarkets and Traditional Local Markets on the hard one. Solidarity Purchasing Groups display a different positioning: they score well in the soft dimension of quality, underperforming in the hard dimension in terms of public reputation and prices. All in all, the empirical evidences so far illustrated reasonably support the second hypothesis.

To find support for the third hypothesis, we check firstly the statistical significance of the above illustrated differences between the supply chains. As Tab. 3 shows, between groups differences are statistically significant.

Tab.3 Quality dimensions and supply chains (Anova analysis)

			Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Soft quality Supply chains	*	Between groups	7,163	4	1,791	7,344	,000
		Within groups	234,086	960	,244		
		Total	241,250	964			
Hard quality Supply chains	*	Between groups	15,720	4	3,930	17,065	,000
		Within groups	221,084	960	,230		
		Total	236,804	964			

To check if the chain effect on the quality positioning (Fig. 3) is stronger than the effect of the individual level attributes such as gender, age, birthplace, social class and income, we estimated the parameters of a linear regression⁶. The first model introduces the supply chains as independent variables, the second model adds gender, age, birthplace, social class, and income as control variables. Results (Tab. 3, models a1-a2, b1-b2) show that the supply chain effect is significant, consistent with the hypotheses and independent from individual-level attributes. As showed in Tab. 4, both Eataly and, even more, the farmers markets are able to attract customers who consider important the soft quality component.

⁶ In the model, the reference group is that of the large-scale system consumers, having the following social profile: male, over 65 years old, born in the South of Italy, working-class member and with a low-income

On the opposite side, the supermarkets are ineffective in expressing this conception of quality (see negative intercept). Socio-demographic variables are all non-significant (<0.01) and do not change the weight of the chains' parameters, which keep their influence as expected.

With regard to the hard quality component, both the farmers markets and, especially, the SPGs chains have a negative effect on this dimension, while for Eataly and the traditional local markets the effects are not statistically significant. The introduction of the socio-demographic variables in the model does not change the influence of the chains as individual-level attributes are not statistically significant (<0.01). These results are coherent with the positioning in the quality space of the different chains (Fig. 3).

Tab.4 The Supply Chain Effect on Hard and Soft Quality

Reference profile: Large-scale system, male, over 65 years old, from Southern Italy, working class, net income <800 €/month											
	Model a1		Model a2		Model b1		Model b2				
Dependent variable:	Soft quality		Soft quality		Hard quality		Hard quality				
Observations	964		964		964		964				
R2	0,033		0,054		0,075		0,105				
Model sig. F	0,000		0,000		0,000		0,000				
Durbin Watson	1,913				1,846		1,841				
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	
(Constant)	-,110	* ,052	-,388	** ,128	,188	** ,051	,397	** ,125			
Traditional local markets	-,159	,087	-,110	,089	,017	,085	-,002	,087			
Farmers' markets	,471	** ,121	,496	** ,122	-,333	** ,118	-,325	** ,119			
GASs	,003	,102	,233	,155	-,758	** ,100	-,789	** ,151			
Eataly	,222	** ,083	,226	** ,085	,073	,081	,070	,082			
Female			,071	,064			-,034	,062			
Young 18-34 y.o.			,199	,110			-,342	** ,107			
Adults 35-64 y.o.			,149	,099			-,062	,096			
Piemonte			,026	,083			-,189	* ,081			
Northern Italy (other than Piemonte)			-,044	,106			-,086	,103			
Center Italy			-,225	,149			,162	,145			
Abroad			-,232	,157			-,152	,153			
Upper class			,200	,137			,038	,133			
Self-employed middle class			,095	,135			-,068	,131			
Employed middle class			,240	* ,114			-,012	,111			
Not employed			,031	,130			,087	,127			
Net income 800-1500 €/month			-,090	,077			,082	,074			
Net income >1500 €/month			-,043	,098			,086	,095			

*p<0,05 **p<0,01

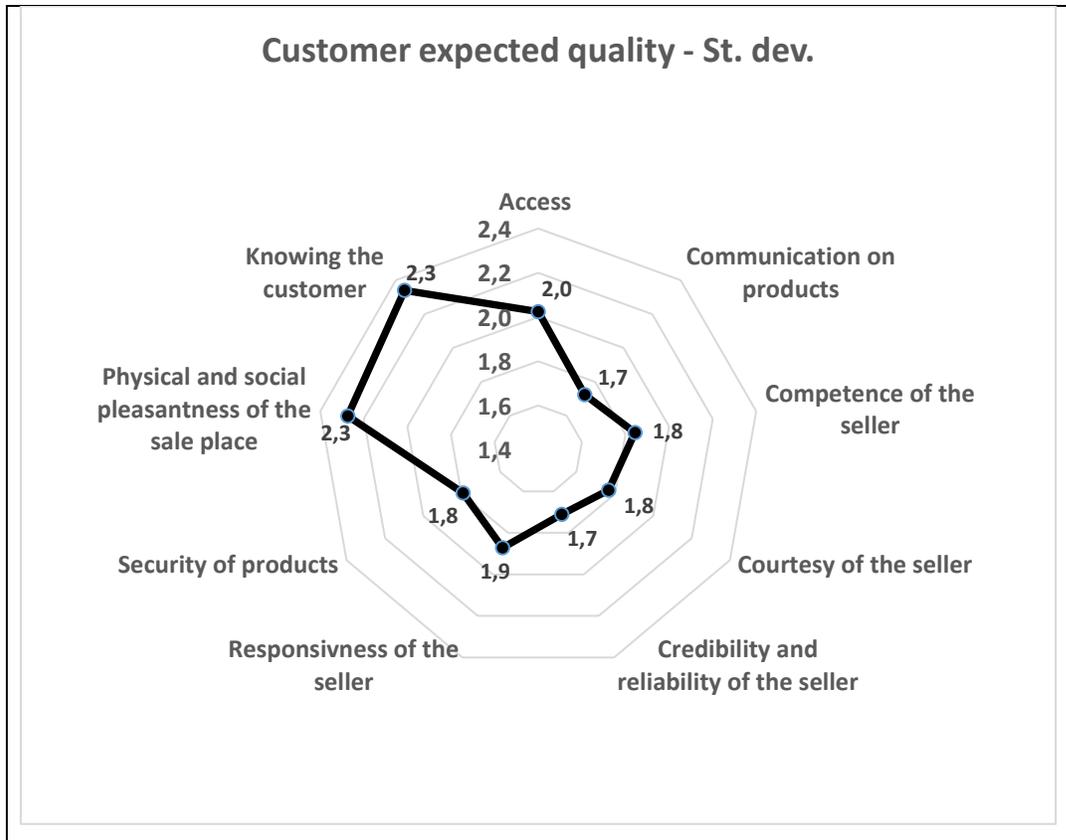
Collinearity among the variables was excluded by examining the VIF

Finally, we tested the organizational strategies pursued to support the positioning in the quality space. We expect that the quality-based strategies of Eataly exemplify a clear combination between different worlds of quality *and* judgment devices. To this end, we measured the consumers' ratings about expected quality through nine items (score from 1 to 10), following a customary model of analysis of quality dimensions (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1994). The analysis aimed to explore the differences in the expected quality among consumers who regularly purchase in the different chains, and then to bring out the competitive advantage of the organizational strategies carried out.

As Fig. 4 shows, the quality expected by consumers has high and homogeneous values on security, credibility, courtesy and communication on product, while it has a greater variability, with less homogeneous judgements, on knowing the customer, easiness of access, physical and social pleasantness of the sale place.

Fig.4 Expected quality





To single out the organizational leverages, we performed a principal components analysis and two clearly different dimensions emerged.

Tab.5 Latent dimensions of expected quality: seller vs. sales environment

Item loadings for principal component analysis. Rotated component matrix.	Factor 1	Factor 2
What features of the sales service deems important, when you choose where to buy fruit and vegetables?	The seller matters	The sales environment matters
Access	,129	,650
Communication on products	,691	,206
Competence of the seller	,864	,011
Courtesy of the seller	,712	,295
Credibility and reliability of the seller	,783	,141
Responsivness of the seller	,707	,307
Security of products	,620	,295
Physical and social pleasantness of the sale place	,121	,851
Knowing the customer	,398	,588

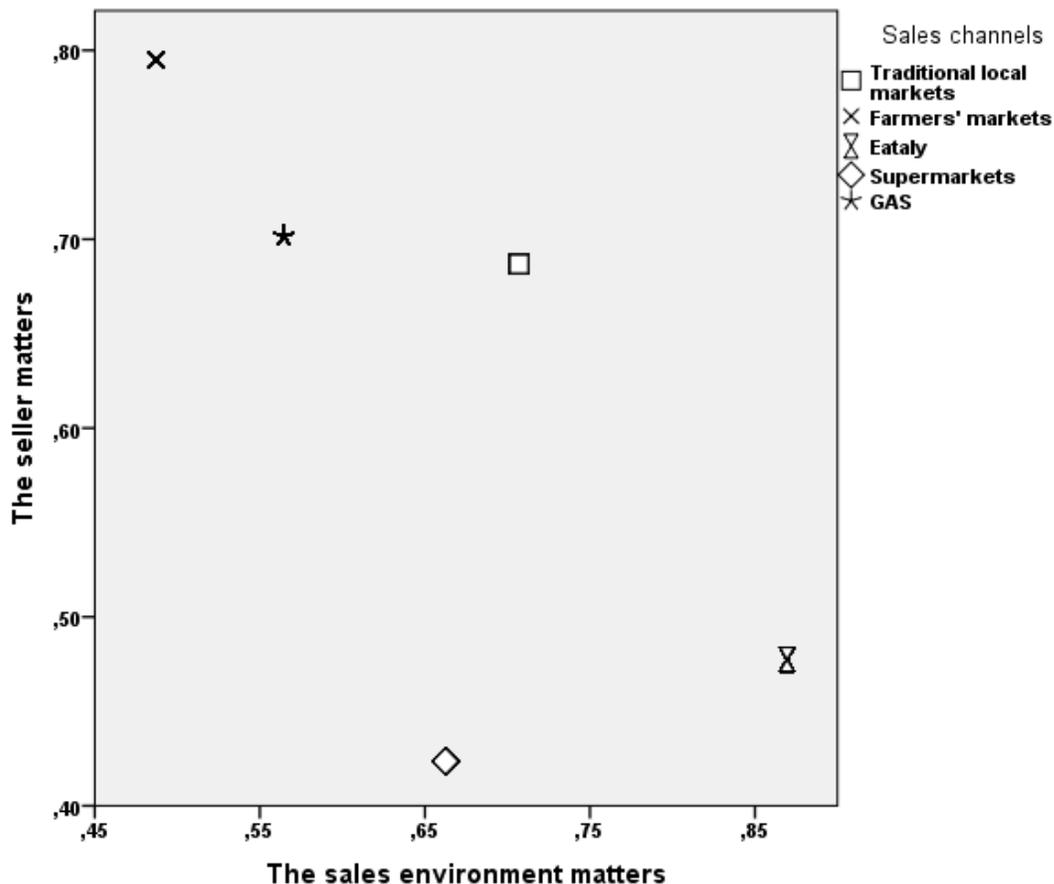
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Equamax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 3 iterations. 58.2 is the percentage of explained variance by the two factors. The sample is weighed: every supply chain has the same weight. The sample variables are transformed into their logarithms. Final test: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test: 0,876. Bartlett test sign.0,000.

Note: the variables present in the greyscale belong together

The first factor, labelled “the seller matters”, highlights an expectation of quality focused on the personal relationship with the seller and on her expertise and reliability. The second factor, labelled “the sales environment matters”, points out an expectation of quality related to the easiness of access and to the physical and social pleasantness of the sales environment. The need for personalized answers is the only dimension transversal to the two factors, although its loading score is higher for the second factor. Thus, the structure of the quality expectation of the consumer can be summarized by referring to these two areas, which highlight different organizational strategies carried out by the operators in the supply chains. One is centred on the seller, the other is focused on the sales environment: in both cases, a personalized knowledge emerges as relevant.

We then analyzed the position of the operators in the different supply chains regarding the use of these organizational levers (Fig. 5).

Fig.5 Positioning in the expected quality space



Note: the axis value is the percentage of consumers over the mean value of the factor by sales channel

As Fig. 5 shows, the supply chains positioning representing the two dimensions highlights the different practice of the organizational levers. The farmers' markets and the SPGs are positioned to the extreme of the vertical axes, with almost 80% and 70% of consumers above the average for the importance attributed to the seller. In this case, the lever is the personal relationship with the seller. Conversely, the large-scale supermarket minimize the personal relationship, without proposing a real alternative to the traditional markets. Once again, the case of Eataly has a peculiar position that is coherent with the role of the organizational lever used to manage the previously outlined score on the soft dimension of quality (Tab. 5). Eataly manages the soft dimension not through personal devices, but by the means of impersonal and commercial devices, which score very high. As Tab. 6 shows, these positioning are highly statistically significant.

Tab. 6 Positioning in the expected quality space, (Anova analysis)

		Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The seller matters * Supply chains	Between groups	17,131	3	5,710	25,015	,000
	Within groups	184,445	808	,228		
	Total	201,576	811			
The sales environment matters * Supply chains	Between groups	12,770	3	4,257	20,709	,000
	Within groups	166,092	808	,206		
	Total	178,862	811			

Here again we estimated the parameters of a linear regression model to compare the ability in market segmentation carried out by the different chains, controlling for the effect of socio-demographic variables as gender, age, birthplace, social class, income. Results (Tab. 4, models a1-a2, b1-b2) show that the supply chains effect is significant, consistent with the hypotheses and independent from individual-level attributes.

Tab.7 The Supply Chain Effect on the expected quality

Reference profile: Large-scale system, male, over 65 years old, from Southern Italy, working class, net income <800 €/month	Model c1		Model c2		Model d1		Model d2	
	The seller matters		The seller matters		The sales environment matters		The sales environment matters	
Dependent variable:								
Observations	935		935		935		935	
R2	0,035		0,065		0,079		0,118	
Model sig. F	0,000		0,000		0,000		0,000	
Durbin Watson	2,012		1,997		1,993		1,993	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
(Constant)	-0,202	** 0,055	-0,447	** 0,129	,034	,051	,311	** ,118
Traditional local markets	0,337	** 0,088	0,394	** 0,090	,044	,081	,005	,083
Farmers' markets	0,394	** 0,123	0,443	** 0,124	-,372	** ,114	-,368	** ,114
GASs	0,328	** 0,103	0,613	** 0,155	-,298	** ,095	-,562	** ,142
Eataly	-0,06	0,085	-0,077	0,087	,444	** ,079	,475	** ,080
Female			0,043	0,065			,034	,060
Young 18-34 y.o.			0,120	0,111			-,404	** ,102
Adults 35-64 y.o.			0,200	* 0,100			-,030	,092
Piemonte			-0,062	0,085			-,032	,078
Northern Italy (other than Piemonte)			0,007	0,109			-,109	,100
Center Italy			-0,081	0,152			-,049	,139
Abroad			-0,583	** 0,158			-,005	,145
Upper class			0,105	0,138			-,080	,126
Self-employed middle class			0,054	0,138			-,144	,126
Employed middle class			0,189	0,115			-,020	,105
Not employed			0,043	0,133			-,057	,122
Net income 800-1500 €/month			0,003	0,078			-,121	,072
Net income >1500 €/month			0,132	0,100			-,183	* ,092

*p<0,05 **p<0,01 Collinearity among the variables was excluded by examining the VIF

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we aimed to get an insight into quality attributes emerging among consumers in different agro-food supply chains, both conventional and alternative, and to highlight the strategies adopted by supply organizations, positioning themselves coherently in the quality space in order to intercept the consumers' expectations.

We first showed that complex but ordered quality profiles are widespread among consumers. Consumers' quality positioning on the one hand denies the existence of random omnivorous profiles; on the other hand, it does not blindly reflect the "conventional-alternative" traditional polarization. Instead, two macro-dimensions emerge: we named them *soft quality* (food characteristics) and *hard quality* (public reputation and price).

We then shifted to the food supply side, bringing out the consistence between consumers' quality representations and chain's quality profile and confirming, therefore, the existence of differentiated strategies carried out by the operators to attract consumers with specific quality expectations. In this case too, two macro-dimensions emerge: one focused on the seller and one centred on the sales environment.

Table 8, providing a summary of the chain effects on the quality positioning by reference to the large-scale system, allows us to do some further reflection on supply operators strategies.

Table 8

	Eataly	Traditional markets	Farmers markets	Solidarity-based purchasing groups
Soft quality	Positive	No effect	Positive	No effect
Hard Quality	No effect	No effect	Negative	Negative
Seller matters	No effect	Positive	Positive	Positive
Sales environment matters	Positive	No effect	Negative	Negative
Quality strategy	<i>Soft quality is <u>in</u> the air</i>	<i>Quality is <u>in</u> the relationship</i>	<i>Soft quality is <u>in</u> the relationship</i>	<i>Quality is <u>the</u> relationship</i>

Traditional markets, farmers' markets and solidarity-based purchasing groups share the relevance attributed to the seller, showing high quality expectations related to this relationship. Although, there are some differences in their positioning.

In traditional markets the centrality of the personal relationship with the seller and the irrelevance of all the other dimensions describes a situation in which *quality is in the relationship*, namely the direct contact with the vendor embodies the generic quality expectation of consumers.

In the farmers' markets, instead, the vendor is seen as an intermediary and a guarantor for a specific kind of quality, the soft one, focused on the characteristics of the agro-food good, its link with the territory and with the community. In this case, therefore, *soft quality is in the relationship*.

In solidarity-based purchasing groups, a sort of negative prejudice against hard quality is found: this is probably due to the low importance that consumers give to market and labels/expert's opinion as quality signals. At the same time, the personal relationship with

the seller is crucial for quality expectations in this chain. For this reason, we can say that in solidarity-based purchasing groups *quality is the relationship*.

We finally observe the case of hybrid organizations, such as Eataly. In this case, quality strategies seem to be conveniently designed in order to combine different worlds of quality and judgment devices. Eataly in fact is able to keep together the ability to respond to soft quality consumers expectations and the ability to attract consumers for whom the sales environment is important. In other terms, consumers of high-end supermarkets do not look for a specific seller: they look for a particular *selling atmosphere*. And, in an unexpected way, the sales environment is the organizational lever Eataly relies on to generate the experience of soft quality. Eataly shows a precise mimetic ability: it valorizes the soft dimension of quality, without renouncing to the hard one, by mimicking the trusting relationship of AFNs through impersonal judgment devices strategies where the selling atmosphere substitutes the personal relations with a specific seller. As Oscar Farinetti, the patron of Eataly, declared: “The street market has been a tremendous suggestion to me, I tried to recreate the same atmosphere at Eataly”⁷. Soft quality in high-end supermarkets is thus connected to the easiness of access and to the physical and social pleasantness of the sale place. In Eataly, *quality is in the air*.

This findings support the idea that – in the eyes of the consumers – Eataly looks like a new large-scale distribution retail format that offers a new food distribution paradigm inspired by concepts such as sustainability, sharing and responsibility (Sebastiani et al. 2013). It goes without saying that the “eyes of the consumers” conflict with the workers protests against low wages and precariousness, with the buyer-power Eataly exercises on suppliers and with the tremendous political capital of the founder, which gave to Eataly a key role in the EXPO 2015 “Feeding the planet” in Milano. From this viewpoint, the strategic mimicry of Eataly and its positioning in the quality space stands out as *camouflage* (Gambetta 1998).

Our results show that mimetic quality is being articulated and reframed in given quality spaces and organizational settings. Quality conventions and judgment devices combine differently but coherently with chains profile and consumers representations. Quality is a

⁷ R. Fiori, *Eataly è unica come Benigni*, “La Stampa”, 21th december 2014.

contested field and quality conventions spread from consumers to producers, pointing to the relevance of an analysis that includes “complete” commodity circuits from production to consumption and not, as it is usually done, only from production to distribution (Ponte 20..).

With regard to the “conventional-alternative” dimensions of food production and distribution, at the macro-level mimetic quality points to the capacity of capitalism to absorb critical pressures (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). In the case of Eataly, this seems to occur primarily through narratives. When, during a public event, a Sicilian farmer complained that in Eataly its agro-food goods were sold at a fivefold price than what was paid to him by the wholesaler, the patron Farinetti began a long tirade on the concept of narrative, claiming that a product has no value if you’re not able to build a narrative on it (Bukowski 2015). Mimetic quality activates thus new justificatory discourses in order to resist the anticapitalist critique encoded in AFNs narratives: “In fact, critique has an internally transformative influence on capitalism. Capitalism incorporates the values that were the basis for its critique” (Rendtorff 2014, p. 261).

At the meso-level, the concept of mimetic quality points to the relevance of organizational hybrids, namely those organizations that respond strategically to the new quality mixes and combine institutional logics in unprecedented ways (Haigh et al. 2015).

At the micro-level, finally, the idea of mimetic quality points to purchasing choices as a *situational competence*, where individual-level traits matter less than chain-related features. Judgment on purchasing always takes place in *situations* where valuation is spatially localized and temporally marked (Hutter and Stark 2015).

Creative mimetics, in fact, must be necessarily dynamic and able to adapt quickly to the evolving demand. For this reason, further localized analyses that take account of differences in time and space are needed. A broader understanding of quality strategies in hybrid organizations will come, for instance, from a deepening of young consumers quality expectations, who according to our empirical findings appear the less sensitive to the strategy of creating soft quality through the sales environment. Or, through a comparative perspective, an analysis about how mimetic levers change in different contexts: while a sales environment reproducing the traditional markets atmosphere exists – and seems to work – in Italy, in other Eataly’s point of sales around the world other mimetic strategies

may be implemented in order to meet different consumers expectations and ideas about what quality is. Case studies focusing on Eataly's selling points in New York, Chicago, Monaco, Istanbul, San Paolo, Dubai, Tokyo or Seoul, where stores are located, will provide useful elements to understand how quality strategies pursued by hybrid organizations can adapt to the context.

References (to complete)

- AGCM (2013) Indagine conoscitiva IC43 - Settore della Grande Distribuzione Organizzata. Available at: <http://www.agcm.it/indagini-conoscitive-db/open/C12564CE0049D161/973E4D42D69C4A11C1257BC60039BBA0.html> (accessed 30 November 2016).
- Arcidiacono D (2016) La grande distribuzione alimentare. In: Barbera F, Dagnes J, Salento A and Spina F (eds) *Il capitale quotidiano. Un manifesto per l'economia fondamentale*. Rome: Donzelli, pp. 74-87.
- Barbera F and Audifredi S (2012) In Pursuit of Quality. The Institutional Change of Wine Production Market in Piedmont. *Sociologia Ruralis* 52(3): 311-331.
- Barham E (2003) Translating terroir: the global challenge of French AOC labelling. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19: 127-138.
- Beckert J and Aspers P (2011) *The worth of goods: Valuation and pricing in the economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Biggart NW and Beamish TD (2003) The economic sociology of conventions: habit, custom, practice, and routine in market order. *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 443-464.
- Boltanski L and Thévenot L (1991) *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Boltanski L and Thévenot L (2006) *On Justification*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Borghi V and Vitale T (2006) Convenzioni, economia morale e ricerca sociologica. *Sociologia del lavoro* 104: 7-34.
- Bukowski W (2015) *La danza delle mozzarelle. Slow food, Eataly, Coop e la loro narrazione*. Roma: Edizioni Alegre.
- Callon M, Meadel C and Rabeharisoa V (2001) The economy of qualities. *Economy and Society* 31(2): 194-217.
- Dansero E and Puttilli M (2014) Multiple territorialities of alternative food networks: six cases from Piedmont, Italy. *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* 19: 626-643.
- DellaPosta D, Shi Y and Macy M (2015) Why Do Liberals Drink Lattes? *American Journal of Sociology* 120(5): 1473-1511.

- DiMaggio PJ and Powell WW (eds) (1991) *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis* (Vol. 17). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Eymard-Duverney F (1989) Conventions de qualité et formes de coordination. *Revue Économique* 40 (2): 329-359.
- Gallarza MG, Gil-Saura I and Holbrook MB (2011) The value of value: further excursions on the meaning and role of customer value. *Journal of consumer behavior* 10(4): 179-191.
- Gambetta D (2005) Deceptive Mimicry in Humans. In Hurley S and Chater N (eds) *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science. Volume 2: Imitation, Human Development, and Culture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 221-242.
- Gambetta D (2009) Signaling. In Hedström P and Bearman (eds) *The Oxford handbook of analytical sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 168-194.
- Grasseni C (2013) *Beyond alternative food networks. Italy's purchase groups*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hauser M, Jonas K and Riemann R (2011) Measuring salient food attitudes and food-related values. An elaborated, conflicting and interdependent system. *Appetite* 57(2): 329-338.
- Honkanen P, Verplanken B and Olsen SO (2006) Ethical values and motives driving organic food choice. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 5(5): 420-430.
- Hutter M and Stark D (2015) Pragmatist perspectives on valuation: An introduction. In: Antal AB, Hutter M and Stark D (eds) *Moments of valuation. Exploring sites of dissonance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-12.
- Johnston J and Baumann S (2007) Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing. *American Journal of Sociology* 113(1): 165-204.
- Karpik L (2010) *Valuing the Unique: The Economics of Singularities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kebir L and Torre A (2012) Geographical proximity and new short supply food chains. In: Lazzeretti L (ed) *Creative Industries and Innovation in Europe: Concepts, Measures and Comparative Case Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Lamine C (2005) Settling shared uncertainties: local partnerships between producers and consumers. *Sociologia ruralis* 45(4): 324-345.
- Murdoch J, Marsden T and Banks J (2000) Quality, nature and embeddedness: some theoretical considerations in the context of the food sector. *Economic Geography* 76: 107-125.
- Murdoch J and Miele M (1999) 'Back to nature': changing 'worlds of production' in the food sector. *Sociologia Ruralis* 39: 465-483.
- Murdoch J and Miele M (2004) Culinary networks and cultural connections: A conventions perspective. In: Amin A and Thrift N (eds) *The Blackwell Cultural Economy Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 231-248.
- Nelson P (1970) Information and consumer behavior. *Journal of political economy* 78(2): 311-329.

- Onozaka Y, Nurse G and McFadden DT (2010) Local food consumers: how motivations and perceptions translate to buying behavior. *Choices* 25(1): 1-6.
- Parasuraman A, Zeithaml VA and Berry LL (1994) Reassessment of expectations as a comparison standard in measuring service quality: implications for further research. *Journal of Marketing* 58(1): 111-124.
- Pettenati G and Dansero E (2015) La territorialità degli AFN: rappresentazioni, processi e politiche. I risultati della mappatura. In: *AFNIA workshop*, Torino (IT), 15 February 2015.
- Ponte S (2009) Governing through quality: conventions and supply relations in the value chain for South African wine. *Sociologia Ruralis* 49(3): 236-257.
- Ponte S (2016) Convention theory in the Anglophone agro-food literature: Past, present and future. *Journal of Rural Studies* 44: 12–23.
- Reeves CA and Bednar DA (1994) Defining quality: alternatives and implications. *Academy of management Review* 19(3): 419-445.
- Rendtorff JD (2014) *French Philosophy and Social Theory. A Perspective for Ethics and Philosophy of Management*. Rotterdam: Springer Netherlands.
- Sage C (2003) Quality in alternative food networks: Conventions, regulations and governance. In: *Policies, governance and innovations for rural areas: International seminar*, Università della Calabria, Arcavacata di Rende (IT), 21-23 November 2003.
- Salais R and Storper M (1992) The four ‘Worlds’ of contemporary industry. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 16: 169-193.
- Sebastiani R, Montagnini F and Dalli D (2013) Ethical consumption and new business models in the food industry. Evidence from the Eataly case. *Journal of business ethics* 114(3): 473-488.
- Storper M and Salais R. (1997) *Worlds of Production: the Action Frameworks of the Economy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sylvander B (1995) Conventions de qualité, marchés et institutions: le cas des produits de qualité spécifique. In: Nicolas F and Valceschini E (eds) *Agro-alimentaire: une économie de la qualité*. Versailles: Editions Quae, pp. 167-183.
- Thévenot L (1995) Des marchés aux normes. In: Allaire G and Boyer R (eds) *La grande transformation de l'agriculture: Lectures conventionnalistes et regulationnistes*. Paris: INRA-Economica, pp. 33-51.
- Tirole J (1988) *The theory of industrial organization*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Warde A, Wright D and Gayo-Cal M (2008) The omnivorous orientation in the UK. *Poetics* 36(2): 148-165.