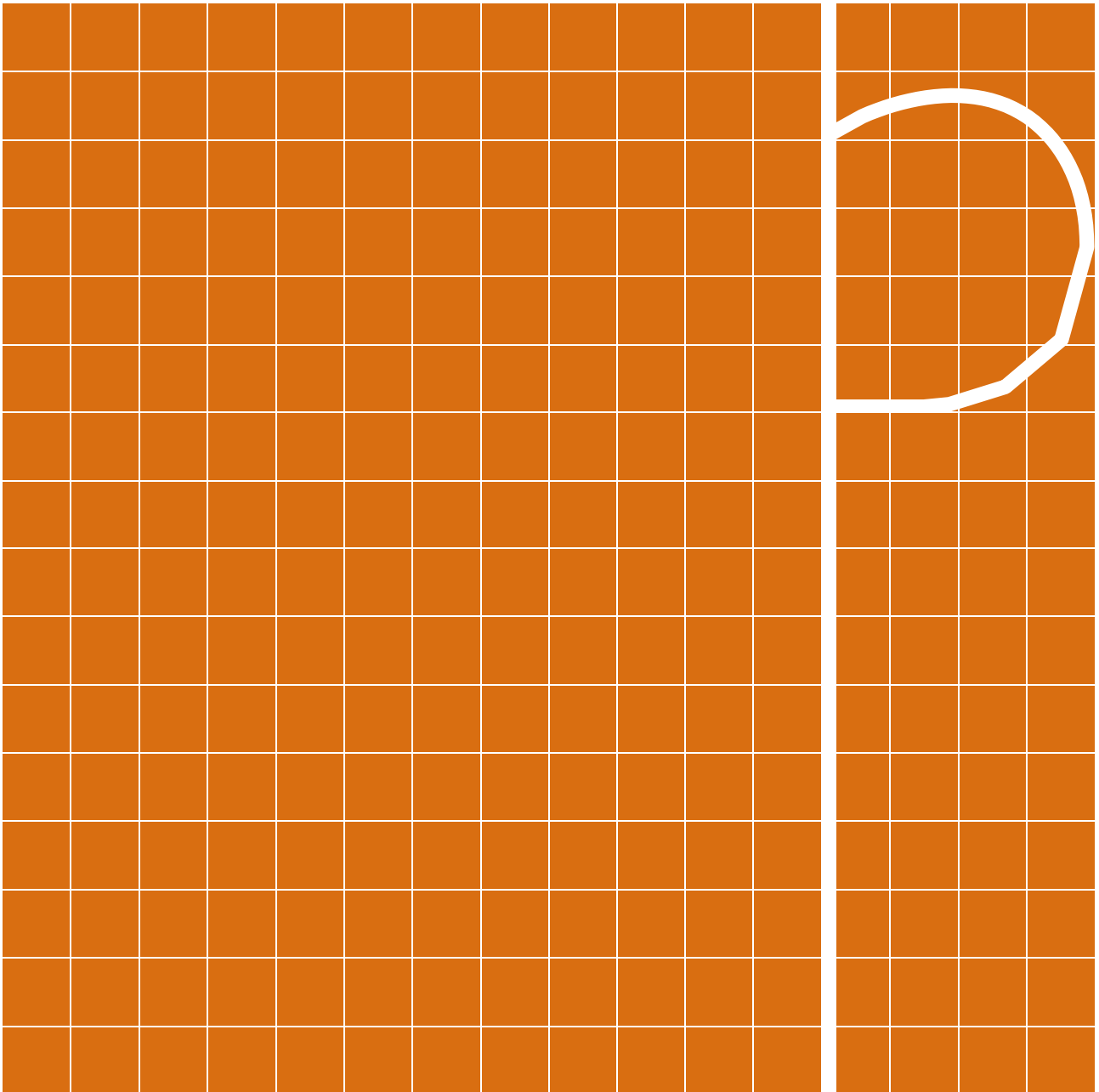


/08

Paper: The counter-market

From the market outside the walls to the market inside the walls, up to the market without walls and the market in the network





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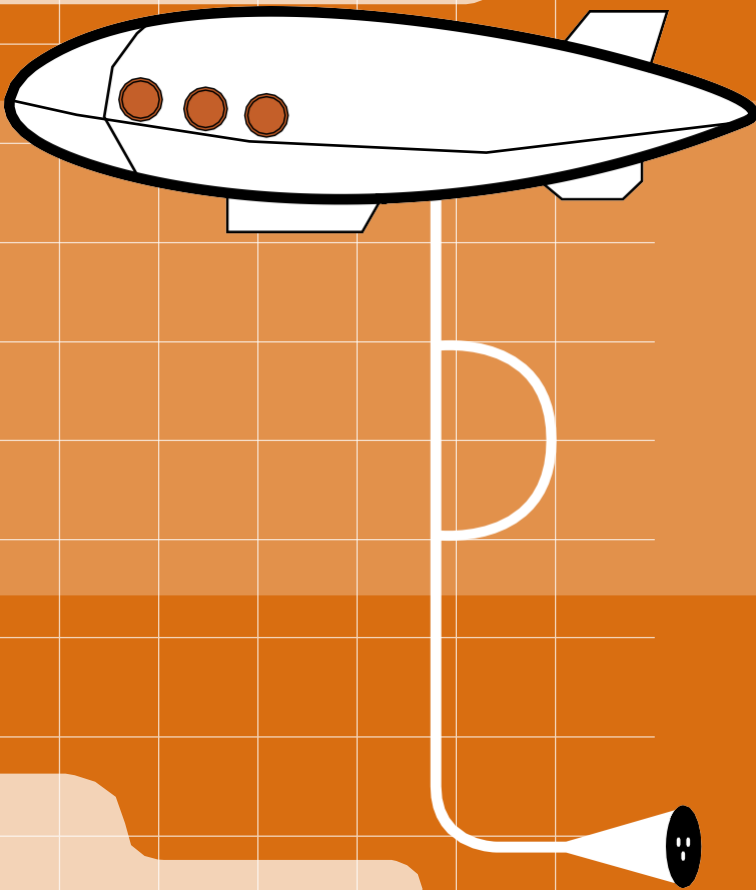
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Markets, particularly small markets, have always been a combination of numerous components. They are not simply a point of exchange of goods and the relative transfer of money and the meeting point of the demand and supply of products; they are also precious places where words, stories and thoughts, emotions and gestures, looks and winks are exchanged, where dialects, jokes, complaints, regrets, desires and memories circulate. They are a particular smell, something that still tastes of ancient craftsmanship of boxes filled-transported-prepared-exposed...

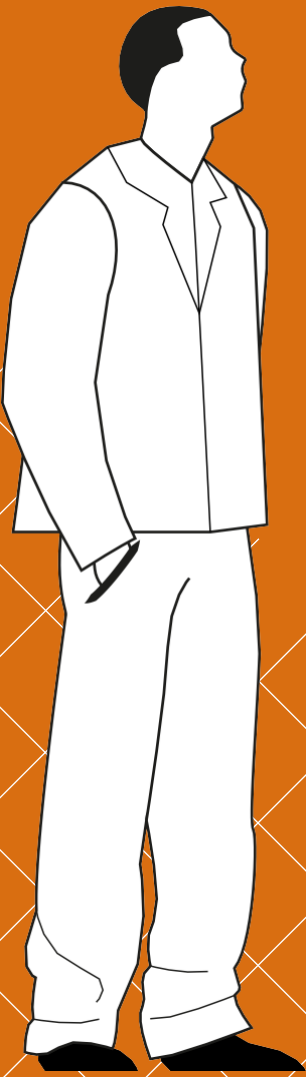
...of prices written with chalk, of the noise of scales and bags, of the colours of fruits and vegetables and, above all, of the human sweat and toil that comes with work.



Abstract

- Among the social structures that Humanity has taken on throughout its history, few have been as contaminating and permeating as the markets. They have acquired many shapes and dimensions and have developed private and public interests and ambitions, yet they have also contributed to inventing rules for controlling mediations so as to contain the individual selfishness inherent in the human soul. In a nutshell, it could be considered one of the most widespread examples of “war between good and evil”, between what is ethical and what is not.
- A brief history of markets can help to better understand their importance not only in the present, but also in the future. The proposal put forth in this Paper does not have the ambition to be exhaustive in this sense, however it certainly aims to disseminate small flashes that can facilitate in choosing the path to follow. These glimpses of History are essentially small fireflies which, albeit with their natural intermittency, brighten the night of the subtle Moon that Humanity seems to be going through.
- In a production system where food has been reduced to a function of mere merchandise, often subject to financial speculation in global commodity exchanges, the farmers market manages to shorten the supply chains, re-territorialize production, and ultimately restore identity and value to the products the land has to offer.
- Farmers markets are not simply places of trade, rather they become platforms through which a new agri-food practice spreads, whose protagonists are certainly the growers-sellers, but also the general public consumers. In this sense, they become places of encounter, of exchange, of circulation of ideas. An actual “agora of food”, in which a different culture is affirmed. One which redesigns the disjointed relationship between city and country, between those who produce food and those who consume it.

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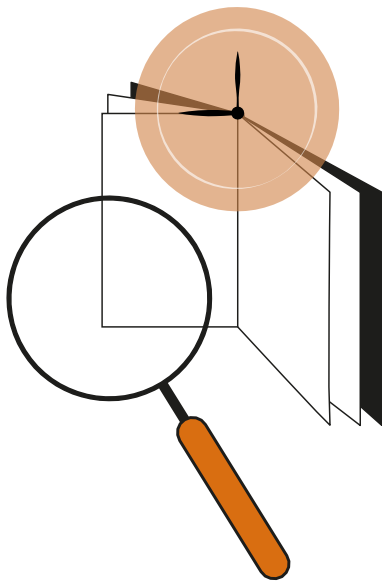
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1.



1. Introduction

Politics and economics are two organizational formulas of the relations between men. The first is based on authority, the second on exchange. The two spheres have often been linked and, equally, have often been in contrast. Overlapping and/or distancing have changed for thousands of years: indeed, to be more subtle, we can establish that the economy has only recently begun to exist, with trading and with the market. In essence, since man began organizing himself hunting and gathering natural products, or since he began to domesticate nature, that is obtaining an overproduction such as to be able to maintain classes of “elites” who lived on surplus (warriors, sorcerers, priests, princes, etc.), it was precisely politics that dominated through authority. Indeed,

exchanges were very few, considered as occasional situations and conditions. Instead, the development of an organizational form such as that of the market is interpreted as a different dimension. The course of history allows us to outline three phases: that of the market outside the walls of settlements, that of the market within the city walls and that of the market without walls (basically mercantilism which develops between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the commercial capitalism of the first globalization, of the great national companies). The market outside the walls is that of the initial exchanges, where merchants did not have a good reputation: they were less aggressive than looters, perhaps, but also more clever, perhaps. A bad reputation that remains stuck to them for many centuries, given that in the middle of the Middle Ages Scholasticism still expressed the

admonition: "*homo mercator vis aut numquam potest Deo placere*" (or rather: the merchant can never, or hardly, please God). Obviously, however, merchants was necessary and therefore tolerated, however they were basically kept out of the *civitas* and the market took place outside the walls. There were also other types of merchants who, however, carried out intermediary work on behalf of the administration with producers, acting as central officials: the Assyrian Karum, the Babylonian Tamkarum and the Chinese mandarins, for example.

With regard to strategic commodities, the city-state was still the political authority that prevailed over economic exchange. Probably in the most powerful and luxuriant cities some merchants / entrepreneurs began asserting themselves, but there was still no room for a "capitalist" form of trade, that is, for a conscious class of merchants. Historians have long debated the role played in ancient Rome by the merchant Trimalcione (in Petronius' *Satiricon*), agreeing however that his trading and becoming a landowner was dictated by the ambition to enter the aristocratic elite; a class of rich bourgeois did not exist. In essence, within the *civitas*, there were still no traces of a commercial capitalism

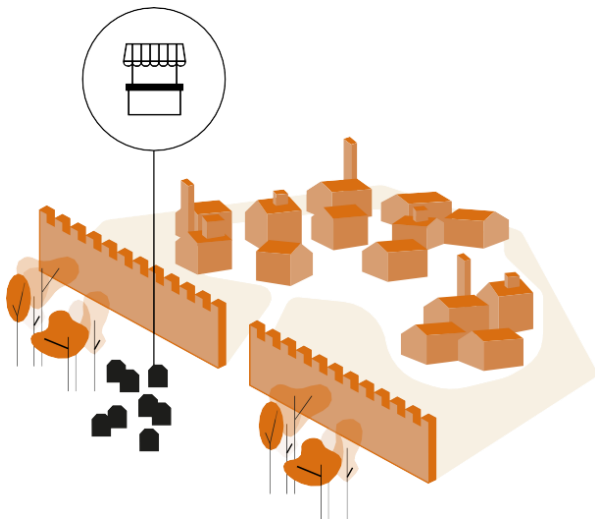
based on the market. On the other hand, Rome fought commercial wars with the legions and the "pax romana" was governed by continuous warfare which was waged on the various ever-widening fronts, sought after by imperialist ambitions. If the empire lacked bread, Sicily was conquered or Egypt was subdued, there was no form of commercial negotiation.

It is not until the late Middle Ages that we begin to see the development of trade, at least in the Western world. These are centuries that see the development of agriculture, an increase in population, the construction of abbeys, monasteries, castles, city-states and municipalities. Centuries of cultural and economic renaissance: social agglomerations begin to take on features that will last over time; craftsmanship develops and the first specific and territorial productions begin to grow (textiles and ceramics, for example); urbanization grows and with it appear the first street vendors (farmers or artisans or personal service providers), then progressively the first shops and the first markets begin forming "inside the walls"; there are often trend reversals, retreats and closures. Indeed, the phenomenon could not be linear: they were also periods of wars, famines, hunger and shortages, of daily scarcity.

And there was also devastation caused by the innumerable diseases that circulated at the time: the plague above all, which for centuries swept through Europe periodically, but also typhus, smallpox and so on up to tuberculosis (the white plague in the Bohème and La Traviata). As a result, the combination of the various variables listed made the level and composition of the demographic audience extremely fluctuating. It is only at the end of the 18th century that the world's population continues to increase.

The fact remains that during the late Middle Ages, which had by then overcome the barbarian invasions, the strong imperial structures with their centralized administrative bureaucracies collapsed; meanwhile the market virus permeated city walls and the market economy took on its role.

2.



2. The forms of the market

2.1 The great journeys and the major Fairs

Once the Middle Ages ended, we see an era of great transoceanic voyages, discoveries of new routes, galleons, colonization, silver and precious goods, pirate activities, competition between the great empires and even between small, but powerful free cities, such as our Maritime Republics. These are also the years of the development of the large market fairs and exchange of products. It is a considerable change of pace whose progress is determined by the strength of the new class of commercial entrepreneurs and the introduction of new techniques in the credit-finance sector (a good combination for the Genoese and the Venetians initially and later for Antwerp, Amsterdam and London).

The interests of political authority converge with those of economic power that comes with trade, accentuated by the new opportunities of international logistics: a feature that lays out the new system of Western capitalism, both in the city-state and in the great empire-states. Major international fairs become the platforms (today we would say the hubs) of the new trades, Antwerp, Medina del Campo in Spain, Frankfurt, Lyon, Bergen op Zom in Holland, Besançon in France, with Venice and Genoa governing Mediterranean traffic and for several decades

masters of monetary and credit transactions. The Fairs took place on fixed dates, lasted a few days and then went through long intervals.

They constituted a sort of "universal exhibition", at least for the universe of the time. Trade was represented by valuable products. Stock markets on the other hand, which developed between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and envisaged a daily activity, were strongly linked to important ports of call (but also to a populated gravitational area of consumption) and also dealt with products that weren't valuable but widespread (flour markets, etc.).

Essentially, we are faced with two types of markets: one of a high level, trade fairs and stock markets, where, although there is some type of retail sale, the domain is made up of important merchants, those who will then become wholesalers; while the other is dedicated to small daily purchases for basic sustenance. The distinction seems trivial, but at first glance it reflects the dissonance that existed between the ordinary life of the individual and the history depicted from the sources or from the paintings, which reflect well the great exchanges, the great enterprises and expeditions, the wonderful silk worn by aristocrats, etc., however they tell us little of the daily life of most of the people, of social customs and also of poverty. If for a moment we focus on the images in the

"still life" paintings, which were widespread in the West, we might come to the conclusion that each table was laden with cooked and feathered pheasants, wild boars, deer and game of all kinds, trays full of fresh fruit imbued with fine flowers. However, this reality only applied to those few families who could also not only purchase the painting but also completely maintain the "house" painter. It is quite difficult and rare to find a still life painting with potatoes, beans, broccoli and radishes and it is somewhat complicated to imagine the daily diet of 99% of the population just by taking those paintings as examples. The fact remains that the vast majority of the people left their traces through popular sayings such as "carrots kiss the eyes" or rather "children are born under broccoli". Thus, in spite of the aristocratic families who chose to mix only blue blood, the reproductive power of cabbages was claimed by those who were less fortunate than the nobles.

The success of international Fairs found its peak moment during the 17th century driven, above all, by the arrival of precious metals from the Americas and the stimulus produced by a credit system, a masterpiece of Genoese origin, capable of quickly circulating an admirable amount of loans and promissory notes. Great trade was no longer restricted to the Mediterranean, but increasingly used Atlantic routes.

Nevertheless, the role of Fairs quickly extinguished itself while, just as quickly, the importance of Stock Exchanges was strengthened, particularly those that developed in some northern Europe countries.

In the face of the commercial intermittency that the various Fairs could offer, the Stock Exchanges guaranteed a continuity, a daily life, for large trade. This features also took place in small businesses: it is during those decades that the number of shops, which were even less discontinuous than the market, increased in urban centres. It's the years of the Dutch dominance, with their huge fleets and trading prowess. Initially Antwerp and then, above all, Amsterdam which during the 18th century established itself as the largest centre specialized in commercial loans. However it was already being undermined by London and, albeit at a considerable distance, by Geneva and Genoa.

2.2 The belly of Venice

Venice continued to play an almost completely autonomous role, which in the lagoon continues to experience all the phenomena described in its own setting. Still to this day, Venice holds the Redentore Fair and the Sensa Fair. In 1455 everything took place around the Rialto Bridge, the Loggia of the wholesalers, where merchandise was bought and sold, ships and crews were rented, insurance policies were stipulated, contracts were also signed with foreign merchants - inside Rialto, the commercial belly of the city, there were also the Beccarie butcheries, the Pescheria fish market, and the Herberia vegetables market. There was also a widespread retailers market between Rialto Nuovo and Rialto Vecchio, full of small stalls and small boats overloaded with food and everything needed at the time. Located, just a few steps away

were the discreet 'bottegucce' (small shops) owned by the financiers-bankers, ready to settle or finance transactions that took place in the market square. In essence Rialto was the pearl placed in the body of Venice which collected small and large exchanges and trades, fully reflecting what was happening in the meantime in some areas of the richest and most developed West. An interesting detail, regarding the relationship between political authority and the power of the economy, is found precisely in Venice, a city of enormous sensitivity with respect to the power that trade could offer, when it was decided to build the Fondachi. It was natural for the Venetians

to trade with foreigners, yet with due care and attention. An example of this is the Fondaco (warehouse) established for the Germans and for the Turks. They were large palaces intended both for the hospitality of international merchants and for storing their goods. Indeed, the defensive prudence of the Venetians for the city was well known in every strategic sector (one need only think of the structure of the Arsenal or even the decision to place the large glass furnaces on the island of Murano, so as to reduce the risks of fire in the city). It is obvious that trade and its permeability were an extremely strategic sector for Venice.

2.3 Shopping in England

A powerful fleet and being an island, therefore less exposed to enemy invasions, had meanwhile also guaranteed the British populations the possibility of expanding both a strong international and internal commercial network, obviously favoured by the prosperous wealth. During the two centuries that we are here observing, England saw trade and consumption intensify greatly, mainly driven by small markets, initially itinerant, then progressively in villages and cities. English historiography distinguishes these *private markets* from *public markets*; the large markets were directly and constantly supervised by urban authorities. The lack of a "political control authority"

(and obviously of tax collection) has played a driving role in the development of private markets which, even prior to the 18th century, began to organize direct collection chains from producers and addressing consumption towards off-market direct sales directly from farmers-breeders of certain products (wheat, wool, raw canvas, etc.). Basically, what took place was the development of a "*counter-market*" compared to a traditional market regulated by authorities, by a baronial lordship. "Semi-hidden", yet very efficient and unscrupulous, commercial chains begin cropping up which are quite consistent and characterized by considerable freedom of movement.

3.



3. Past and present merchant contamination

3.1 A European-only imprinting?

What has been outlined so far essentially concerns Europe and is dictated by a Euro-centric interpretation of history that derives from the most available sources, from historians or from the stories told by European travellers-navigators. However, it is not difficult to imagine that the affirmation of certain forms of market have also taken place outside our continent. Prior to the great fracture produced by the industrial revolution and the emergence of the capitalist market system, the daily succession of social relations probably wasn't very different

in other civilizations. It is obviously always risky to generalize, yet it is beyond doubt that some routes have had a common direction. Indeed, different civilizations, despite being characterized by different cultures, have always been "fluid" entities, permeable and permeable to/of something that has crossed borders without being intercepted by any customs, something that has invisibly placed itself in the mind, in the spirit of individuals. That certain something that we could call *contamination*

among civilizations. The market, in its various forms and with all the differences it assumed, is certainly part of the fluid that circulated and was instilled throughout the world overcoming every possible division. Beyond any conflict or clash of civilizations, each individual can thus discover himself as being the repository of genetic social elements of different civilizations, of composite and mixed cultural aspects. Western Europe, which has been discussed so far, has also presented considerable internal differences. However, it is undeniable that history has developed along paths that provided for polarizations, decentralizations and repolarizations, and not necessarily on the same territorial areas: ancient cities became depopulated and disappeared, others were born and/or grew reaching apogees of enormous wealth and then withered up, replaced by new trade routes and new settlements. Historical origins, technical revolutions, pandemics and devastations have played a heavy role. Many differences can be found along the narrated journey, but common traces remain of some events. There is no doubt that during the Middle Ages most of the people lived a rather difficult life: if you did not belong to an aristocratic family you could either become a soldier, pray in a monastery or be a peasant on the lands of the lordships. During the late Middle Ages, however, things changed: the development of agriculture stimulated the

growth of the population and consequently the population living around the courts. The conditions of individuals hadn't changed much, however, so much so that there was a notable migratory phenomenon towards the urban centres from the countryside. Indeed, feudalism did not provide for the socialization of the land and the hopes of obtaining a better life meant moving towards the urban nucleus. The economy, in the courts, was in any case still autarchic, yet the first markets and shops began to express the initial pressures of the opposite direction. Here too, there are still obvious dissonances. For example, we can think of the many testimonies provided by the Italian medieval cities compared to those found in northern European countries: in Italy, the feudal lords stood at the centre of the inhabited nucleus and fortified the city while in France they usually placed their castle at the centre of their land-holdings, perhaps in the open countryside. In principle, the cities founded by the Romans maintained and fortified the walls, a situation less traceable beyond the Danube and in general in northern Europe.

3.2 Who contaminated whom? Non-European influencers?

In principle, improved agricultural efficiency, urban and markets development went hand in hand. No doubt, the diffusion of markets and the growth of a commercial consciousness has strongly and quickly characterized the Western world, thus giving way to the industrial revolution, but we mustn't think it was an isolated, albeit widespread, phenomenon. There are of course sources and testimonies concerning large countries outside the old continent such as Islamic countries, India, China and Japan, but we can assume that some forms of market have also existed in Amerindian or sub-Saharan civilizations. When we speak of Islamic countries, we must think of the East's "Arabian Nights", the city of Baghdad, for example, which for hundreds of years had been the capital of world mathematical knowledge, or Istanbul (with its *Besestan*) or all those agglomerations that developed along the Silk Road. Even in these cases, one could easily proceed by highlighting the current persistence and importance of the Bazaars, the *Funduqs*, the *Suks* or by remembering the efficient mail stations known as *Caravanserai*.

Here too, we could find the hierarchy of the various levels in the marketplace, mainly destined for the most precious goods, such as the Bazaars, vast covered markets located within the largest cities, the *Suks* (from the Arabic term *Suq*) consisting of hundreds of small stalls that have always occupied the alleyways of the *Medina*, the oldest part of the city (such as the *Kalsa* in Palermo, speaking of civilization contamination). Compared to a Bazaar, an organized market, they often coincide with the entire neighborhood and are, apparently, more chaotic and have always offered multiple formulas of what we now call street food (Marrakech, Cairo, Tunis, etc.). Another matter, however, are the *Caravanserai* and the *Funduq*. In this case, their development followed the trade routes of the freight caravans. They generally combined enclosures to take care of pack animals, traders, and warehouses for transported goods. Of course, there was no shortage of all the products needed for the journey's food supplies or trade in ready-to-eat food. *Funduq* in Arabic means "to welcome all" and this term has become widespread, considering that in Spanish it is called "*fonda*", in Hebrew "*ponduq*", in Genoese and

Venetian “*fondaco*”. In each of these countries they represented warehouses for merchants and also a place of negotiation. They also provided a food supply market that was specialized in the original habits of the passing foreigners. As in Europe, even in the Islamic East the big cities progressively attracted the markets of the neighbouring villages, which developed immediately outside the gates of the urban centre; a meeting area between the city and the countryside and here too it was an area that was certainly more “control-free”. Inside, there were also suks and small neighbourhood markets. Various market levels/models can also be identified in India. A form of large market, similar to the Fair-Bazar, is still present in the heart of old Delhi: the Chandni Chowk (or Moonlight Square). Designed in 1650 by the daughter of Shah Jahan, ruler of the Mughal Empire and belonging to the Islamic dynasty, which for many centuries dominated a larger empire than present-day India, it was originally made up of roughly 1,600 shops built

in the shape of a half-moon, it was 36 meters wide and just under 1.5 km long. For a long time it was the largest market in India and the imperial processions of the Mughals crossed it periodically. It was very famous for the silver trade (hence the name, since in the Indian language this metal is called “*chandj*”) but there were also all kinds of goods to be found. Although suffocated by congestion, the market still retains its historical character. If, when it comes to large markets, the “contamination of civilizations” leads us to also to think of a single “identity of civilizations”, things change when we look at the day-to-day livelihood markets. In fact, in India every village has its own market. It is a market that develops under a large tree, the *Ficus bengalensis* (sacred tree). An evergreen that can reach 30 meters in height, with practically horizontal branches and with roots like columns that support the fronds (the intertwining of trunks and roots can cover over one hectare of extension).

The tree is also often called Banyan, an appellation that derives from the name of the traders who took advantage of its shade to administer the trades that took place there. The Banyans were the members of the caste of Indian traders, initially engaged in trading with Arabia and East Africa, even before the arrival of the Portuguese. They carried out the activity of intermediaries at each village market exchanging goods for currency so as to pay the exactions due by the community-village to the Great Mughal and the tax collectors. The presence of the Banyan merchant thus became essential both for the life of the village market and presumably for allowing a certain operational freedom in trade, very similar to that of the English private markets. Moving even further to the East, one finds instead a very particular formula of development of the "small markets": the Chinese system. The cantonal model has been widespread and voluntarily pursued for centuries. Around every large city, where long-distance trade

and supplies of goods not produced in neighbouring territories took place, there is usually a ring of villages with markets that are located in such a way that farmers can bring their products and return by evening. It is a sort of orbit that radiates around the large urban nucleus and allows for the supply of fresh food. This wide network of interconnected and linked market points represents the cantonal space. The system's strength is represented by the radial pattern and the distances of the various points of exchange. The calendar and the frequencies of the markets of the various satellite villages and cities are also regulated in an abnormal manner, so as to allow the continuous flow and outflow of goods. However, the system was subject to exceptional control. Exchanges and fairs were rare, but the Chinese territory is extremely large. Some fairs are held in Canton or in some cities bordering Mongolia, which suggests that they substantially fulfill the need to satisfy foreign merchants, thus making it easier to

control of their movements within the Kingdom. Two observations derive from this system; one concerns a question often faced by economic historians regarding the possibility that the lack of development of capitalism in China has been induced precisely by the extreme activity of control consistently exercised by the political authorities, during the various Dynasties that have succeeded each other. A control that was best exercised in a vast and widespread system, but in any case decidedly autarchic, although developed for centuries to supply the great Western Empires with silk (Chinese silk arrived in Rome even before Julius Caesar). The other observation concerns its closure stemming from the desire to preserve the inventions and the resulting technical innovations made within the country. The secret of silk, for example, lasted for hundreds of years; it was the Byzantine emperor Justinian who, as a great importer of silk (and we obviously refer not only to him), found a suitable ploy by sending two "tourist" monks to China who returned with silkworm cocoons hidden in their walking sticks along with the instructions for weaving the precious thread. Worth recalling is the long list of strategic inventions which will be seen only a couple of centuries later in the West, such as the compass, gunpowder, paper, etc..

Suffice it to mention that in 1502 the book "Collection of useful illustrations for the people" (attributed to Guang Fan, entirely dedicated to agricultural techniques) was published. It was then reprinted in 1552 and 1593, entirely computed with modular typefaces (another Chinese invention, initially in terracotta and then in bronze). Even earlier, numerous domestic encyclopedias, treatises and essays were published that also concerned agricultural taxation or the water control system for rice paddies and other crops, as well as many monographs dedicated to specific territorial areas, often dedicated to local agriculture. However, the difficult permeability of the Chinese system did not produce a contaminating effect on the external territories.

In Japan, for example, trade mainly developed in large markets which take advantage of an organised road communication network for the decentralised circulation of products. Product exchanges took place daily through the daily meetings of important merchants which were held right after the market closed. A system quite similar to the one already in place in the large northern European squares and which was widespread in the Indian archipelago, Malaysia and throughout Indonesia as well.

33 The various development models

Despite the discrepancies that reflect the various social structures, we can still note the development of market models quite similar to each other. The contrast between “state” authority and “power of exchange” seems to progressively diminish as politics perceive the importance of supporting some spontaneous encouragement directed toward free trade in relation to the higher general level of well-being that might derive from it. Upon affirmation and diffusion of these commercial models, particularly in Western Europe, we begin to see the cardinal foundation of the capitalist system. Albeit, this change should be read keeping in mind the different penetrations exerted by the continuous contaminations and interconnections between the various forms of civilization. Indeed, it is evident that capitalism as well has taken on various forms and features. It suffices to observe how the different models, around the “common core”, are characterized by specificities in the structures, institutional setting and economic policies. A good litmus test can be to measure the degree of “acidity” with respect to supporting policies, that is, the policies that

need to control the development of one of the typical, and we may add natural, defects of the system, or rather the degree of social solidarity obtained by compressing the dominance of the market. In this way, we can no doubt trace some capitalist models: the Anglo-Saxon (United Kingdom and US, etc.) model which is less prone to social protection; the “Rhenish” (Germany and Holland) model, more protective, but rigidly Calvinist (in many respects Darwinian); France’s technocratic model; Japan’s managerial system; Sweden and Norway’s highly neo-corporative model; the “family” type model that has developed in Italy. Added to these is the “partisan” model that has recently established itself in China (extremely aggressive in foreign trade, yet hyper-controlled internally). Each of these models of capitalist economy, and others of course, contain defects and virtues implicitly marked in their DNA that have been structured over time by history, through the formation of small and large exchange markets, through the consistency of the class of merchant-entrepreneurs, through the regulatory activities set by the political authorities, etc. Generally speaking, however,

34. Globernance (global governance) necessary for interconnected capitalism

it should be recognized that in the last two hundred years, that is after the Industrial Revolution, this system has allowed the growth of the world product to a much greater extent than the global population, increasing the average income per capita by tenfold. Economic growth, moreover, has pushed the political authority to establish more sophisticated control formulas, despite its three main negative aspects: instability (in prices, employment and production, in the value of real and financial assets) dictated precisely by the fact that capitalism is in itself conjunctural; the disarticulation it produces with regard to ecological balance, on the environment (being conjunctural leads to postponing extra-generational objectives in relation to respect for natural resources; the objective of the search for wealth obscures social ethics, cancels out solidarity); the social divide it generates between winners and losers, rich and poor (it tends to increase the concentration of income and assets in the hands of a few).

At this point an issue of considerable importance arises. The capitalist system, considering the powerful phenomena it has made use of in the last two hundred years, technological innovation and globalization, is rapidly widening the gap between its social power and the power and control capabilities of political intelligence, or rather of the ethical regulations. Capitalism however needs, precisely due to the defects illustrated, a well-defined hierarchy and we are now aware that this system does not self-produce hierarchies. If anything, it tends to adapt and use those it finds, just as it did not invent production, consumption, employment and the market. Rather, it has taken possession of it, making everything much more efficient and faster. In fact, for the first time in human history, we are faced with a world

that is highly interconnected, tightly wrapped in a network of economic, political and cultural interdependencies, yet lacking any supranational system of government that is capable of providing this network with the right ethical rules. For example, a supranational, but not global, hierarchy, such as the European Union, declares a zero-carbon objective and then within six months it moves on to reactivating coal-fired power plants. Indeed, this highlights how strong interconnections are and how weak hierarchies of political authority can be. We thus end up seeing government activities that are quick-fixes of the problems by adopting short-term solutions, customary traditional techniques, very limited and small-range political horizons and palliative care in the face of "terminal" problems. Seen from this perspective, the current context which is strongly conditioned by the pandemic, by ongoing war conflicts and by rapid climate changes, could lead us to imagine a rapid process of decay for humanity.

History, however, leads us to read the future with greater optimism, through the signs of a progressive evolution. It is undeniable that the growth of economic and social interdependencies have generated a gap between the capacities of control by politics, in the forms of Western democracies, and the power of the economy. This gap has been increasing, reflecting the lesser political strength of the state and the weakening of the ethical force of ideologies. It is, nevertheless, equally true that new technologies, through the development of digital networks, may have introduced new forms of "democratic control". The broader access to information available to the individual today may represent a positive basis, less mediated by elective representation, capable of increasing the ability to update and evaluate any individual choices, thus modifying mass trends.

3.5 The new web-driven counter-market

A signal in this sense can be seen precisely in the multitude of small markets that in many countries have been developing in recent years, in the face of a period that has seen large-scale retail groups strongly prevail. A mixture of elements that have been spreading quite rapidly through the channels of the telematic revolution. With reference to the food sector we've seen the widespread circulation, obviously in societies with higher social welfare, of criteria that is more oriented towards "health" with consequent changes in consumer tastes, with increasingly convergent choices towards "organic" products, towards those products that allow greater knowledge of their origin and the processing treatments undergone.

In short, greater transparency. In essence, we are also seeing the overcoming of those marketing techniques that pursued the imposition of a brand or a trademark through television or printed advertising. Nowadays, a product's features are circulated on the net and it is generally through the net that the control of the quality of the product is sought: the more the supply chain underlying its marketing is transparently explained, the easier it will be to attract consumer choices. In practice, there is an increasing tendency to look for correctness, or rather ethics, in the label that accompanies the product. In order to gain consumer confidence, with regard to the food sector, and even more so concerning rapidly deteriorating products,

it has become more and more important for producers to “take on direct responsibility.” Knowing the seller / manufacturer personally, not through a wholesaler and numerous retailing steps, is in itself a broad guarantee of quality. The latest telematics technology has in many cases allowed manufacturers to have the time to organize themselves even for direct sales, perhaps also supported by consortium or individual formulas for e-commerce supplies. However the direct sales are basically destined to the territory bordering production (the so-called 0 Km products is another element of strong selection for consumer preferences). Despite appearing as a return to the historical form of small markets, the development of the new “farmers markets” moves

along completely innovative paths. The stimulus is undoubtedly represented by the immense information network. A network which in hindsight can also allow to rediscover a vital space for the social solidarity that is needed for the survival of democratic systems in a capitalist system which by nature tends to evolve in environments less subject to the control by politics. Once again, with regard to the exchange of direct sales, we can speak of a “counter-market” where a redistribution of margins is created to the advantage of producers as opposed to wholesale intermediaries, through the consumer's greater knowledge and awareness.

4.



4. Farmers markets, the new agora of food

4.1 Markets on a human scale

The development that farmers markets have experienced in recent years, in which the agricultural producers have also become the sellers of their products, represents both a revolutionary evolution and a return to the ancient tradition of the local market. Evolution, because these markets give way to a radical metamorphosis of the classic figure of the farmer, understood for centuries as a mere supplier of products to merchants, wholesalers or traders, transforming him into an all-round food entrepreneur; tradition, because it brings buyers closer to the places and mechanisms of production, after progressive yet relentless distancing determined by

the proliferation of trade agreements and the increasingly marked globalization of food supply chains. In a production system, in which food has been reduced to a function similar to any merchandise (or *commodity*, often subject to the whim and excesses of financial speculation in the global merchandise stock exchanges), the farmers market has the merit of shortening the supply chains, re-territorializing production, reducing the physical, yet also cognitive, distance between those who work the land and those who consume the products of the land. This process has had an undisputed result: that of giving food the identity that it had largely lost. In this sense, the farmers market

can be described as a form of resistance to the standardization of tastes imposed in an increasingly marked way by large players in the food and distribution industry. Nowadays, consumers often don't know where their food was produced or by whom; they do not know the mechanisms of production or the origin of the food they buy; they are therefore incapable of being an active subject in the supply chain. The farmers market is also successful for this reason: because it gives back a role to citizens, who are no longer just unaware consumers of the various phases of the supply chain, rather they become 'consumer-protagonists' who, as a result of their choices of food, can support quality agriculture with less negative repercussions on ecosystems.

4.2 Food artisans and defenders of biodiversity

It is for a wide range of reasons that farmers markets are an expression of a more sustainable agriculture that respects environmental balances: they are structurally short-chain, since it is the producer who sells and therefore necessarily does so in their own area of action and competence; they promote biodiversity because each producer must guarantee a variety of products and therefore cannot dedicate themselves to those mono-cultural crops that are instead requested and implicitly promoted by large-scale distribution; they eliminate waste because, knowing their customers more directly, the producer is able

to predict what quantities to produce from time to time.

All these aspects, which are structural in nature and represent, so to speak, the essence of the action of the individual producer and of the market as a whole, also become elements of differentiation and of an identity that is proudly claimed. The reduction of the distance is not only valid in terms of space, but also in terms of time: if the fruit and vegetables for sale in the large-scale distribution as well as in the small businesses that supply wholesale to the general markets are already subject to deterioration when they reach the point of sale, due to both the physical distance and the complexity of the logistics (so much so that they are often harvested before

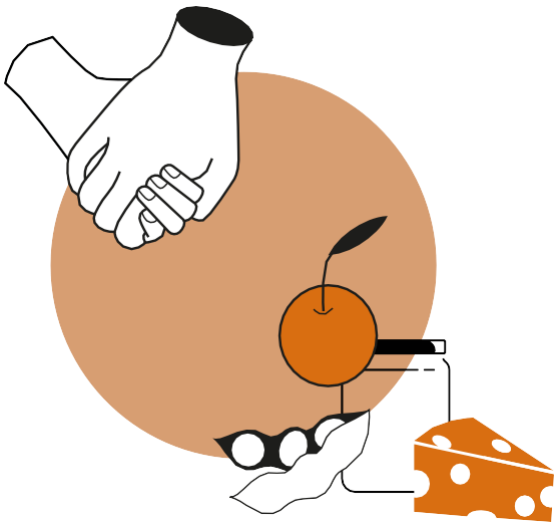
maturity and then subjected to ripening above ground, with ensuing loss of organoleptic properties), those sold in farmers markets are fresh par excellence, picked the same morning and therefore at an optimal degree of ripening.

Biodiversity is not only based on the need to provide a wide range of products, it also becomes practice and experimentation on the part of growers, who are stimulated to produce different products or to rediscover ancient varieties, precisely by virtue of the fact that they have a relationship of consolidated trust with their customers, to whom they can offer unknown products. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the definition given by Francesco Capalbo, a producer from

Montesperello di Magione (PG) of himself and his fellow direct sellers: "We are food artisans and defenders of biodiversity". The reacquisition of an active role in primary production, which is no longer that of a mere supplier, naturally pushes farmers to experiment, to undertake unknown paths, to revive productions that have fallen into disuse because they are unable to penetrate a difficult and, by its nature, homogenized market like that of large-scale distribution. This is the case of Capalbo himself who planted the "Calabrian long zucchini" in his Umbrian company, initially proposing it as a gift to his customers who were unaware of its existence and then making it one of the flagship items of his counter.

In addition to successfully selling his products in the covered market of Perugia, this young farmer has experimented with an even more innovative way of reducing the distance between grower and consumer: he allows his customers to book purchases and collect them directly in the garden. This type of approach allows consumers both to literally touch the freshness of the product and to understand the mechanisms of production. The consumer is thus re-educated in getting closer to the produce the land has to offer. In a certain sense, this is a form of food education that is not found in schools nowadays.

5.



5. The new path of equity and solidarity

5.1 A fairer distribution of value

Farmers markets are not to be understood as a form of ideological struggle conducted by a handful of enlightened producers or sensitive consumers: they design new economies, guarantee profits to innumerable companies, while activating virtuous processes of innovation. The direct sale of products by farmers today involves more than 130 thousand companies, it has an estimated turnover of around 6 billion euros and millions of consumers: far from being a niche reality, it is an essential element of the Italian agri-food chain.

If farmers markets are so successful and continuously expanding, it is precisely because they meet the basic need of all production: that of guaranteeing an income to the producer. By eliminating intermediate steps and bypassing strict market access rules imposed by distributors, farmers who participate in direct selling are able to summarise their control and management of the means of production, without imposing higher prices on their customers. The mechanism simply implements a fairer distribution of value along the supply chain: consumers

spend the same amount, if not less than what they would spend in supermarkets, yet they reward the producer they know personally, someone who puts their reputation and work on the line (because we mustn't forget that direct selling involves taking away workers from production and in some cases this means increasing the number of hours worked on the farm, especially in family-run businesses).

Essentially, direct selling allows the supply chain to take back the transparency it had lost and allows producers, who had often ended up ignoring the final destination of their products, to repossess control of their goods. Alessandro Melis, owner of a farm in Ogliastra who has worked for years supplying large retailers and today sells his products in various markets throughout Sardinia, tells us: "When I gave my products only to the GDO (large-scale supermarkets) I had no idea where they would end up. I once saw my grapes leave Sardinia for the mainland and then return to Sardinia." Today Melis has reversed the percentage sales of his production. He sells 70% in the markets and 30% to some distribution brands, guaranteeing himself a bargaining power that he did not have before. He differentiated his production and significantly increased his turnover.

5.2 A bastion against food waste

Born as a tool to increase income margins for producers, increasingly oppressed by market access mechanisms dominated by large groups, farmers markets gradually become something else: a form of resistance against mechanisms of food distribution that have become increasingly opaque and less respectful of the regeneration of eco-systems. The theme of sustainability, unavoidable in today's world, is an element of primary reflection on the part of an agricultural world that sees the effects of the climate crisis and its impact on production worsen year after year. The sector is both a victim and co-responsible for this crisis: one third of global climate-altering emissions are associated with the production and consumption of food, understood as in its entirety throughout the supply chain, from field to plate. This high figure is partly linked to the movement of food from one end of the planet to the other, and partially also to the incredible percentages of food waste, which can reach the record figure of 33% of the food produced. This disturbing percentage is also due to the

so-called food waste, i.e. those products that are thrown away directly by farms because they are considered unsuitable for consumption. This is an evolution determined in part by the strict rules imposed by large-scale distribution, whose specifications on fresh products end up directly affecting the amount of waste during production. Supermarkets require that fruit be shiny, of a certain colour, and above all of a certain size. The products that do not comply with this criterion are not accepted.

The farmers market knows no waste, simply because different rules apply: fruit and vegetables need not be beautiful, but good and genuine. And the guarantee of produce authenticity is not given by the aesthetic aspect, but by the producer's assurance, who grew and collected it the same morning, before bringing it to the market. Thus, pears are as they are created by nature: they can be different from one another, made of various shapes, some warty, others bruised. At the farmers market no one pays attention to shine and colour: no orange will be presented with the skin covered in wax to make it brighter, as happens in supermarkets. No one pays attention to the minimum size needed for products to be sold on the counters of large-scale retailers,

which often force fruit growers to throw away part of their production or to allocate it to the market of processed foods, with a significant loss of profit. The watchwords of these markets are different: quantity rather than quality; size rather than flavour; abundance rather than seasonality.

This latter aspect is also crucial since it is part of the process of re-education of the consumer previously mentioned: supermarkets have conveyed the illusory impression in proposing the same products all year round, imported from the other side of the world or grown in hyper-heated greenhouses, that the rhythms of nature can be distorted, that oranges are available in summer even if they do not grow on the trees within our hemisphere, that tomatoes can also be eaten in winter. The farmers market reverses this paradigm: it only sells what the land offers at a particular time and place. So fruits and vegetables are not always available, contrary to what takes place in supermarkets. They are available when it is their time; because farmers market producers do not import their goods, nor do they produce goods that are out of season. Farmers markets allow consumers to rediscover the direct relationship with the territory and the ancient taste of the seasons that cyclically mark

the course of time. The elderly can “rediscover the flavours of childhood”, as a customer of a certain age told Luca Mattozzi, a producer from Fara Sabina (Rieti) and soul of the Circus Maximus market in Rome. "You sell me memories," added the lady to the farmer, who tells the anecdote with a bit of satisfaction.

5.3 Ferrymen of the future

Sellers of memories, food artisans, defenders of biodiversity. All these definitions are fitting, yet another can be added: that of ferrymen of the future with their feet firmly planted in the past. Another characteristic of these direct sales chains: they combine innovation and tradition, using ancient knowledge and interpret it in a modern manner. Farmers markets do not indulge in nostalgia of a long gone era, alleged ancestral and pre-modern agriculture. Instead, they use the most advanced techniques to have more satisfactory results in the field, to reduce water consumption, to fight viruses. Yet, they do so without losing sight of the primary goal of agriculture: to produce genuine and quality food. They simply shy away from the main distortions of the agri-food system (hyper-productivity, obsession with the aesthetic aspect, availability out of season) starting from a profound knowledge of the productive and distribution mechanisms. They resist giving in to a system that wanted to marginalize them, claiming and taking on a new centrality. The centrality of an agricultural world that many considered inessential, on the verge of disappearing or at the limit of transformation into a mere executor of production paradigms codified elsewhere.

Their role as ferrymen of the future is also evident from the use that many of them make of digital technology tools, often wisely exploited to expand their range of action: during the lockdown period, many experimented through selling via WhatsApp with deliveries directly to customers, demonstrating an ability to adapt that appears somehow linked to an intrinsic versatility and their condition of being not only and no longer simple farmers, but also sellers. They then continued on this path, combining the two methods of sale: direct and on-line. Many of these producers have joined together and today offer a wide range of

products to city customers who do not have much time on their hands. It is an offshoot of the farmers market, which perhaps loses the beauty of exchange, gathering and meeting yet it allows producers to amplify the direct sales network which not only becomes the essential feature of their business but also represents one of the greatest revolutions of contemporary agriculture. In a certain sense, we could say that disintermediation changes the balance of power between producers and distributors, which seemed inevitably destined to lean in favour of the latter. Farmers market producers and all

those who have chosen direct sales in its various forms become distributors of themselves and propose a mechanism which, although not openly opposed to large-scale distribution, questions its basic functioning mechanisms. Revolutionizing the mechanisms also favours the farmers' permanent attention towards a growing appreciation of their products: it is no coincidence that many producers are also transforming themselves more and more frequently, setting up small artisan workshops or joining forces with processors. They produce juices, pestos, pasta, cheeses, thus managing to close the supply chains while

remedying one of the main shortcomings of the Italian agricultural sector: the low remuneration of raw materials. They can do it, yet again, because they have a reference clientele, with whom there is a permanent and lasting relationship of trust. This allows them to make investments, take risks, experiment and ultimately propose original goods, which would hardly find space on supermarket shelves, while increasing food bio-diversity.

5.4 Healthy carriers of a new model of society

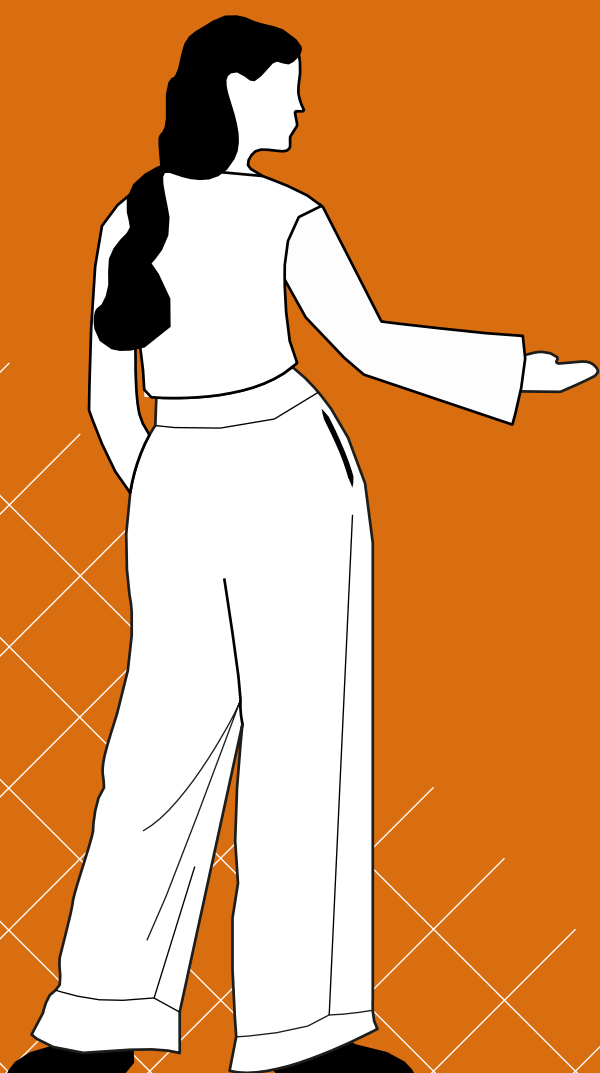
Ultimately, we can affirm that farmers markets are not simply places of trade, rather they become platforms through which a new agri-food practice circulates, whose protagonists are certainly the growers-sellers, but also the general public consumers. In this sense, they become places of encounter, of exchange, of circulation of ideas. An actual “agora of food”, in which a different culture is affirmed. One which redesigns the disjointed relationship between city and countryside, between those who produce food and those who consume it. It is not only a question of shortening the distance between consumers and the farmer producers, but also of establishing new alliances, new forms of cooperation, economies of solidarity that outline the contours of what is defined above as a modern

“counter-market.” The protagonists of the farmers markets are therefore not simply resistant to the overwhelming power of large industrial groups and organised distribution. They are healthy carriers of a new model of society, which creates new spaces of interconnection and collaboration through food. Spaces that are increasingly necessary in our systems of advanced capitalism in which individualities appear atomized while the forms of collective participation are going through a deep crisis. The farmers markets in Italy have experienced a resounding success in the last 15 years, yet this is a worldwide movement, which crosses all continents with its peculiar specificity, but with common features and characteristics. The development of direct selling was

stimulated by the reaction to the mechanisms of the agri-food system which aimed at cancelling the individuality of farmers transforming them into labourer-suppliers. It is precisely the awareness of being carriers of another culture and other values that has led to the birth of a global coalition of *farmers markets*, which sees the participation of representatives of farmers markets from all over the world: from the United States to Italy, from Ghana to New Zealand, passing through almost all European countries and several Asian countries. Launched on the occasion of the FAO summit in the summer of 2021, in the suggestive setting of the San Teodoro market at Circo Massimo, a stone's throw from the headquarters of the international organization, the coalition is experiencing

significant growth, through joint meetings, networking and sharing of practices. And through the drafting of a manifesto, in which the claim of a role other than that of simply selling is made explicit from the opening lines. "Farmers markets are like flowers. When cared for, they thrive in the sunlight and seek space to grow. We imagine a world of farmers markets like many flowers in a field, that act as interactive symbols of commerce and community." Interactive symbols of commerce and community: that is, the fulcrum of the counter-market which seems destined to impose itself as one of the supporting elements of a new model of society.

b



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