

Article

Revitalization of Food in Sweden—A Closer Look at the REKO Network

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Abstract: Can parts of the future food system include bi-weekly opportunities to purchase uneven stocks of produce at semi-remote locations? Current development in the Swedish food system suggests so. In the last few years, the Swedish Alternative Food Network ‘REKO’ has grown at an explosive pace. This anthropological article describes and discusses the organizational structure and motivations of the network, as well as discusses it from a revitalization perspective. From a netnographical and policy analysis perspective it is shown how the network uses social media and policy to convey a low bureaucracy, end to end, commercial space for local food—understood as a more “simple” way to achieve direct relationships in the food supply chain and thus create opportunities for local food networks. By adopting a view of the conventions and values of this Alternative Food Network as representing a parallel system aiming at facilitating direct relationships between ends in the food supply chain, the REKO initiative can be understood as a feasible model for a more satisfactory culture without needing to replace the mainstream food supply. The findings of the research deepen the understanding of REKO in Sweden by pointing towards how it can be understood as a sign of change of consumer preference and of prioritization of official policy concerns. The article also points towards how grass root movements can replicate success rapidly using policy documents capturing experiences and best practices spread online through social media.



Citation: Gruvaeus, A.; Dahlin, J. Revitalization of Food in Sweden—A Closer Look at the REKO Network. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 10471. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131810471>

Academic Editor: Luigi Roselli

Received: 18 August 2021

Accepted: 16 September 2021

Published: 21 September 2021

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Keywords: alternative food; revitalization; food systems; local communities

1. Introduction

For being a Thursday afternoon in December, the parking lot in the urban sprawl of a southeastern Swedish city was unusually full of activity. Twenty something cars, vans and small trucks all parked with their rears facing inward formed a small u-shaped space where farmers and small-scale producers handed over pre-paid foods to enthusiastic customers, forming lines in front of the car-trunks. Bi-weekly, this parking lot was transformed to a farmers’ market of pre-ordered goods. This Thursday had more visitors than usual since Christmas was the following week and the demand for traditional hams had been particularly high. One farmer had enrolled her children to help, keeping them busy crossing people from a list as they collected their ham and went about their day, often with a smile on their face. About half an hour after the first cars had showed up, the farmers started to pack the flags or signs signifying their presence back into their cars or vans. A few minutes later, the parking lot was once again empty.

Such was the scene on a pick-up meet of REKO, an alternative food network which has grown rapidly in Finland and Sweden over the last few years. The name REKO is constructed by wordplay on the Swedish words “Rejäl”—sturdy and “Konsumtion”—consumption as well as “Eko”, the common abbreviation for Ekologisk—Organic. The word “reko” is also used colloquially in Sweden meaning “decent, fair, straight”. As of January 2021, there are approximately 220 REKO-rings active in Sweden with around 800,000 members in its associated Facebook groups [1]. REKO is organized in a decentralized “grass roots” manner with local nodes coordinating purchases of local food through

digital platforms—primarily Facebook. The first REKO-network was founded in 2013 in the (largely Swedish-speaking) Österbotten region of Finland by initiative of small-scale food activist Thomas Snellman with support from the EU-program EkoNu. Inspiration came from Local Food Networks in France, but unlike the French model where consumers pledged to buy a certain amount of product during a set interval, REKO was built around one-off purchases coordinated before each delivery. REKO then spread to Sweden in 2016 when local food enthusiasts in Grästorp municipality copied the Finnish model. The network is decentralized and without any formal governance or leadership. It is held together by practicing the same policy and voluntary participation of members in online discussions. Participation in the network is free of charge and no commitments of continuous purchases are made. A particular aspect of REKO is that all purchases of food are made in the digital platform and then at a regular interval delivered to a common “pick-up” location where producers and consumers meet up—no actual soliciting takes place under the meeting between consumer and producer.

This article emanates from a curiosity sparked by the quick ascent of the REKO network in Sweden in the past five years. When first coming into contact with REKO it sparked questions such as: How could it have grown so fast? Isn't this an inconvenient rather than simple way to get food? The purpose of the research is thus to investigate if networks of this kind constitute a feasible future for the food system. Such issues were not easily found in studies up to that point, but academic interest had mainly concerned motivations of the consumers participating. The investigation sits at the intersection of networking through global communication platforms and local consumption. The aim of the article is to by way of mapping the REKO-network understand the structure of network and how it adds value based consumption into the food system. The article discuss how alternative food can be understood with help of the anthropological concept of revitalization which highlights the moral and cultural values of the network. The focus of the network, instead of consumer and producer relationships, allows an analysis of how REKO accommodate both “ground up” and “top down” desires of change to the food system.

By its findings, the article places itself in the vein of alternative food research which argues for an understanding of alterity as dependent upon values and geography rather than relation to the capitalist system or adoption of certain farming practices. This example of a Swedish local food network can also be viewed as an example of how grassroots movements adapt to the social media landscape and use the tools widely available to create more satisfactory societies.

The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 introduces and discuss the terms alternative food and revitalization and how they are understood and used in this article. The chapter also gives a brief account of the Swedish context in which REKO is situated as well as an account of previous research on REKO. The chapter concludes with summarizing the discussions of the chapter into a research framework which understands alterity as a proposition of parallel value regimes aimed at some other definition of quality. Section 3 describes the methods and materials of the article. Section 4 presents the results in the form of a description of the REKO network and the values constituting its value regime. Section 5 discusses the results before the article ends with additional reflections in Section 6.

2. Literature Review and Previous Research

2.1. *Alternative Food and Revitalization*

The REKO network, is a supply chain formed as an alternative to the mainstream way of distributing food. Alternative food is a subject which has been researched extensively elsewhere. Here, a brief account will be given of where this article places itself in this scholarly context.

Motivations for engaging in alternative food can be manifold: ecological stewardship, justice, opposing commercialism [2,3], preserving heritage [4] or something as simple as sharing with a peer [5]. The understanding of “alterity” employed in this article is as a

figured vector—pointing from any felt dissatisfactions with the mainstream food system. This understanding allows inclusion of the different specific motivations people might have to participate in alternative food movements to qualify as “alternative”—notwithstanding if the motivation is to change the world or find an economic niche.

With alterity defined as departing from to the mainstream food system, this paper understands Alternative Food Networks as formed around different values and goals than the mainstream. See Figure 1 for illustration on how a short supply chain in this sense would be “alternative”. Following this, terms loaded with values will have different meaning. For example, the term quality has different meaning in context promoting standardization and quantity as opposed to quality in the context of requesting small scale local food embedded within a relation between supply chain participants. These different values and embedded meanings foster different conventions—that is practices fulfilling such values. Convention theory—the study of how describing and analyzing different “worlds” of quality [6], their routines, logics and economics is an established perspective in studying alternative food. This perspective has been influential by the works of David Goodman who together with E. Melaine DuPuis and Michael K. Goodman from convention theory forms an understanding of Alternative Food Networks as “cognitive structures embedded in routines, which create and stabilize relational communities of practice of mutually qualified producers and consumers” [6] (p. 52). In this understanding quality follows from behaving in order with the right convention.

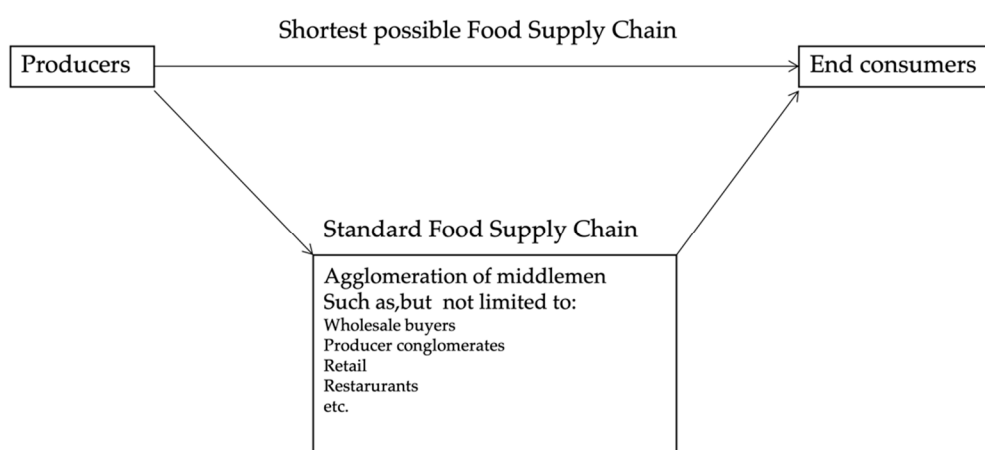


Figure 1. Model illustrating Food Supply Chain configurations. Since the mainstream are “long”, short can be understood as alternative. A goal for Alternative Food Network’s is usually to facilitate shortest food supply chains. The spread of digital media platforms has enabled food supply chains in their shortest constitution. The parts of the supply chain can be understood as corresponding to meeting different values and their embedded meaning.

A value-and thus convention-focused understanding of alterity is in line with an approach suggested by Blumberg et al. in a recent article, where alterity does not have to choose between explanations relying on, for example, capitalist process versus alternative geography [7]. Such an approach for understanding Alternative Food Networks seems common sense since many different values exist outside of the industrial food system which can be motivation to forming distributive ecosystems. Focusing on the embedded meaning and latent different conventions in values enables an evaluation that draws on Clayton Christensen’s model of innovation and organization in value networks. This model, which was developed in the 1990s, describes how ecosystems form around certain value propositions. The model in its original context was used to illustrate firms’ positions and what needs were required to meet demand on their respective markets. But it can also shed some general light on alternative food systems. The value network of Christensen is connected to the idea of the technological paradigm, defined as a “pattern of solution of selected technological problems”—only broader, aiming at solving value-problems [8]. This paper borrows and adapts the term ‘value network’ to discuss Alternative Food

Networks' contra-industrial farming in the following understanding: Value networks are formed around certain needs and are met by propositions utilizing certain technology and organization.

Acknowledging that industrial farming and Alternative Food Networks seek to upfill different value propositions makes it possible to understand the network-forms as "techniques" aiming at solving different problems and needing different conventions. This view of networks formed around different problems calls for different solutions and meeting different demands; for example, enough calories to sustain the population versus increasing existential angst of the middle classes in the West [2]. This means that even though Alternative Food Networks are defined in relation to the industrial food supply, they are not necessarily competing if they are meeting parallel and non-competing demands. Implied by a focus on alternative values is that some values are left unfulfilled, enough so that there is deliberate effort to organize new systems around them.

Cultural dissatisfaction and organization towards fulfillment are sometimes in anthropological terms discussed as revitalization. The term "Revitalization" as defined by its originator, Anthony F C Wallace, means a "deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" [9]. This paper draws upon Wallace's definition of revitalization, serves as inspiration for a framework to discuss the cultural goals of REKO. Especially the wordings "deliberate organized, conscious" and "to construct a more satisfying culture". This adaption allows for a focus on both practices and motivations in an analysis of change and possible futures. In this understanding, the urge to "construct a more satisfying culture" ignites the "deliberate, organized and conscious" and creates frames and limitations under which the urge for more cultural satisfaction can be met. It should be noted that Wallace serves here as inspiration and not as a set model for analysis. For example, the discussion here places little emphasis on tradition, which is an important theme for Wallace. There are several reasons to depart from an orthodox understanding of revitalization. For example, Dahlin and Svensson in this issue point towards that the original concept is tied to the anthropological vogue of its era [10] (p. 6). Still, as Dahlin and Svensson argue, the concept is promising since it allows for a discussion of transformation that considers both material and cultural aspects.

To do this, the paper makes use of definition of revitalization as a "deliberate, organized effort" which is aimed at a "more satisfying culture" to operationalize an approach that uses the idea of revitalization as framework for sensemaking. It is an approach that assumes that engaging in food supply either as a customer or producer can have other motivations than mere sustenance or economic rationales.

By focusing on what values alternative food networks promote, this approach to revitalization allows for the identification of aspects of mainstream structures which are felt unsustainable by at least some of the participants in these movements. Doing this uses Wallace's definition as a tool to identify motivations for turning from the mainstream and instead engaging in something alternative. This would constitute the "technological paradigm" referenced above for solving the value network's needs. In this way, revitalization can be thought of as a purpose of change that drives organization around alternative values.

By thinking in terms of value networks and how well different practices correspond to fulfill these values, sources of potential cultural dissatisfactions and needs of revitalization can possibly be identified. For example, if there is demand for the product being embedded with a direct relationship between producer and consumer, there will be cultural demand for revitalizing solutions that facilitate short chains of supply. This is a concept of revitalization without friction between innovation and tradition. Rather, it places emphasis on revitalization while recognizing the tendency that such efforts often borrow from or draw on experiences, interpretations, or ideas of the past. We are, after all, by necessity entering the future backwards.

The model comes together as follows: If the values of a revitalization movement correspond to a felt dissatisfaction with the culture, then values of an alternative food

network can be understood as an organizational vector to solve a particular cultural unsustainability. The success for alternative food networks could therefore be understood as dependent on the extent of the felt dissatisfactions with the mainstream and the ability to address them. If the problems seen with the mainstream are widely felt, the potential to scale these alternative value networks is larger, and will then be met with different propositions to solve the problem. Meaning that in alternative movements there is a “pocket” of potential futures whose feasibility is dependent on how widespread the cultural dissatisfaction is, and the scalability of the conventions the solution suggests.

To better understand the possible cultural dissatisfactions which REKO might be trying to solve, the paper will in the next section provide some context of Swedish agricultural development and important actors in it.

2.2. On Sweden's Agricultural Development

In 2007, more people in the world live in cities than in rural areas. For Sweden this tipping point occurred in the 1930s [11,12]. During the late 1800s and 1900s, Sweden underwent a rapid transformation from a rural society based on agriculture and self-sustenance to an industrial nation integrated in the global consumer goods market. In postwar times, the agricultural sector went from strategic national interest to free-market principles [13]. This development, together with Sweden joining the European Union, means that today the country is dependent on imports for much of its daily food items. The agricultural sector itself is import-dependent on fuel or other input goods, and many farms rely heavily on subsidies from the European Union [14,15]. In 1951, the agricultural sector in Sweden directly employed 869,000 people in Sweden on 282,187 farms—which is equivalent to 12 percent of the population [16]. In present times approximately (These numbers are pre-Covid19 pandemic estimates) 171,400 people, or 1.7 percent, are employed on 63,000 farms. Production of grains has increased, but the share of farms keeping livestock has decreased. This serves to illustrate how the amount of people having direct connection to the country's agriculture and food production has dwindled during the last 70 years. While there is reason to believe that a sharing economy of homegrown goods can still be important for producers [5] it seems to be a reasonable conclusion that there is more distance now than in the past, literal as well as allegorical, between crop and table—as illustrated by Figure 2 below. And although the food industries are a large and economically important sector, a minority of the revenues and jobs are connected to primary production.

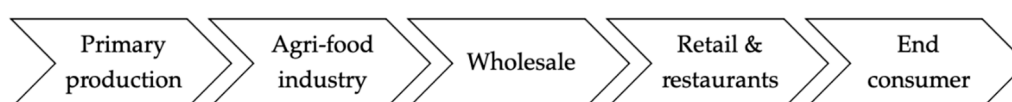


Figure 2. Illustration of a typical industrial food supply chain.

This transformation from a rurally-based agricultural nation to food as an industrial and effective effort could be understood as optimizing towards quantitative outputs. Better tools, mechanization and later robotization, and rearranging property ownership from communal and fragmented to larger continuous entities took place in Sweden via a series of reforms from the 18th century onwards. These reforms were mainly instigated by state institutions, with the aims of rationalization and more productivity. Institutional optimization towards greater productivity per labor hour is also visible in the fragmentation of each link in the supply chain towards discrete tasks where each actor focuses on one's comparative advantages: a day where a farmer takes her produce to the market is a day wasted and an agri-food industry not adopting the assembly line-logic of 1900s mass production would be left behind. The history of industrial agriculture and farming is the history of transforming the farm from a way to survive and perhaps trade the surplus in a small community to a more collective and centralized pursuit. This is a value-regime which has separated the producer from the role of direct distributor to the consumer. Farmers have been transferred from center to periphery, obscured for the end consumers,

and pressured by profit margins of other links in the food supply chain. In this context, movements facilitating more direct relationships and a shorter supply chain would in practice bring to life characteristics of the food-supply which were more prevalent in the past. It also points towards a transformation to a value regime which is very successful at fulfilling its core value: food on the table. However, in the process of feeding the nation, participants in the food-chain became obscured from each other.

2.2.1. State Support and the Housekeeping Associations

Important institutions in this rapid development of agricultural practices were house-keeping associations formed to further economic and social development in rural Sweden. And, as will be discussed further along, they continue to play a role. The associations, which were first formed in 1791, were state funded initiatives to accelerate effectivization in agriculture [17]. Similar associations and initiatives were formed in Finland (which by 1791 was a part of Sweden) and elsewhere; for example, the Granger movement in the USA. Development of agricultural practices remains the goal of the organization. The local house-keeping association organized under a central organization in 1948 and is currently known as "*Hushållningssällskapet*"—literally translated as "the association of Housekeeping."

The state's interest in developing food practices continues in the current times. In 2017, Sweden adopted a new food strategy [18] which states several goals that aims to perform some reconfigurations of the food production and supply of the nation. For example, aims to increase the production and consumption of organic food to 30 respectively 60 percent of national levels towards 2030 as well as to simplify rules. The strategy also aims to promote interaction between agents in the food supply ecosystem [19]. While accompanied by goals of increasing net production and effectiveness, the strategy shows some overlap in the public ambition, as well as some underlying motivations in Alternative Food Networks generally and REKO specifically: Several initiatives to fund food craftsmanship and support to knowledge hubs has been initiated with support from the strategy. The food strategy can therefore be seen as an example on how the demand for organic and local food has been growing in the Swedish society. The strategy will also be relevant as context to understand REKO's current network structure because of how it motivates *Hushållningssällskapet's* role as a knowledge hub and policy maker for the network. In 2017 *Hushållningssällskapet* was tasked by the Swedish government with describing and supporting REKO, which has been done by creating a web portal describing and formulating documents and guides to the identified best practices in the network. In a way, state funded efforts to influence agriculture and food production through *Hushållningssällskapet* has finally come full circle: From rationalization and growing large scale operations to supporting and growing the small and local.

2.2.2. Food Regulations

For the reader to better understand the rationale of some of the policies and practices of REKO, some words on Swedish food regulations are provided here. Commercial primary producers of food such as farmers of produce or livestock must register their operation to their regional council or department of agriculture depending on the type of business [20]. Refining or selling raw food items in a general commercial manner also must be registered with the proper authority. Delivering directly to end consumers or local restaurants or retailers who sell directly to consumers do not need to be registered separately. Exceptions to registration are also granted to recreational farming and producing—defined as personal operations conducted without seeking profitability [21]. Registered food companies may deliver directly to both end customers and retail. Operations which are not subject to the exceptions (direct selling to consumers and recreational nonprofit) have to comply with the full food safety regulations which regulates most processes from production to delivery. Operations subject to the exceptions must follow general guidelines about hygiene, safety and animal welfare. Detailed description of the rules is beyond this article's space and scope. But what is of interest and is something that provides important context

is the explicit ambition to provide simplified rules for direct consumer-producer supply. As discussed later, navigating the rules and regulations in the institutional frames is an important purpose of the REKO networks policy. Partly to help small scale actors find a space where they can develop and partly to run the network without transgressing formal law and regulations.

2.3. Previous Research on REKO

As REKO has grown during the last years, it has been catching the interest of researchers, journalists and government officials alike. From an academic standpoint, REKO has been approached from different angles, often with a focus on motivations for participation. One important motivation which seems to be commonly reoccurring is direct relationship. In one study, Isaksson & Cedermarck maps direct relationship as an important element for producers in short food supply chains such as REKO to transfer what they call embedded knowledge about their products [22]. The value of direct relationship is present in several other studies of REKO. For example: a study on consumer motivations in REKO by Helena Lindström found that among usual “universalist” motivations for engaging in local food networks, social interaction was an important value for consumers [3]. A 2020 survey of REKO’s impact for consumers in the Sjuhärad region in western Sweden also highlights the value of the direct relationship and contact with the producers of goods [23]. In a 2019 study of values for the different REKO-stakeholders, Hamod & Westin also highlight direct contact and building of relationship as an important value in REKO [24]. The direct relation as a value is present also in REKO’s origin country Finland: In a 2019 article by Ehrnström-Fuentes, Jauho, & Jallinoja, which presents research on perceptions of sustainability goals in REKO in Finland, the direct connection between consumers and producers, as well as between producers themselves, is seen as a prolific social sustainability value created by the REKO network [25]. Further, achieving the direct relationship seem from a consumer perspective to fulfill a motivation of supporting local food production and building a better economic niche for small scale food production. This theme is especially visible in the news coverage in both local and national media that have covered about REKO during the years since its start [26–28].

2.4. Research Framework

The literature review is brought together as a framework (also illustrated in Figure 3) in the following sense: Drawing on Wallace’s idea of revitalization, Alterity can be understood as a vector pointing from felt dissatisfactions towards an idea of a more satisfying culture—to realize this, there is need for conventions, i.e., structures and routines which allow for the “more satisfying” understanding of quality to be embedded in the products. This new formation can then be understood as a parallel value regime with different ideas of quality and how to create it.

The development of Sweden as an agricultural nation points towards a supply chain which has neglected end-to-end relationship, which was a common part in past times) in favor of industrial capability. This development includes creation of institutional logics built to serve the latter and not the former.

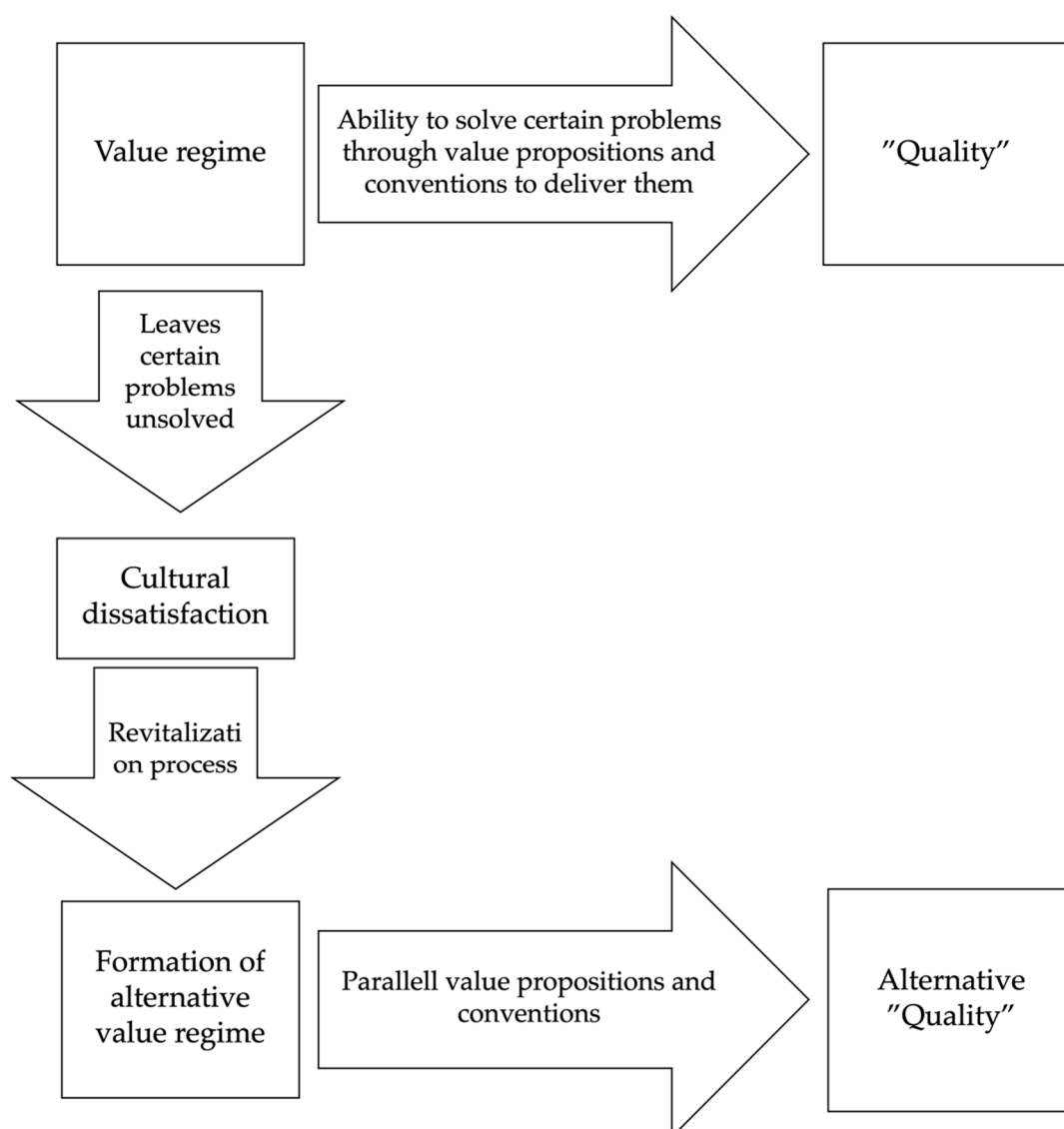


Figure 3. Illustration of analytical framework.

3. Method & Materials

The anthropological research behind this article consisted of three parts: The first is fieldwork which has been executed in the form of netnography and participant observation around a REKO-network in southeastern Sweden in 2019 and early 2020. The netnographical study was modelled after the recommendations made by Robert Kozinetz work on netnographical methods, opting for an approach that tried to better understand the structure and mechanisms of REKO. Access was requested and granted for public groups on Facebook, due to the public nature of both physical and digital space, all collection of observations of behavior was kept anonymous and generalized to functions in the network. The group's activities and web pages were primarily treated as archival data [29] (p. 165)—that is data that is created without the interference of the researcher. Before the bi-weekly pick-ups, the public group of the network was observed and classified according to a simple schema of the nature of the activity. The purpose of utilizing the netnographical approach was to map and understand the wider REKO-ecosystem to understand the “conventions” and “routines” formed that let REKO grow fast and meet the dissatisfactions felt in the obscure and bureaucratic mainstream formed around industrial priorities. This area of research was felt to be underdeveloped since much research focused on motivations of certain roles in the network such as consumer values.

The netnographic study of REKO was then complemented with participatory observations in one of the REKO networks in south-eastern Sweden. The purpose of these observations was to get a deeper understanding for the nature of the activity in the network outside of its digital milieu. Through participatory observations knowledge of length of pick-ups and interactions between participants could be gained, it also provided opportunities for interactions and brief interviews with participants. Ten observations of this kind were done during the winter 2019–2020. These observations served as a tool for reflexive abduction with the archival data of the netnographic study. To further inform the fieldwork with illustrative examples, five interviews were conducted with different consumers to the REKO network in question as well as one in-depth interview with two producers in the network where the researcher spent several hours together with the producers at their farm. These interviews were done in a semi-structured manner and focused on identifying motivations to participate in the network. The purpose of these interviews was also to validate that the REKO network which was studied to describe the network mechanics did not seem to deviate from the general themes visible in other more quantitatively focused studies of the network. The fieldwork as a whole served as a ground for comparison and abduction with the second pillar of the research, which consisted of interviews of an expert character as well as a study of other investigations of REKO. One representative of *Hushållningssällskapet* (Translates roughly to “house keeping association” and will be referred to by its Swedish name in cursive throughout the article) (a non-governmental organization described more in earlier in the paper) was interviewed two times for approximately one hour each time. This informant was interviewed from his professional perspective as coordinator of a state sponsored initiative to help spread the network and its practices. Supplementing this was a longer interview with the founder of the original REKO-network, Tomas Snellman. These interviews were conducted in spring 2020. This part of the research also included studying the work on the REKO-network that was continuously emerging. It was by surveying the findings from the two first pillars fieldwork, interviews, and studies by other scholars that sparked interest in the subject of the third part which is the policy documents of REKO distributed by the NGO *Hushållningssällskapet*. This collection of documents, available online, was analyzed with inspiration from anthropologist Raymond Apthorpe’s description of policy as something that “tries to convey rather than describe” [30]. The research modalities are summarized in Table 1, which also lists some important contributions from each modality. This approach allowed describing analyzing network structure and mechanics. Compared to methods that would have utilized more participatory and interactive netno- and ethnographical approaches this research design might lack the “thickness” and deep investigation of personal accounts, this is certainly an important part of anthropology which could have furthered elevated the study. With the constraints which effected the research, the utilized approach at least allowed to cover some gaps which at the time was leaving us as researcher unsatisfied.

Table 1. Summary of research approach.

	Fieldwork	Supplementary Interviews	Policy Analysis
Techniques	Netnographical mapping of the network, observations on physical pick-ups	Open ended interviews with different actors in the network	Analytical framework of asking: What is the policy conveying
Goals	Understand and describe network structure and correspondence to behavior	Abductive reasoning with fieldwork.	Defining REKO’s alterity and core value propositions
Results	Descriptions of network structures and organizational mechanics. Insights in the official governments involvement	Re-emphasis on the importance of policy of the network, understanding of the role of official government	Conclusions about the function of policy in the network

4. Results: The REKO Organization

In the following section, the organization of REKO will be described in detail. The organizational matters are relevant to evaluate if the “solution” is feasible enough to be a widespread and stable convention—a new mainstream. It is also in this case a quite impressive adaptation and use of newer communication technology worthy of making accessible for a wider English-speaking audience.

The foundational unit of REKO is the local nodes—called “rings”, which is the forum where food and sometimes other commodities are exchanged. A REKO network “ring” usually consists of at least two separate Facebook groups: One, which is usually public, for coordinating delivery days between sellers and buyers; the other for active producers in the area which is used for discussion and knowledge sharing. In a usually bi-weekly interval, administrators advertise “pick-ups”—meaning a set time and place where producers and consumers meet up to hand over products. This is done by a separate post in the Facebook group for both consumers and producers. Following this post, the producers that will participate in this pick-up advertise their products in separate posts. This is usually done by a short advertising introduction followed by an index of products with their prices. The producers often use pictures of their products or from their farms or of themselves. In these posts, consumers then can make their orders. At the pick-ups, only the pre-ordered items get delivered, which are in many cases pre-paid using mobile payment services. No sales of extra items are made at the pick-ups. This process is illustrated in Figure 4. The reason for this is to work around regulations for sales in public spaces. For the same reason, the producers usually use their cars to both carry the products and as the place for making the handover. The pick-up spots are usually the same time after time, with some rings utilizing several spots in a region and arranging several pick-ups. For example, one ring in southeastern Sweden used three spots and kept the pick-up time to about half an hour each. When time was up in one place, the producers moved their cars in unison. The usual spaces used for pick-ups are parking lots adjacent to easily accessible places. Making agreements with the owners of the parking lots is one of the important roles of the ring’s administrators, who run and develop the rings as volunteers. Producers can choose freely which pick-ups they participate in and make no commitment to deliver any set quantities or set inventories.

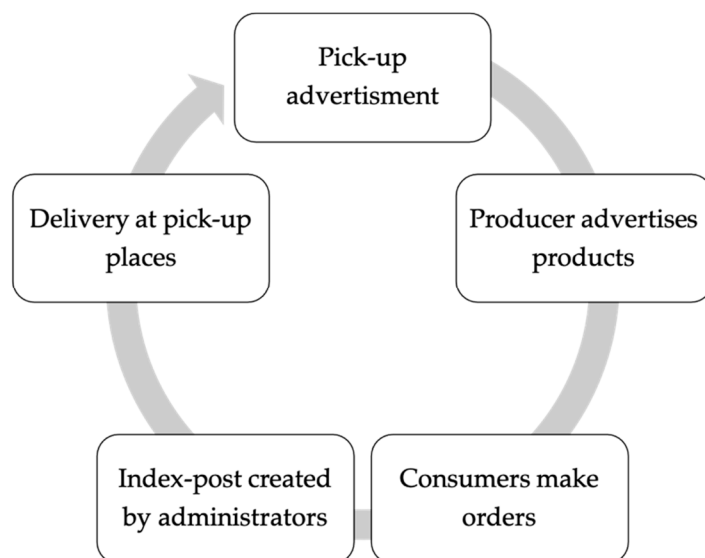


Figure 4. Schematic illustration of supply process in REKO rings.

There are three main defined roles which participants in REKO can adopt: Consumer, Producer and Administrator. The same person may assume several of these roles, meaning that consumers may also freely enter the ring as a producer and the administrators may be either a consumer or producer as well. This was exemplified in an interview during the

fieldwork; one interviewed producer used REKO to purchase other food which she did not herself produce to “come closer to a lifestyle which is self-sustained”.

The role of the administrators is to administrate the Facebook group, which is the usual coordination tool for the local network. This usually means creating posts advertising pick-ups as well as creating posts containing indexes of producers who will take part in a pick-up. Other tasks for the administrators include managing memberships; for example, by allowing members into the Facebook-group—which often use the privacy setting “closed,” which means that all Facebook users can find the group using Facebook’s search engine, but the group requires application for admittance. Besides these core tasks, administrators can be active in expanding or organizing the ring’s activities. The level of engagement in the online groups usually varies among different rings and since there is no formal organizational structure with authoritative power, the satisfaction and participation from consumers and producers is an important regulating mechanism. See Figure 5 for an illustration of how the different roles usually interact with each other. The separate groups for producers and administrators are places outside of the “ring” to highlight that these are supporting functions and not a core part of REKO’s foundational nodes.

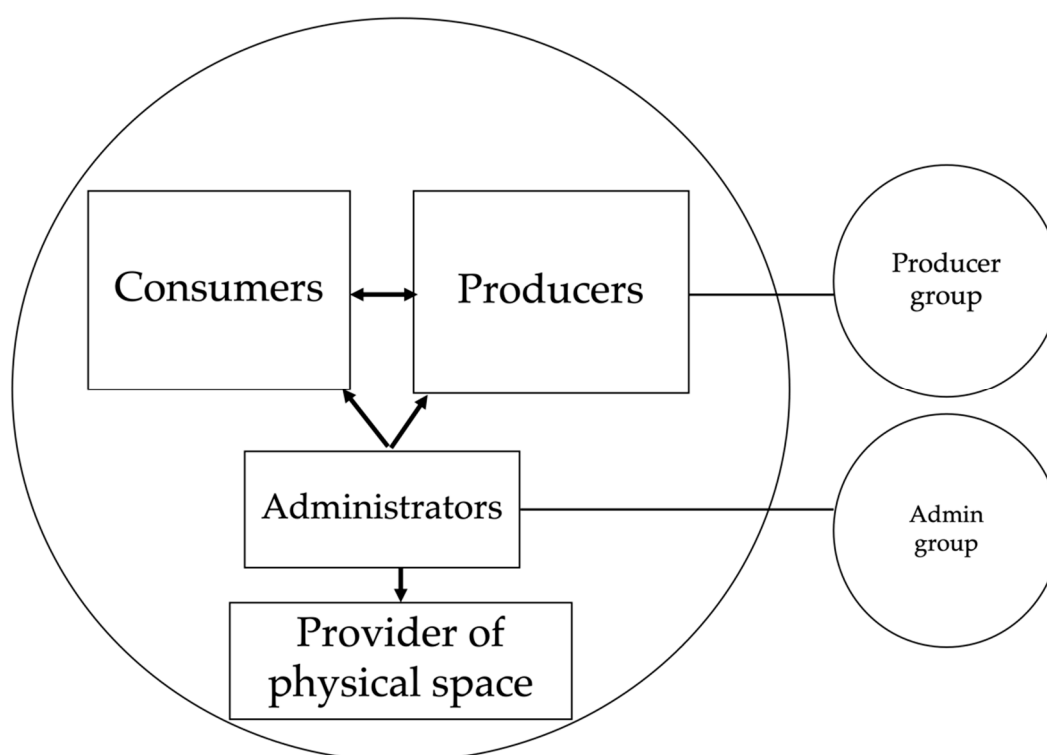


Figure 5. Schematic representation of a REKO ring network structure. At its core the ring “encloses” the commercial activity between consumers and producers, the activities of the administrators and the physical space and its provider. Outside the core elements are discussion groups for producers and administrators.

Some small-scale producers with high enthusiasm for the network travelled up to an hour by car just to deliver one or two small orders to rings further away—acts which no doubt were not very profitable from an economic standpoint, but as one producer said, it felt important for reasons such as “brand building” and sheer enthusiasm to meet other likeminded people and have the satisfaction of providing a requested food item.

As seen in Figure 6 the wider structure of REKO include resources outside of the social media platform used for distribution. Most important the resources provided on *Hushållningsällskapet*’s web, which both supports the network and are the link between the national food strategy and the network. The wider connections of a local network to other nodes inside the REKO ecosystem are upheld in part in digital and in part in physical

space by producers or consumers participating in several networks—it is not possible to “click through” the whole REKO network using only admittance to one Facebook group, so the rings themselves are highly independent and the network at large decentralized. There is a “nationwide” Facebook group for supporters and participants to discuss matters related to REKO, but activity in this forum is low compared to local rings, which can be interpreted as the practical aspects of REKO as a supply chain are of greater interest and value for the participants than public discussions on the subject.

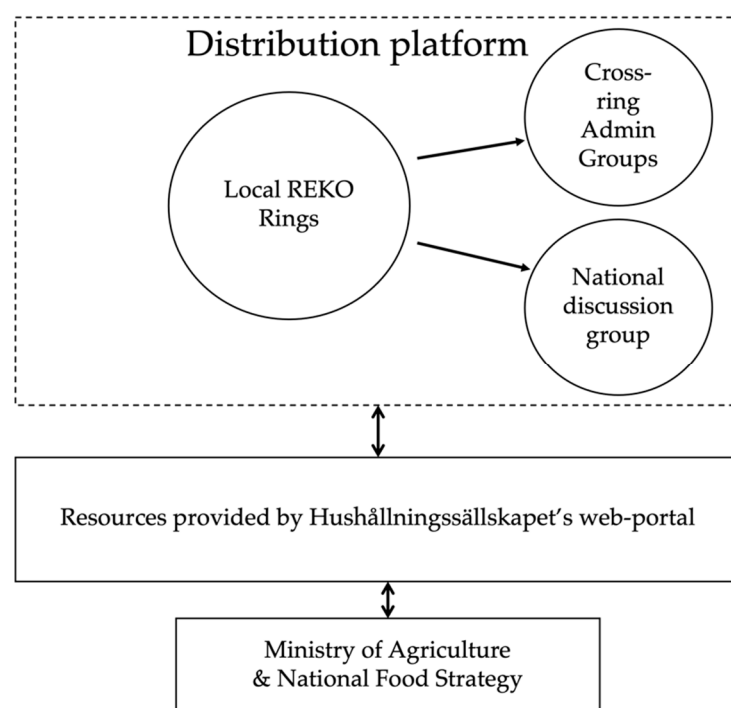


Figure 6. Schematic representation of REKO’s structure: The distribution platform (primarily Facebook) contains the meeting spaces for most participants activity and connections inside the network. Administrators from local groups have access to mutual “cross-ring” admin groups for discussions. All participants have access to a national discussion group Interacting with the participant network and their distribution platform are the resources from *Hushållningssällskapet*. Whom in turn interacts with the ministries. While not exhaustive this model serves to visualize different platforms relevant for the network—each with its own purpose and constituents.

In the ecosystem of groups, there are also private groups for administrators to help each other. Several of these groups are created, directly or with support of staff from *Hushållningssällskapet*, as an effort to support with coordination and help networking since *Hushållningssällskapet* often functions as a source to which people turn for help with starting rings after their governmental assignment. In many places, connections between *Hushållningssällskapet* and local food producers are already in place since their function is as local knowledge hubs and resource centers as well as consultants for specific matters.

At its fundamental level, REKO can be described as consisting of producers and consumers, with some of them taking on the role of administrators. This is the basic composition of a local ring, which uses Facebook and public space as a coordinating tool. Furthermore, representatives from “*Hushållningssällskapet*” are part of the network by both providing support to administrators and administrating a website containing descriptions and resources for REKO in Swedish. Through *Hushållningssällskapet*, the network is extended into government bodies. The actors and their main functions are presented in the following summary in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of REKO actors.

Role	Description
Consumer	Orders and consumes products from the REKO-networks through Facebook groups
Producer	Provides products in the network, creates “for sale posts” in advance of the meetups they are going to participate in.
Group administrator	Creates summaries of products for sale, moderates the local Facebook-groups.
<i>Hushållningssällskapet</i>	Describes and supports local rings and creation of new rings
Ministry of Agriculture	Funds <i>Hushållningssällskapet</i> ’s engagement in REKO
Distribution platform	Provides the communications-platform and infrastructure for REKO to coordinate producers and consumers. Because of its already widespread user base, Facebook is the usual platform, although some rings also use alternative media platforms such as Local Food Hubs.

Decentralized initiatives such as REKO that are independent of established state or private venues, do not fit neatly into the traditional Swedish organizational norms of formal associations or companies. Rather, they compare better to the loose network structure which characterize online communities. Netnography scholar Robert Kozinets provides some typical network structures which are common on the web. And as a network structure, REKO has many of the aspects of a network Kozinets classifies as an “Interest Group Alliance” where “popular and shared topics unite multiple smaller groups” [29] (p. 45). These local groups are characterized by decentralized “influencers” and separate social hubs held together by ideology or sentiments and can also be composed of different kinds of people fulfilling different roles. At a level of analysis focused on the “life” of the separate REKO-rings, the interest group alliance maps very well at first glance. However, by zooming out and acknowledging the involvement of the state through *Hushållningssällskapet*, the interest group alliance does not paint the whole picture. In 2017, the efforts by *Hushållningssällskapet* caused concerns [31] for some producers that the initiative would be converted into a centralized and governmentalized project; worries which could be understood as transforming the network from an interest alliance towards a hierarchical surveillance of local food. These concerns were visible also in the interviews with the *Hushållningssällskapet* representative, who stressed on several occasions that they have no executive authority over REKO and every ring in principle is free to do as they see best, which some of the rings chose to do, creating local variations of policy or organizational structure. For example, some rings have evolved closer to a regular market where sales can be done without pre-ordering, while other chose to use their own graphic profiles and not the ones provided by *Hushållningssällskapet*.

Hushållningssällskapet’s role as a “knowledge hub”, illustrated below in Figure 7, could within Kozinets’ framework be viewed as supplementing the interest group alliance with a “customer support” or, for prospective REKO-enthusiasts, take the role of “audience network” [29] (pp. 39–42), where the separate nodes of a network are connected either by their support or are broadcast from a central source. At a micro level, the network also contains different social constellations of personal relationships between the agents.

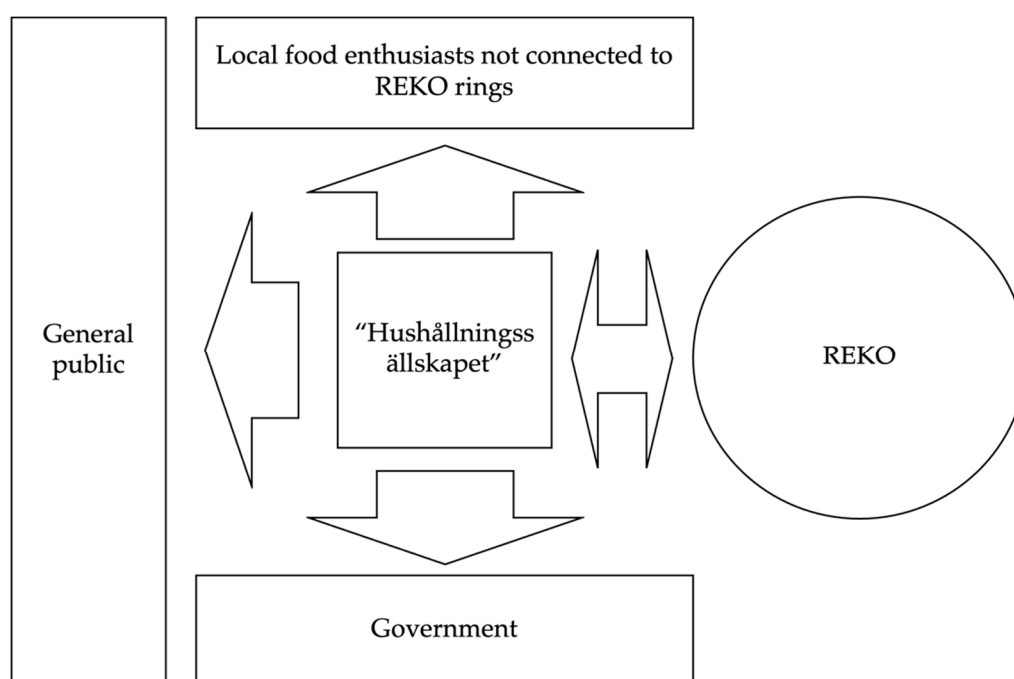


Figure 7. *Hushållningssällskapet's* position in the REKO-network. To the public, non-connected local food enthusiasts and to government bodies, it functions as a broadcasting node in an audience network. To the REKO movement, the relationship is reciprocal with more of a "customer support" character "aiming to serve" as Kozinetz puts it—through providing hands on guidance. In return *Hushållningssällskapet* is receiving information which allows it to fulfill its tasks assigned by the governmental bodies.

The adoption of a loose network structure of the "interest group alliance"-type, outside of common practices of Swedish formal associations and with a high level of decentralization of the network and few formal roles and little administrative tasks, would through the lens of the framework of this paper suggest that REKO is currently trying to solve precisely the problem of obscurity and anonymity in the food supply chain which in the context segment of the article was identified as a consequence of the industrialization of food production. As will be seen in the policy of REKO (cited in the next section), besides the requirements of no intermediaries and presenting only local foods, not much attention from the networks is per se paid to farming practices. Neither is the network trying to implement alternatives to commercialism. Rather, it is trying to strengthen commercial viability of local food by supplying a platform for commerce. Taken together with the rapid spread of REKO nodes through the country, it seems like the movement has found a cultural dissatisfaction that has been widely felt and a way to replicate the initiative without much formal organization. One part of the ability to spread with consistency is due to the replicable policy provided on *Hushållningssällskapet's* web.

4.1. A Network Kept Together by Policy

To understand the thought world forming conventions for the value regime of an online phenomenon (which REKO partially is), an investigation usually must broaden from the social interactions of its members to include other media, documents, or sites important for the network [29] (p. 45). One such important place for understanding REKO is the online resources on *Hushållningssällskapet's* web site, which was created as part of their mission from the ministry of agriculture and contains unofficial yet influential policy and guidelines of REKO. Anthropologist Raymond Apthorpe argues that policy reflects cultural values and moral systems at the same time as it tries to convey rather than describe [30] (p. 55). An understanding in line with revitalization movements having focus on conveying cultural values. Wallace writes how revitalization movements "must innovate not merely discrete items but a new cultural system, specifying new relationships" [9] (p.265) By studying the

REKO networks policy in this perspective, it is possible to identify what more satisfactory culture the network tries to convey. This is an understanding of policy in revitalization movements as conveying that a particular part of the culture is unsatisfactory as well as giving the means to correct this dissatisfaction. It tries to convey to participants to focus on certain values and doing this in certain ways. Policy in this understanding is a tool to align individual motivations with a certain alterity. Hosted on *Hushållningssällskapet's* website are links to the nationwide Facebook groups as well as a peer-created map containing all REKO rings in Sweden. For prospective REKO enthusiasts, *Hushållningssällskapet's* web portal will likely be the introduction to REKO since the portal is the top search result on most search engines. On this web portal, *Hushållningssällskapet* presents the following seven principles as foundation for what constitutes a REKO-network:

- Only food and by-products from own food production
- Only sales of own products
- No middlemen
- The products are pre-ordered before each delivery
- Each order is an individual agreement between buyer and seller
- Trust between everyone involved—honest and factual dialogue
- It should be free to participate in a REKO ring

These principles will also face an enthusiast who has found REKO directly on Facebook since a standard practice is featuring the principles as mandatory reading or sticky post (always on top of the feed) in the group. The two first regulate what can be sold—products from one's food production and its by-products. The third defines the short supply-chain by not allowing, for example, a group of small producers to sell at a REKO-ring through a third party in small-scale wholesale. The fourth and fifth keep the pick-ups legal by working around rules for public sales and soliciting, and keeps liability for adherence to rules and regulations on the respective producers and consumers. The sixth and seventh principles promote social values of trust and inclusiveness which prevents REKO from being used for creating local trusts or cartels in local food where competitors are denied access to the local food customer base. A “conveying”, in the Apthorpe sense explained above, part of the policy is also visible in how the policy documents on *Hushållningssällskapet's* web portal is reinforcing openness and market principles over protectionism of local customers: “let consumers choose what they want to buy. If all producers report their goods openly and honestly, the market will regulate itself. The desired survives. The unwanted falls away” [32]. The conventions conveyed to create a more satisfactory /higher quality culture can by this policy be summarized as end-to-end commercialism. Suggesting that the quality is not necessarily to be found in certain food practice but rather in locality and direct interaction.

This resonates with the purpose of creating REKO and its specific organization was according to founder Thomas Snellman: a pragmatic way to support local food markets in his home region of Österbotten. The founding principle of REKO from the start was its non-profit and decentralized organization where all local food producers are welcome. This can be seen as a “technological” feature that ensures that the REKO-network do not become a business model where the platform owner controls a customer base to which third parties might sell. Quality in this sense is also connected to the place rather than certain agents inhabiting it.

The policy documents available from the web portal of *Hushållningssällskapet* conveys simplicity both as a value (it should be simple to buy and sell local food) and as a certain practice (how to organize an inclusive platform that can flourish in the legal loophole created by pre-arranging purchases). By formalizing the policy, *Hushållningssällskapet* asserts this certain model of organizing alternative food networks in pursuit of a certain alterity: an open platform for commercial activity with short supply chains connected to geographical locality. In the coming section, the article continues the discussion of some of the important values this model seeks to promote:

4.2. Important Values for REKO

The portal paragraphs of *Hushållningssällskapet*'s policy documents for REKO mention direct relations between consumers and producers as a reason for participating in REKO and motivates its guidelines as a proven way to make this simple. This section takes a closer look at these values and how they are supported in REKO's organization.

4.2.1. Direct Relationship: Brief Interactions, Dense with Value

The physical transaction of goods between consumers and producers during the REKO pick-ups are often brief. Consumers find the stand, often in the form of a car-trunk, truck or van, and give their name and content of the order, receive it, and then pay. The interactions observed seldom exceeded one or a few minutes and mainly consisted of organizing the exchange and giving some short appreciations of the products. While these moments of interaction are brief, they seem to be dense in value for REKO consumers and producers and highly visible in how consumers regularly shared their stories about how they enjoyed their food in posts in the Facebook group. This is in line with other scholars' findings on values in alternative food networks. So, one important value which REKO manages to provide is the platform for meetings between the actors which usually are obscured from each other in the food supply chain—a value connected with the organizational form and supported by the policy: no intermediaries and pick-ups face to face. The willingness to go through a several-step process which, in comparison to an everyday understanding of convenience and simplicity, suggests that the value from direct connections, although seemingly brief in character, is indeed valuable and points towards that an obscure food chain itself can be a source of cultural dissatisfaction. This conclusion shines more light on the value of simplicity which will be discussed more right below.

4.2.2. Simplicity

In an age of increased convenience and last-mile delivery, how can REKO be considered as a simple way of shopping? Consumers are limited to a bi-weekly delivery, demanding that they browse a social media-feed, pre-order, and then make it to the pick-up in time. Compared to the standard shopping experience, it seems anything but simple. This can be understood, as suggested above, when simplicity is understood in relation to fulfilling specific values which have been dissatisfied in the mainstream. When understood not as a food-supply per se but as delivering direct relationships with local food producers and their products from the perspective of the consumer, and direct relationships with consumers and lower barriers to enter the market from the perspective of the producer, then REKO seems more simple—since the alternative would be finding and developing personal relationships with producers by seeking them out on their farms or building a customer base from scratch. What REKO makes easier is not just “access to food” but also building relations and having direct connections between producer and consumer or finding a market to sell small batches of food products. Simplicity in REKO should be understood as connected to facilitation of marketplaces without intermediaries and a chance for direct connection with the corresponding end of the supply chain for producers and consumers alike.

Here, it seems like cultural dissatisfaction is evident: a primary problem which REKO solves is that it is too hard to buy and sell local food directly from the ends of the supply chain. REKO provides a solution with low “costs” for entry to the market: in principle, the cost is the need for a Facebook account. The emphasis of market principles in the policy can inform the understanding of “simplicity” as conveying a certain alterity—focused on the supply chain organization. For small scale producers, REKO provides access to reach markets to which products can be offered while remaining in the “Hobby” definition of enterprise, which has fewer regulations and demands on the food production. For example, there have been several instances of producers writing along the lines of: “We can now offer one pig (or other livestock) for slaughter”. For a producer in the standard supply chain, sale of one animal slaughtered directly on the farm would be neither profitable nor

permitted. Then there is the simplification of the personal meeting and relation building. For REKO, simple seem to mean “simpler than it has been in a long time to buy and sell local food items in the shortest supply chain as possible”. It is an alterity directly pointed away from the long and bureaucratic supply chain which has replaced direct relationships between end consumers and producers.

4.2.3. Reciprocal Showcases of Trust and Quality

The sixth principle of the REKO-policy conveys the need for trust between participants. Consumers need to trust that the food item is as sustainable and as locally produced as promised, and the gratification for the producer from the feedback and sense that their work is appreciated is built upon reciprocal trust. The online groups are an important place for creation of this trust. In their advertisements of their products before pick-ups, producers often provide pictures and stories of their establishment.

Consumers in turn regularly give feedback posts made in the REKO-networks groups as well as face to face during the pick-ups. An additional tool used in some REKO networks is inspiration-threads created by group admins on a semi-regular basis. In these threads, consumers showcase what they have created with the food using text and pictures. This can be viewed as the consumer reciprocally giving evidence of quality in the end consumption of the food item, in the sense that the embedded work and toil of the producer gets a final appreciation and participation in the meal is granted to the producer of the food. This can be seen as an examples of how social media technology and culture are leveraged to create and reinforce a culture of more direct relationship and trust building. Such examples reinforce the notion that what is at work is a different value regime than industrial food with the aim of yielding the most calories at an acceptable price. It also speaks towards the quality of online interaction and its ability to produce both direct connection as well as trust and reciprocal behavior.

4.2.4. Supporting Small-Scale Agricultural Business

Support of small scale and local food businesses is explicit in the policy of REKO as well as visible in REKO founder Thomas Snellman’s talks and presentations on the network. In an interview with him for this article, Snellman emphasized the need for practical strategies for small scale agriculture; which has been under immense pressure from the industrialization of agriculture, something made clearly visible in the sharp decline in farm numbers in Sweden during the 20th century. Satisfaction in relation to this paper’s use of revitalization can therefore be understood as a food supply chain more catered to small-scale producers. This allows an understanding of REKO’s revitalization as, in part, aiming at going back—not to certain modes of practice in food production but rather to create values aiming at something more satisfactory. This connects to how ‘simple’ as used here has been argued to mean “simple to meet and transfer goods directly”. In this manner, by having a policy creating markets catered to small scale producers, REKO under the form given by *Hushållningssällskapet*’s policy gives an indirect support of the views and motivations which led a producer to start a small-scale operation in a field distinguished by large scale advantages. In relation to this, it can be noted that the policy emphasizes openness and free entry to these markets rather than protectionism for the producers already active in the area. Revitalization efforts seem to be aimed at viable options for small scale and end-to-end agriculture, not necessarily for preserving the local operations per se, but aiming to change the culture at large.

5. Discussion

In relation to previous research on REKO, this study finds little that contradicts findings which identify considerations such as direct relationship and simplicity as motivation for participating in REKO. For example, Isaksson and Cedermark finds that REKO provides opportunity for producers to form direct relationship with customers through providing an arena on which they can communicate. They also argue that consumers find REKO

reasonable convenient [22] (pp. 41, 44). In her survey on REKO in the Sjuhärads Region of Sweden, Kjellberg finds that consumers find REKO “efficient” and providing food of good quality. Her study also argues that although the producers are not experienced in e-commerce REKO’s model is accessible and positive for building relationships and trust with customers [23] (pp. 36–37). In her study on customer motivations Lindström argues that REKO’s focus on direct connection creates value for customers through providing opportunities to interact, ask questions and show appreciation towards the producers [3] (p. 46). Ehrnström-Fuentes et.al argues that REKO through providing better market access has supported economical sustainability for producers. They argue further that while economical concerns are an important reason to join the network the social benefits of more direct relationship with direct customers are an appreciated benefit [25] (pp. 9–12). All these findings are in line with the conveying by REKO’s policy of a culture based on direct relationship and how to achieve it “simple”. Less harmonious but also in line with the discussion of the free market conventions of the policy is observations by Kjellberg [22] and Ehrnström-Fuentes [25] that while REKO seem to foster a collegial culture between producers’ tensions related to competition can arise. While perhaps not always positive for the individual producer this speaks to the policy’s resolve to create a competition-based market rather than a platform for the already present farmers [32]. The free-market convention can be seen as an argument that the policy is carrying and to some extent enforcing a certain alterity which is centered around relationships and simplicity to achieve it but not necessarily concern about any specific producer. The concern with organizing and reproducing conventions and routines corresponds well with the idea of a revitalizing movement as something that has its aims set at culture at large. Tensions around competition between producers and other potential contradictions arising between the idea of a more satisfactory culture carried by the policy and its participants could be an interesting field to investigate onwards. It could very well be the key uncertainty for how the question if REKO is a feasible future for the food system should be answered. Answering this question fully therefore seem to require additional study which would focus on sentiments and effects from competition between producers. Nevertheless, this uncertainty does not contradict but rather supports that the policy creates local cultures in line with its explicit aspiration.

Figure 8 summarizes results and how they are viewed in the analytical framework in Figure 3. Those feeling the cultural distress of an obscure and “difficult” food supply are likely motivated to participate in the revitalization process. Those consumers or producers who have at least some preferences for the alternative value propositions and parallel qualities now have greater opportunity to engage themselves in a movement with the tools provided ready at hand through digital means.

Attention to the value “simplicity” has furthered an understanding on what frictions between the revitalizing impulses and the current food systems which has need to be solved. This is visualized as “difficult” as an unsolved problem. Engineering simplicity is in this context connected to creating easily replicable low maintenance organizations which keeps the activities inside the law. The search for pragmatic and low-barrier solutions to channel the impulse for a “more satisfying culture” can be understood as motivating the adaptation of new social media technologies. If the mainstream food systems conventions are understood as rigid and optimized towards certain values which are not compatible with valuing of the small scale and end-to-end relationship, the social media space allows for plasticity in iterating routines and cognitive structures that supports an alternative understanding of quality.

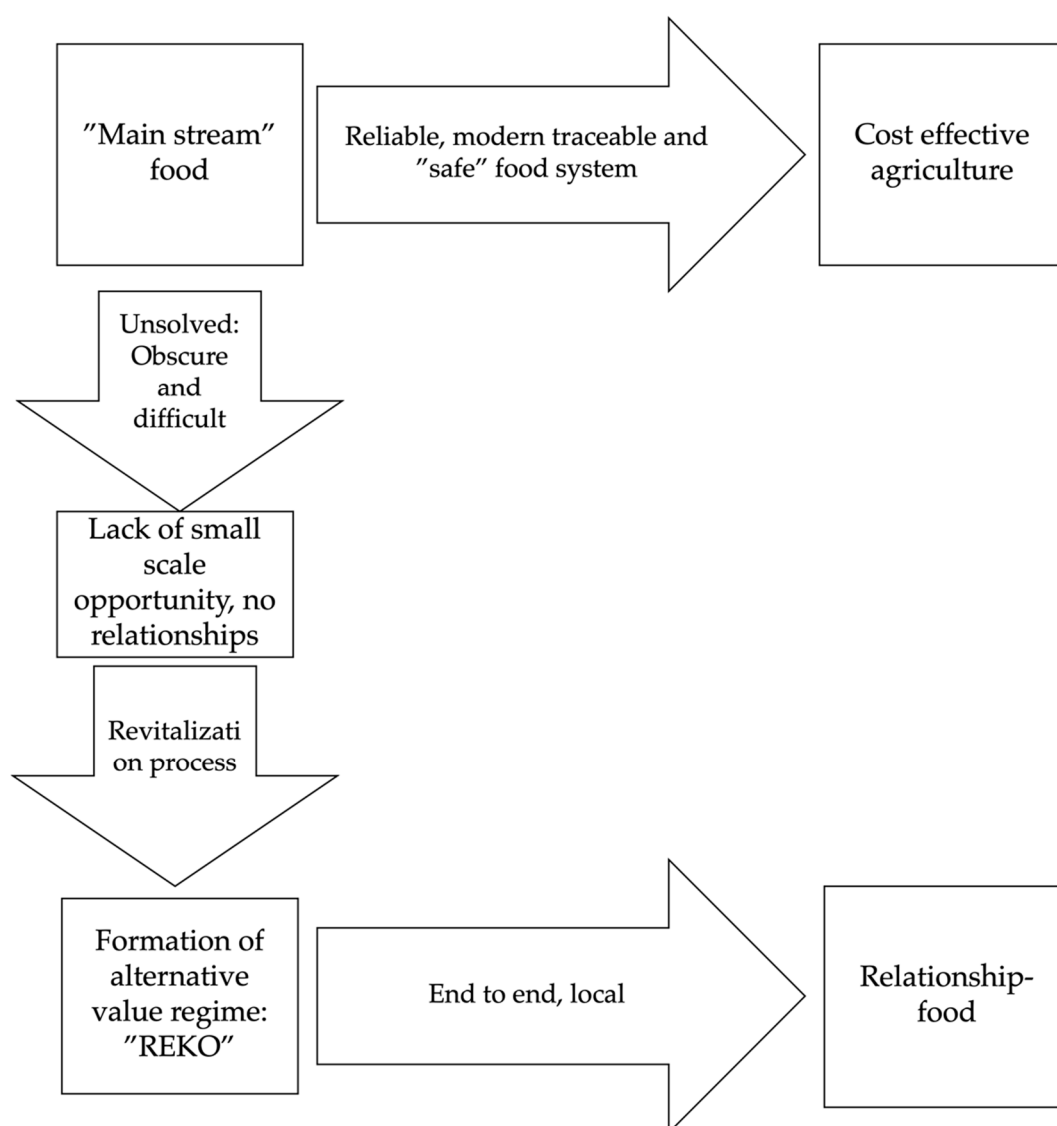


Figure 8. Illustration of the results mapped on the analytical framework presented previously in Figure 3.

The attention to policy, organizational structure and network participants of this paper also adds to the understanding of REKO in the sense that it highlights how the network both is “ground up” in the sense that there is a broad sentiment towards local food, but also “top down” in that the projects have received government support in changing the practices around food towards a food system more favorable to small scale farmers through better access to customers. REKO’s deliberate construction of policy was found to give the cultural dissatisfaction felt from below (as shown by the rapid rise and spread of the network itself as well as in previous research) organizational and technological conventions to create “quality”. The netnographical approach enabled connections between the motivations of participants, policy, and the ambitions of change in the Swedish food systems expressed in the national food strategy. Thus, REKO can be understood more broadly than a revitalization movement of consumer and producers of local food in the way that there are signs of revitalization of the agricultural nation as whole.

Through the task assigned “from above” to *Hushållningssällskapet* to gather best practices and describe and support the initiative—the nation state is in practice undermining previous official policies. This might seem strange at first glance, but in the light of best practices in innovation management, it resembles the idea of allowing start up practices to evolve outside of the established system [33]. Where new solutions are allowed to grow with less constraints by culture and policy inside the system—aiming at some value which

is shared by the origin organization as worth pursuing. Viewing REKO as a novel form of policy innovation raises further questions about the role of the large social media corporation in providing infrastructure for strategically prioritized areas of policy development. Elaborating such a discussion is beyond this scope but is worth mentioning and could be of interest for further research.

Contradiction with established practices and order must not necessarily be paradoxical. From a public policy standpoint, this part of REKO's relationship with the public sector and Sweden's food strategy could be viewed as an innovative practice where parallel systems regulated in different way are allowed to co-exist. This becomes more understandable from the view that REKO and the mainstream food system are different value regimes—with organizations that solve different problems. By its focus on making direct relationship and local food markets simpler rather than conveying a certain food practice, REKO can be said to be a revitalization movement aimed at reintroducing the possibility of having direct relationship with a plethora of local food producers without having to form a more private relationship with them outside of the commercial. For a broader debate about alterity, this speaks towards that the main societal power structures should not necessarily be viewed as barriers to change.

The policy promotes a network which is alternative in the sense that it centers around promoting different values than the mainstream. These values are neither in conflict with fundamental ideas about free markets nor promoting traditional practices per se but are focused on geography (only local food allowed) and relational (no intermediaries). Blumberg et al. suggest a success of Alternative Food as dependent upon both geographical "spatial" factors such as access to the right customers as well as farmers capable of producing good products [7] (p.10). REKO can be viewed as an effort to solve such geographical problems—by creating an easily replicable system which can provide "alternative geography" as an arena for local Alternative Food.

6. Concluding Remarks

From a revitalization standpoint we can conclude that REKO's policy is of great importance for the network. Through the policy it conveys its picture of a more satisfactory culture. The "memetic" (Here "memetic" is being used in the spirit of how Richard Dawkins coined the term as a unit for carrying and replicating an cultural idea.) aspect of the policy as a unit of information that can replicate the networks local rings also allows for its rapid spread: By enacting the policy the more satisfactory culture gets reproduced at a new location.

The article has shown how through digital means and social media, the REKO movement both define and spread a new cultural system and conventions that supports it. In a broader discussion about revitalization as concept this digitally reproducible revitalization challenges some aspects of how Wallace original account of revitalization should be interpreted. In his seminal article on the matter, Wallace at several instances mentions the role of the prophet or leaders in revitalization movements. While no doubt persons such as the founder Thomas Snellman has been important for the network and his beliefs seem to reflect what REKO's policy tries to convey, the ability to spur revitalization in the era of social media seem less dependent upon the oratory powers of a leader. Instead the "only" thing that is necessary is an accessible blueprint and enough felt dissatisfaction for it to be adopted in new locations.

Drawing inspiration from the definition of revitalization by Wallace, REKO can also be understood to be "deliberately organized" towards a certain more "satisfactory culture". From the founders' origin motivation of supporting local food and small-scale agriculture to the innovative way the Swedish REKO policy is set up to transcend formal law regulating commerce in public spaces, REKO shows evidence of deliberate effort towards developing methods of achieving their goal. Such deliberation in policy is visible in the expression of trust, fairness, and no intermediaries as fundamental pillars.

The development of agriculture from sustenance and barter to industrial scale operations in support of modernization and eradicating famine loosened the relationships between producers and consumers through introduction of more intermediaries and distance. The rapid rise of REKO, including the support from government although it circumvents policies regulating farmers markets, is a sign that the transformation to the large scale also meant creating some cultural dissatisfaction when food items lost connection to relationships between producers and consumers. With the increased technological ability to network and connect, these dissatisfactions have found a new outlet which lets those touched by the sentiment organize more easily.

The emphasis in REKO on simplicity and direct relationships can be understood as pointing towards these areas as being a particular source of dissatisfaction in the mainstream food supply chain. And REKO can be understood as a value regime formed around solving this problem, where simplicity is referring to simplicity to satisfy the desire to meet and do business with either producers or consumers. The difficulty to do this in a chain where the ends are obscured from each other is what simplicity seeks to rectify. In doing so, it achieves the value of direct relationship. This makes REKO an Alternative Food Network aimed at solving cultural dissatisfaction with obscurity between “ends” in the food supply chain rather than a competing structure for “food on the table” for the general population. In this sense, the term “alterity” in Alternative Food perhaps even starts to become misleading. Rather than providing an alternative to the large-scale food system, from a value focused perspective, REKO provides a parallel food system which could remain successful if interest is maintained, but without competing fully with the established food system—more as a provider of direct relationships as well as a venue for small businesses. The low barriers of entry facilitated through use of already widespread social media means that the experienced dissatisfaction does not need to be very high and participation in the network is compatible with a modern and mainstream lifestyle in general but also welcoming to those who might have more far-reaching ideals. By providing low barriers of entry and tapping into a felt desire for a more satisfactory culture (visible by the large number of “rings” and fast spread), REKO seem not only to be a feasible pocket of a prospective new mainstream food practice it seems to have sustainable benefits, especially in respect to the social and economic dimensions. To tie back to the idea of revitalization once again:

A “vital” future along the REKO example could be one where a parallel food supply chain where farmers once again personally deliver food directly to consumers, dense with valuable relationships in a simple way. Such a future is alternative in the sense that it provides a feasible way of both buying local foods and finding venues to sell it. But since REKO aims at a different value regime than the mainstream, it is not necessary that it represents an alternative to industrial practices. Rather, it should perhaps be understood as a possibility to diversify and create a more heterogeneous food system. Further, accepting the premise that REKO aims at solving different sets of problem and is not necessarily aiming at usurping the status quo calls for a different measure of success, such as the value added to social sustainability through simple connections and relationships and commercial opportunity for the small scale. Supporting such a future would likely benefit from more research on how economic sustainable participation in alternative food is for producers and if “local food” is a viable full-time employment or if the sustainable model for the future is a market network for part-time and hobbyist farming.

Also, regarding the support of *Hushållningssällskapet* through state funding, something could be said about the ability of large-scale institutions’ ability to innovate and run tests which go against the common way of conduct. The state-sponsored guidance through loopholes to support small scale agriculture and food production which is commonly thought to be disadvantaged in the food system is an interesting case of governmental innovation further problematizing the idea of alterity and the often-supposed rigidity of large-scale bureaucracy. All things considered, there seem to be few barriers to cold parking lots in December continuing to be hubs for social media-facilitated food systems. The

core idea of a low-bureaucracy end-to-end supply chain with low costs for participation as a solution to cultural dissatisfaction with obscurity and atomization is an interesting development of local food and could be an interesting as well as promising field for further studies in striving towards increased social sustainability.

Author Contributions: Writing—original draft, A.G.; Supervision, J.D. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors state no conflict of interest.

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