

Unifying nature of food: consumer-initiated cooperatives in Istanbul

Unifying
nature of food

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to study how activists involved in consumer-initiated cooperatives, in a specific context, challenge the practices of the neoliberal system and develop counter-practices that are ingrained with their values. It aims to access the transformative capacity and inclusiveness of consumer-initiated cooperatives and the role played by prefigurative practices in changing the status quo. Three practices – defetishization of agricultural commodities, surplus generation and distribution, prefiguration – that enable the inclusion of those groups who are marginalized in the food production and consumption nexus by neoliberal policies are identified.

Design/methodology/approach – The findings of this paper were developed from 23 unstructured interviews, participant observation and analysis of the social media accounts of five consumer-initiated cooperatives located in different districts of Istanbul and which are involved in a collective response to the neoliberal policies.

Findings – The study discusses that, in a specific context, political events and economic policies can be a catalyst for the initiation of alternative consumer-initiated cooperatives. The findings indicate that these organizations can develop and articulate prefigurative practices that are influential in transforming the prevailing capitalist food provisioning system to be more inclusive.

Research limitations/implications – The findings offer an alternative view to the dominant capitalist logic and advance the concept of how the economic sphere can be re-politicized and how the persevering notion of financial performance is resolved by invoking values of inclusion, solidarity, responsibility and sharing. The findings are based on the study of five cases in a specific context during a specific period.

Originality/value – This paper focuses on cooperatives owned and governed by activist consumers and presents results concerning their underlying practices for creating a food provisioning system that is inclusive and aiming for social justice and equality. Similarly, it provides evidence of how local political and economic conditions influence the appropriation and development of these practices – commodity defetishization, surplus distribution and prefiguration.

Keywords Alternative food networks, Consumer-initiated cooperatives, Prefigurative spaces, Diverse economies, Turkey

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the past couple of decades, we have witnessed the emergence of food provisioning systems that are “alternative” to “conventional” food systems. Alternative food networks (AFNs) have been shaped in line with the explosion of interest in locally grown, free of pesticides and good quality food which is usually distributed in farmers’ markets, online or



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offline specialty shops or via unconventional methods like box and basket schemes (Renting *et al.*, 2003; Whatmore *et al.*, 2003; Maye *et al.*, 2007; Goodman and Goodman, 2009; Goodman *et al.*, 2012; Wilson, 2013). In an effort to bypass intermediaries in production and distribution, AFNs are in “opposition to conventional, supermarket-led food chains” (Maye and Kirwan, 2010, p. 1). The driving forces of AFNs in Western countries have been the concern of wealthier consumers for healthier and high-quality food and “ethical consumerism” where consumers, by assuming responsibility in making a choice, evaluate the processes used in their production and be part of political activism for social justice and environmental sustainability (Barnett *et al.*, 2005; Clarke *et al.*, 2007; Clarke, 2008; Goodman *et al.*, 2010; Little *et al.*, 2010; Barnett *et al.*, 2017). Particularly since the 2007 crises that led to deep-rooted economic and social problems, there has been an increasing interest among academicians and informed, responsible citizens, to study and experiment with alternative forms of organizing which operate with a non-capitalist logic. Studies of alternative economies and cooperatives mainly emphasize their role in the construction of non-capitalist subjects, repoliticizing economic realm (Gibson-Graham, 2003), and how commercial success can be resolved by the governing principles of equality and democratic management. One of the commonly studied forms of alternative organizations is cooperatives; they are expected to develop innovative solutions to the problems of capitalism in relation to unemployment, housing, food provisioning, energy as well as providing examples that challenge the existing ownership pattern, profit motive and governance mechanism.

The focus of this study is consumer-initiated cooperatives (CICs) embedded in alternative food systems which strive to change consumers’ purchasing habits, raise their awareness of the nature and seasonality of farming, while, on the other hand, trying to persuade farmers to reduce and eventually cease using agro-chemicals. As indicated by Brunori *et al.* (2012), these cooperatives are initiated by innovative consumers aiming to reshape the production–consumption relations in food provisioning. Since 2013, similar initiatives gained impetus in Turkish food provisioning system that is typified by the dominance of a few vertically integrated big firms. These oppositional movements have a transformative capacity and state a claim on food “justice” and “sovereignty.” They fight against the neoliberal order and the corporate dominated food system. Furthermore, these cooperatives are characterized by solidarity, autonomy and responsibility and thus we take them as “alternative” organizations as indicated by Parker *et al.* (2014). CICs are initiated by activist consumers who perceive food as a political issue and try to re-politicize the economy by transforming both production and consumption. They are owned and governed by activist consumers who practice alternative ways of consumption and deliberately disregard a managerialist logic. All the activities of CICs are carried out by consumers who voluntarily offer their labor and provide examples of non-marketable forms of economic transactions such as reciprocity and social obligations. Given all these features, this study takes CICs as spaces of prefigurative politics where politically positioned consumers not only experiment and gain insight into alternatives of the capitalist logic but also reshape the existing power relations in and around the cooperative.

Studying CICs as spaces for prefigurative politics is helpful in overcoming the dichotomy between action and ideas and emphasize the primacy of action over planning and theorizing (Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Yates, 2015; Farias, 2017a). In prefigurative politics, “action is guided by values rather than instrumental efficiency” (Leach, 2013, p. 1) and “new” within the “old” is developed by counter-hegemonic modes of interaction (Leach, 2013). Furthermore, social movements such as AFNs can be conceptualized as “spaces” (Haug, 2013) where encounters among members and transformations in practices occur. Such an approach also enables to study the role of practices used by movement members in transforming the status quo (Haug, 2013; Reedy *et al.*, 2016; Fernandez *et al.*, 2017; Reinecke,

2018; Skoglund and Böhm, 2019). The practices that are developed in line with the values of the members of a movement influence the accumulation of knowledge and the development of alternative forms of organizing (Yates, 2015).

Based on diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2003, 2008) and alternative economic spaces (Parker *et al.*, 2014), we study CICs as a non-capitalist form of organizing, operating with a non-capitalistic form of work, shaped by values of solidarity, responsibility and in a deliberate quest for ways to dislocate from hegemonic capitalist relations. The aim of this study is to explore how the activists engaged in CICs develop practices that promote inclusion, while tackling the grand challenges (Ferraro *et al.*, 2015) regarding environment and inequalities in food provisioning system. In contrast to those organizations that are embedded in capitalism and, with their structures and operations, turn out to be sites where inequality (especially related to gender, race and class) has been reproduced (Amis *et al.*, 2018), CICs, in an effort to overcome inequality, develop and experiment with practices that enable the participation of a diverse set of stakeholders. More precisely, the paper aims to evaluate the transformative capacity of CICs for being more inclusive and explores practices that facilitate the inclusion of producers and consumers that have been marginalized by the neoliberal policies. Three practices are identified: defetishization of agricultural commodities, developing a different surplus generation and distribution system and creation of a space that fosters prefigurative politics. As opposed to the capitalist logic, CICs experiment with defetishization of commodities to unveil the social relations and labor through which commodities are produced and a different way of surplus generation. To examine these practices, we explore the notion of commodity fetishism as discussed by Marx (1976) where social relations embedded in commodities are obscured because of the way they are exchanged for money. Commodity fetishism, by concealing the social relations in the production of commodities, reifies these relations, hides exploitation in surplus generation (Lukács, 1971) and silences opposition. As prefigurative spaces, CICs enable the engagement of a diverse set of stakeholders to interact and empower multiple voices so that inequality between small and big food producers, inequality between high- and low-income groups in consuming good quality food and inequality in the composition of labor force are challenged. Furthermore, mobilization of diverse constituents and development of a collective identity can draw in various distributed groups to the movement and “craft hegemonic links” among them (Van Bommel and Spicer, 2011, p. 1719).

The CICs studied in this paper proliferated as a reaction to the neoliberal policies and hegemony of capitalist relations promoted by the governing party. Different from their counterparts in developed economies, they claim that healthy and good food should be available to and affordable by all income groups and this can be accomplished by an alternative organizational form, alternative relations with suppliers and consumers, alternative ways of work and surplus distribution. Furthermore, CICs are different to conventional cooperatives in Turkey that have been instrumentalized either by the state or by companies for private gain.

The contributions are twofold; first, the study shows that CICs embedded in AFNs can be inclusive as opposed to other works done in other geographies that criticize CICs for being silent on issues of inclusion, social justice and equity; and, second, it demonstrates that local conditions – economy, politics and demography – do influence the practices developed, appropriated and shaped by CICs.

The paper is organized as follows. In the following section, we provide a review of alternative food spaces and CICs. The third section is related to the Turkish context and is composed of two parts: the consumer cooperatives and political and economic drivers of alternative consumer cooperatives. The fourth section explains the method, sampling and data collection procedures. Then, in the fifth section, we present our findings followed by discussion and conclusion.

Alternative food spaces: networks, consumers and organizations

In the past two decades, food has become a domain where studies and initiatives as an opposition to neoliberalism have proliferated (Guthman, 2008). The food provisioning system has gone through a transformation via free trade arrangements, privatization, new enclosures in the form of land grabs and leaving food security controls to the market (McMichael, 2014). As a result, small farmers were marginalized, displaced from their land and from farming tradition. With the implementation of free trade agreements, imported seeds and foodstuff found a place in supermarkets. “Food from nowhere,” at low prices, produced by a few vertically and horizontally integrated firms, imported usually with zero tariffs invaded the markets. Small farmers lost their competitive position against large, vertically and horizontally integrated agro-food firms.

On the consumption side, consumer trust in mass-produced industrial foods has been lost; safety-anxious and quality-driven consumers are drawn away from the mainstream food provisioning system. Small producers and activist consumers, as a reaction to neoliberalism and the corporate-led food provisioning system, are engaged in the development of AFNs. The major concern of AFNs is to overcome inequality in food provisioning (healthy and good quality food should be affordable by all income groups), ethical consumerism (social justice and environmental sustainability) and supporting small local producers who have lost their position in the mass-produced capitalist food provisioning system (Wilson, 2013; Goodman *et al.*, 2012; Goodman and Goodman, 2009; Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Whatmore *et al.*, 2003).

AFNs are characterized as “post-productivist” food regimes in rural development, which is typified by the emergence of “quality food markets” as an alternative to “mass markets,” characterized by the dominance of a few big producers and retailers (Renting *et al.*, 2003). AFNs transform both consumption and production; on the consumption side, the major transitions are expected to be on the perception of good “quality” food and buying habits (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002). On the production side, in addition to using more environmentally sustainable methods of farming, the major transformation is expected to re-center the small producers, which have no means to compete against big producers. Furthermore, AFNs are spaces for experimentation and drivers of innovation (Brunori *et al.*, 2012) where alternative forms of organizing and practices are developed.

Although AFNs reconfigure production–consumption nexus and provide an alternative food provisioning system, there has been some criticism as well. One of these criticisms is related to the use of mainstream distribution channels and their commercial success and expansion (Maye and Kirwan, 2010). Resorting to organic and sometimes local food is used only by concerned people who have enough money, and thus such a consumption is taken as “elitist” (Goodman and Goodman, 2009; Demir, 2013). The second criticism is related to the universalization of AFN practices, which disregards local conditions. However, the political, cultural and historical processes dominant in a specific context (Jarosz, 2008; Allen *et al.*, 2003) shape the emergence and development of food systems. Depending on different political, social and cultural contingencies, the practices developed by AFNs can vary. Thus, as proposed by Allen (2010), because historical processes have shaped regions and social relations therein, the discussion of alternative movements in food should take into consideration local economy, democracy and demography.

The third criticism is rooted in the concept of “alternativeness”: the discourse of alternative leads to a dichotomy between alternative and conventional (Wilson, 2013; Maye *et al.*, 2007; Le Velly, 2019). However, such a dichotomy is not applicable in most cases (Jarosz, 2008; Holloway *et al.*, 2007). For example, AFN products were initially distributed through alternative channels such as charity shops, food cooperatives, farmers’ markets,

community-supported agriculture or box schemes. However, today, in some countries, most AFN products are sold in supermarkets (Goodman and Goodman, 2009). The situation is different in Turkey; organic foods occupy very little shelf-space in supermarkets and AFN products still preserve their “alternativeness” (Akyüz and Demir, 2016).

Finally, AFNs have been criticized for being silent on issues of inclusion, social justice and equity (Goodman and Goodman, 2009; Allen, 2010; Wilson, 2013). Some of the extant research argue that the practices of AFNs are confined to a special group of consumers in terms of race and class (Goodman and Goodman, 2009). As discussed by Goodman and Goodman (2009), the domain of AFNs can be limited to “better-off people” located in a limited number of places if related institutional arrangements are not realized. In AFNs, food prices are higher when compared to the conventional food provisioning system; preparation of these systems requires time, commitment and knowledge accumulation, which in turn asserts that being part of an AFN, a consumer requires a significant level of economic and cultural capital (Goodman, 2009). Moreover, most food cooperatives in the USA serve only their members in return to volunteer work and exclude non-members (Gauthier *et al.*, 2019).

Consumption and consumers. AFNs provide an alternative space where some actors such as intermediaries are disregarded and new actors such as active consumers are included in the food provisioning system. Focusing on the transformative power of consumers to produce and re-produce a specific consumption culture, AFNs provide a milieu where producers and consumers jointly constitute a web of relations comprising both market and non-market transactions (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002). Consumers’ demand for more knowledge as to the safety, origin and production methods of the products and the farmers’ struggle to develop such knowledge reserves lead to an understanding where “food is an arena of contestation rather than a veil of reality” (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002, p. 15). Asking and providing information about the origin of the food and about the producers is a practice that can provide a solution to commodity fetishism (Allen and Kovach, 2000). Consumers demand information and make a choice to be part of an AFN or not, and these choices can affect the structure and relationship in the dominant food provisioning system (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Allen and Kovach, 2000). Thus, consumer is political, and consumption is a political act (Brunori *et al.*, 2012) which can change purchasing habits, dominant food consumption habits and production modes.

Consumer food cooperatives. Consumer food cooperatives are an important element of AFNs in challenging the dominance of the corporate-led food provisioning system. They have been influential in providing examples for a set of practices such as box schemes, supporting local and quality foodstuff and training the consumer (Zitcer, 2015). The origin of cooperatives dates back to Rochdale (Fairbain, 1994) and there has been academic interest in cooperatives especially in periods following an economic and cultural crisis.

Consumer food cooperatives embedded in AFNs are advocates of food sovereignty and sites of ethical consumption (Zitcer, 2015). In line with the food sovereignty movement, they aim for a democratic redesigning of domestic agriculture to overcome food dependency and depeasantization (McMichael, 2014). The main argument of the food sovereignty movement is based on the displacement of local farmers from agriculture because of the dominant mass-produced agricultural system. This displacement has severe consequences such as the displacement of land-related tacit knowledge, repurposing of land for housing and the disassociation of consumers in urban areas from nature so that they cannot conceive the hazards caused by mass production. The movements’ main principle is to position food not as a commodity but as a human right and to promote the local. As sites of ethical consumption, consumer cooperatives redefine consumption; they do not perceive foodstuff as simple objects. By unveiling the decisions and actions taken during the production

process, consumer cooperatives aim to overcome commodity fetishism. Furthermore, consumer cooperatives are sites for democratic values because decisions related to the range of products to be offered and various ways of promoting certain producers are collectively decided. Thus, it is claimed that consumer cooperatives understand food consumption as a political process (Moragues-Faus, 2017; Brunori *et al.*, 2012; Forno and Graziano, 2014; Rakopoulos, 2014), favor collective action and solidarity and provide a diversity of economic arrangements that are based on the “ethics of solidarity” (Gibson-Graham, 2003, p. 617).

As is the case for AFNs, there are some criticisms of consumer food cooperatives and their transformative capacity. One of these criticisms relates to the market-based solutions provided by consumer cooperatives that produce and reproduce neoliberal arrangements such as shifting the responsibility to control the origin, content and the quality of the available foodstuff (Busa and Garder, 2015; Guthman, 2008; Lockie and Halpin, 2005). The other criticism is related to the overemphasis of “localness” which can lead to the elimination of products produced in other places that also meet ethical consumption standards. Finally, consumer cooperatives are criticized for being exclusionary in terms of class, income, color and gender (Guthman, 2008; Slocum, 2006). In a research on two food cooperatives in California, Zitcer (2015) discusses that exclusivity is manifested in the products sold, business practices adopted and the ways they draw in potential members. The paper also provides evidence about certain steps (such as anti-racism and anti-oppression training of all employees, a membership fund to cover equity payments and a training program for locals) taken by these cooperatives to be more inclusive on a wider scale.

The attainment of the basic principles – inclusivity, ethical consumerism and solidarity – of consumer cooperatives is rooted in the values and beliefs of the activists involved. As discussed by Barnard (2016), activists can configure their physical world to endorse their moral identities in an immoral world. Barnard (2016) shows that moral (beliefs that specify what is “right” and what is “wrong”) worldviews motivate action, and actors imbued with a certain set of moral motivations can develop a moral habitus although seemingly this would be very difficult in a specific environment. The activist consumers involved in CICs reconfigure their physical world and their relations and develop various mechanisms that would enable them to resist the neoliberal system and realize their envisioned social and political world. As pointed out by Farias (2017b), various practices in the prevailing economic system challenge and obscure the implementation of the underlying values of alternative organizations, and to create a sustainable alternative model, these organizations should develop an alternative culture of exchanges. Consumers engaged in CICs and having a set of values can shape the existing norms and values of the neoliberal system through a mundane, daily activity-consumption.

Methodology

This research studies the CICs located in various districts of İstanbul and in which members are collectively engaged in drafting an AFN. The major question underlying this study is how AFNs, and particularly CICs, provide an alternative and a new form of food provisioning system in a specific context – Turkey. More specifically, it focuses on the practices developed by CICs in developing an alternative food provisioning system. In other words, we aim to evaluate the transformative capacity of CICs for being more inclusive; the specific practices employed by CICs in order to change the prevailing capitalist system that is characterized by the distribution of profits, paid labor and economic performance criteria. In so doing, we focus on three major issues: the defetishization of agricultural commodities, the development of a new surplus generation and distribution system and, finally, networking activities for drafting policies and building alliances.

Currently, there are a growing number of diverse AFN communities that are organized either as informal initiatives such as buying groups or as organizations in Turkey. Among these diverse AFNs, we studied consumer-initiated food consumption cooperatives that identify themselves as “alternative.” They are prefigurative spaces where the members are collectively engaged in drafting the premises of an alternative production and consumption chain. They are grassroots initiatives whose purpose is not capital accumulation but societal benefit and the transformation of the capitalist mode of production, distribution and consumption. In this newly emerging field of alternative food provisioning, we identified five cooperatives. All of them are generalists, offering a diverse set of food items and various other agro-products, and except for UCIC, all started as initiatives that confine their operations to a district of İstanbul. UCIC was established in 2009, before the Gezi protests by the academic and administrative staff of a University and the remaining four, GCIC, KCIC, BCIC and KKCIC, were initiated after Gezi as an outcome of gatherings of the inhabitants in specific districts. While the research was conducted, BCIC, GCIC and KKCIC were “street cooperatives,” because they are not yet able to complete the formal registration process and they do not have their own shops. In December 2019, BCIC, and, in February 2020, GCIC completed the legal procedures and assumed the legal form of a cooperative. A detailed description of the CICs studied is given in Table 1. Except few cases, all CICs purchase from the same suppliers who use local seeds, who do not use chemicals during the production process, and who do not exploit women/child labor. All products sold by CICs are purchased from small suppliers; 23% of these suppliers are women, 23% men, 10% are family-owned farms, 30% producer cooperatives owned by men and women farmers and 10% women-owned and -managed producer cooperatives. All CICs develop a horizontal organization structure and consensus-based decision-making.

Research setting

Consumer food cooperatives in Turkey. The conventional consumer cooperatives for food in Turkey have existed as a political instrument and economic device since the establishment of Republic. The first consumer cooperative was established in 1925 for bureaucrats under the leadership of the government and the necessary legal adjustments for this type of cooperatives was drafted. Later, private and public companies and some labor unions established their own cooperatives to provide low-priced foodstuff to their members. The services of these cooperatives were limited to their members. The major characteristics underlying these cooperatives was the dominant role assumed by the state; the state was the sole source of finance, governance and control (Bilgin and Tanıyıcı 2008). As indicated by Rehber (2000), they cannot be seen as real cooperatives. Until 2000, food consumption cooperatives were managed under the strict scrutiny of the governments. This control was

	UCIC	KCIC	KKCIC	BCIC	GCIC
Date of creation	2008	2015	2017	2017	2016
Initiated as a . . .	Cooperative	Street Coop/ Network	Street Coop/ Network	Street Coop/ Network	Street Coop/ Network
Assumed legal status of a cooperative in . . .	2008 Organization and district	2016 District	Street Coop/ Network District	2019 District	2020 District
Localization					
Involvement of women as founders	25%	71%	67%	57%	100%

Table 1.
Case studies

realized through various mechanisms such as allocating subsidies, paying the fee of the founding partners and price support system. In particular, the allocation of subsidies and price support systems, which were implemented to regulate the price of agricultural commodities, turned out to be political instruments. In 2000, in line with a full-blown liberalization program, the legal framework for the conventional cooperatives was revised (Aysu, 2015, 2019). The aim of this legislative change was to reform the governance of cooperatives using the basic principles of managerialism; production facilities owned by the cooperatives were transformed into corporations, which could be later privatized; unprofitable assets were sold; and decision-making power resides with the managers but not the beneficiaries.

However, the CICs studied in this article differ from the mainstream conventional consumer cooperatives; they are grassroots initiatives, established by consumers sharing a common worldview. They are not funded and governed by the government; they are independent and autonomous. The only state control is through the auditing of financial records. With their deliberate concern for not implementing managerialist principles, CICs provide a space for freedom to exercise alternative governance mechanisms. Furthermore, with their emphasis on reshuffling the relationship between producers and consumers, empowering small producers who are excluded from the dominant mass-produced agricultural system, CICs provide an alternative model for the inclusion of marginalized small farmers as well as those consumers with less purchasing power.

Political and economic drivers of CICs. Among others, two major developments have been instrumental in the proliferation of CICs in Turkey; the Gezi protests and the neoliberal and populist policies of the government related to agriculture. After 2000, in line with the operationalization of export-oriented policy, an industrial agriculture model has been implemented. To increase productivity, farmers relied heavily on imported agro-chemicals and hybrid seeds; this in turn has made them vulnerable to currency fluctuations (Aysu, 2015). Increasing input costs were not balanced by increasing prices at the market. During the past couple of years, to control prices and promote competition, the governments reduced or even circumvented tariffs on various food stuff. Minimum prices, which were once determined by the governments, are left to the dynamics of the free market. The outcome of these developments was reflected in the market structure where a few vertically and horizontally integrated firms dominated the trade and small farmers, who could not compete with these firms, went bankrupt (Çiftçi-Sen, 2018). Small farmers, deprived of the means to produce even their own food, either started to work in big companies as unskilled labor or found jobs in the informal economy. Furthermore, because of financialization, small farmers have become dependent on credit-based supplies purchasing, which in turn has left them vulnerable in their debt repayment.

On the political side, the proliferation of CICs can be traced back to the Gezi protests where citizens with similar concerns assembled, discussed and developed certain practices in line with their values and worldviews. Gezi was a middle-class movement and participants were professionals and one-third of them inhabited wealthy districts of İstanbul (Tuğal, 2013, 2015). These districts later hosted CICs. The Gezi protests, by providing a space for people with similar political concerns, has been influential in the formation and diffusion of CICs. Participants of Gezi wanted to express their dissatisfaction with the precarious social conditions, economic uncertainty and neoliberal policies. They were uneasy about the impoverishment and precariousness of their social life (Farro and Demirhisar, 2014) and they were threatened by the commodification of nature, and shared public spaces (Tuğal, 2013). Protesters refused authoritarian approaches and claimed to have control over their own existence (Farro and Demirhisar, 2014). Gezi was a remarkable

event for collective creativity, which produced more events, particularly the emergence of “solidarity movements” among those who were emotionally sympathetic to the spirit of the movement. As indicated during the interviews with the founders of a CIC, the Gezi protests enabled them to get in touch with wider masses and explain their ideals.

Gezi participants have seen that it is possible to invent alternative ways of living without being subject to the dominant cultural, social and economic framework in Turkey. They have experienced communal life, and have seen that collective decision-making by full consensus is possible (Örs and Turan, 2015). They translated some of the practices they developed during the Gezi protests to other future initiatives. Also, Gezi was an occasion to meet with people who shared similar dreams and were engaged in collective action. As a founder in UCIC stated: “Gezi generated KCIC and after years now it breeds BCIC. So, they are organized around similar political ideals and social structures.” Furthermore, Gezi promoted collective identities and networks of future collaboration. One of the founders of KKCIC stated that:

These kinds of resistance movements disappear but friendship remains. Accidentally, I heard about KCIC, though healthy food was not my priority, I know the uniting power of food for the neighborhoods like ours where people are very sensitive about healthy diet. Then I and two of my friends from our neighborhood started KKCIC.

Thus, the local cultural milieu of the Gezi protests constituted the structure and spirit of the CICs, which we focus on. Similar to other mass protests in European Union countries (Wigger, 2019), the Gezi protest attracted political support from diverse groups and offered more praxis-oriented solutions. After the evacuation of the park, protests were carried into different districts of the city as “park forums.” The Gezi protests and neighborhood forums provided an arena for the gathering of activist groups, collectives and citizens who previously were not involved in politics.

The discontents of neoliberal policies – the consumers and small farmers – collectively set the ground for prefigurative politics in food in Turkey; the actions taken and strategies developed by the leading figures led to the initiation of the CICs. The demands and concerns of the Gezi protesters reconciled with the values that shape the policies of CICs which aim to develop an *emancipatory* and *inclusive* political system in food provisioning so that justice, equality and democracy are promoted. By engaging in AFNs and CICs, activists had a chance to express their dissent with the existing economic system and exercise their citizenship rights: to be part of the decision-making system in politics, which influences the allocation of resources and facilitates the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. The AFN movement and CICs in the Turkish context enabled the unification of those groups in society who were excluded by the populist neoliberal policies. Furthermore, by being part of these CICs, activist groups created a free space to practice their worldviews: participative decision-making; reshuffling relations between producers and consumers; giving voice to marginalized actors; and reworking gender relations, autonomy and freedom.

Method

Sample and data collection procedures. For data collection purposes, we followed a multi-method approach that is composed of interviews, participant observation and secondary data. According to Yin (2003), multiple sources of evidence are useful for ensuring the validity of the major concepts investigated. Initially, for identifying informants, we followed purposeful sampling and approached the founders of these cooperatives with an expectation that they would provide ample information for a better understanding of our research question(s). During the data analysis stage, we also used theoretical sampling to provide

more insight to the information provided by previous informants. The data collection process continued until interviewees provided no new information, a situation of “saturation” as identified by Glaser and Strauss (2017). Although the sample was diverse in terms of gender, the majority of informants were educated middle-class professionals, with four exceptions. Three of our informants were university students and another informant was a blue-collar employee.

In total, we conducted 23 interviews, which spanned for 21 h and 41 min. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In-depth, face-to-face interviews lasted on average an hour and were documented in 165 pages of transcripts. In the interest of consistency, one team member did the first round of interviews. The other team member joined the follow-up interviews after the initial analysis of first round of interview transcripts. By doing so, we expected to improve the richness of the data provided by the interviews and to enhance confidence in the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Data concerning informants and details of interviews are given in Table 2.

Furthermore, we conducted participant observation; we attended an AFN workshop in Boğaziçi University and the Environment Festival of Kadıköy Municipality. We participated in the meetings of the “decision-making” body of some of the cooperatives and their public meetings, which provided information about their values and operations to a wider audience. We also made shop visits to see daily routine operations and observe encounters with customers. During the shop visits and other events (meetings, gatherings, anniversary celebrations), one of the researchers took notes documenting everyday activities. For triangulation purposes, we also analyzed texts from Facebook accounts of them all. Social media is a platform for these cooperatives to make announcements as well as to share their ideas on various political issues. Via their Facebook accounts, we were able to

Role	Affiliation	Age	Gender	Profession/education	Duration
Volunteer	KCIC	30–35	M	PhD student	75 min
Founder	GCIC	40–45	F	Mechanical engineer	104 min
Volunteer	KCIC	40	F	Architect	34 min
Volunteer	BCIC	30–35	M	Bachelor’s in Political Science	66 min
Volunteer	KCIC	30	F	Industrial designer	50 min
Founder	KCIC	30–35	F	PhD student	46 min
Founder	GCIC	35–40	F	Architect	95 min
Volunteer	KCIC	20–25	F	Undergraduate student	60 min
Volunteer	KCIC	30–35	F	Bachelor’s in Education	20 min
Volunteer	KCIC	35–40	M	Teacher	55 min
Volunteer	KCIC	30–35	M	Food engineer	60 min
Volunteer	KCIC	35–40	M	Editor	50 min
Founder	UCIC	45–50	M	Librarian	40 min
Volunteer	UCIC	20–25	F	Undergraduate student	10 min
Volunteer	KKCIC	45–50	M	Manager	35 min
Volunteer	KKCIC	40	F	Professional sportswomen	38 min
Volunteer	BCIC	30–35	M	Worker	46 min
Volunteer	Ecological Farming Association	25–30	M	Industrial engineer	14 min
Founder	Food Producers’ Cooperative	45–50	M	Architect	62 min
Volunteer	Alternative Producer Network	33	F	Industrial engineer	58 min
President	Farmers’ Union	55–60	M	Agricultural technician	120 min
Volunteer	AFN Platform	25–30	M	Bachelor’s in Economics	140 min
Volunteer	Food producers’ collective	20–25	M	Undergraduate student	22 min
Total					21.41 h

Table 2.
List of interviewees
and interview details

access their publications, and read news about their activities published in newspapers, as well as radio and other media outlets. We classified all their posts to understand their priorities and political stance. On their Facebook accounts, CICs also share reports and news about cooperatives; we also used this content as a secondary resource. In so doing, we were able to have a better understanding of the range of activities involved, dominant values communicated and the type of communication strategies used as well as the coalitions built with other organizations. Using multiple data sources and multiple investigators enabled us to catch divergent perspectives and crosscheck our insights. Data regarding social media posts is given in [Table 3](#).

Data analysis. During the initial phase of data collection, we aimed to gain insight into why and how CICs emerged and developed. Informants provided data regarding the history of events, explained where they failed, from whom they had support and the creative solutions they have developed to overcome problems encountered. After analyzing the initial interviews, we decided to use a more comprehensive coding scheme for further analysis of second round of interviews and other data sources. We enriched our coding scheme to include issues as what they wanted to change, what is the target (an organization, culture, practices), the goal (seeking material or symbolic change or both) and what type of strategies they use (engagement, enlargement, communication). This enabled us to identify recurring themes on different data sources (interviews, social media accounts) used and, at the final stage, we aggregated these emerging themes into three groups:

- (1) defetishization of commodities;
- (2) surplus generation and distribution; and
- (3) prefigurative spaces.

We argue that in a specific context, these practices can foster the initiation of CICs that are more inclusive and have a capacity to transform the existing capitalist system.

Social media	UCIC	KCIC	KKCIC	BCIC	GCIC	Total
<i>Posts</i>						
Meeting announcements	285	482	121	157	25	1,070
Product promotions	313	193	6	59	0	571
Announcements about other cooperatives	70	119	50	30	35	304
News from producers	17	29	16	7	6	75
News about coop activities	14	75	1	1	6	97
Mutual activities	21	130	31	24	0	206
Posts about food sovereignty	15	56	33	1	11	116
Posts about food safety	10	57	16	9	13	105
Posts about solidarity	44	81	35	14	18	192
Posts about political economy of agriculture	13	45	3	9	15	85
Coop news on media (articles, radio programs, YouTube broadcasts)	19	50	3	13	0	85
Total (number of posts)	821	1,317	315	324	129	2,906
<i>Shared content</i>						
Articles about food sovereignty, food safety, solidarity and political economy of agriculture	64	457	208	92	220	1,041
News and articles about the cooperative and study notes on cooperatives	29	129	12	10	0	180
Total (pages)	93	585	220	102	220	1,221

Table 3.
Social media sources

Findings

The analysis of our data indicates that in the initiation and diffusion of CICs, the core values and worldviews of the activists have been influential. In the first part of this section, we explain these core values. In the second part, we provide an answer to the question whether CICs initiated and imbued with these core values can provide alternative solutions to transform the existing capitalist food provisioning system enabling them to be more inclusive.

Core values shaping the practices of consumer-initiated cooperatives as drivers of inclusion

This part examines how CICs decouple from neoliberal arrangements by exploring the values and motivations of activists who aim to construct an inclusive, solidarity-based ethical practices in the food provisioning system. Following the argument of [Farias \(2017b\)](#) and [Barnard \(2016\)](#), studying the underlying values of CICs is useful in explaining how they motivate actions and alternative practices. In other words, because the transformative capacity of CICs is rooted in their core values, this section analyzes the values that drive practices adopted in developing an alternative system.

When describing motivations, the founders of UCIC stressed, “care about social, economic, ecologic inequalities in agriculture [...] and aim to provide fairly priced, clean of pesticides, local products directly from small producers to consumers that eliminate the intermediaries.” These core values in different forms are shared by the other CICs, through their websites and social media accounts. However, these values are prevalent only among CICs because these cooperatives are grassroots movements and shaped around collective identities. Mainstream conventional food cooperatives that aim to provide only cheap foodstuff to their members do not share these values. As stated by one of the founders of UCIC:

We share our experiences with many groups but not all of them are able to implement them. There must be a political formation to support and be involved in the movement. There must be ideals about how to get organized and a culture to nourish the movement.

Although the priorities of each CIC studied differ slightly because of their demographic composition, they all mainly share the same values; they are connected by a common identity and common values. They offer an alternative mode of production–consumption nexus and wealth distribution, which is opposed to capitalism, in a militant way. The practices developed by these cooperatives reflect both their values and their aims to create an alternative way of living for consumers and producers as well as collective work relationships among its members. During interviews, various CIC members emphasized that they are united around the values of “food sovereignty.” However, a deeper analysis reveals some other common values. The main principles that unite them all are working with small producers, mutual initiatives in production and consumption, collective work, ecological–social relationships and social solidarity. For example, as publicized on its Web page, UCIC explains itself as “an alternative model that aims to draw small food producers and consumers together without an intermediary [...] to inspire local initiatives [...] to question the presumption that “just” and “healthy” food can be consumed only by high income groups [...] to provide a model where just food can be attained by all income groups [...] to establish long-term, trust-based relationships between consumers and producers.” During the informative public meetings of KCIC that we have attended, they explained their core values to a wider public and invited those who share a similar worldview to join the cooperative as volunteers.

Shared values are translated to some distinctive practices that promote inclusivity and solidarity in the production–consumption nexus and governance. In terms of production–consumption, all CICs work directly with small producers and bypass intermediaries. For example, during the public meetings held by BCIC, where they explain the aims and activities of the cooperative to a wider audience, it is stated that they set a target to buy all the products directly from producer cooperatives, especially those managed by women. Furthermore, they encourage and help farmers to organize as producer cooperatives; they provide know-how and share their experiences in establishing a cooperative with any other group regardless of their political orientation, which indicates a dedication to inclusiveness. Similar concerns are expressed in the website of UCIC, Facebook accounts of BCIC and GCIC as well. In line with social solidarity values, CICs collaborate with producer cooperatives, especially those which are owned and run by women. These practices shaped by their core values promote the inclusion of small farmers who were distanced from agriculture by neoliberal policies and women farmers who were distanced from public life by the social and cultural norms prevalent in Turkey.

CICs value a nature-friendly framework that takes social benefit as the source of their production and consumption relationships. By supporting local production, based on consumption-in-its-place concept, they ensure that everyone, including low-income groups, can have access to healthy food at affordable prices. In one of the meetings of the governing body of KCIC, the participants discussed whether to include avocado in their product line or not. Some participants were against selling avocado because it was expensive and not a native product. At the end of long discussions, the decision was postponed until the next weekly meeting so that everyone could collect more information on the topic. With this practice, it is anticipated that CICs will be more inclusive as opposed to similar cooperatives in other countries. By encouraging “localness,” CICs aim to reduce the financial burden on small farmers who are fated to use imported seeds. Small farmers using imported seeds also had to use imported fertilizers and pesticides, which turned out to be very costly after the Turkish lira lost value against foreign currencies. To overcome this trap, CICs are encouraging producers to use local seeds. As stated by a volunteer from KCIC:

[. . .] local seeds have reproductive properties. When you plant company bred seeds, next year you must buy seeds again because they only give yield once, that will increase the costs for the small farmers.

Practices that aim for solidarity and inclusion guide the governance practices of CICs, which are shaped by participation in the decision-making process. CICs define themselves as non-hierarchical and horizontal organizations. As stated by the UCIC founders, “everyone who contributes with their labor to the cooperative has an equal right in the decision-making process.” Similarly, one of the founders of KCIC stated that, “the main reason why they were organized as a cooperative rather than a company is that each member has an equal voting right.” Those who contribute to the operations of the CICs have the right to participate in the decision-making process and every decision is taken by full consensus. During the decision-making meetings of KCIC, in which we participated, all the participants had a chance to express their ideas for every specific issue. This inclusive process of decision-making lasted many hours; at the end of the meeting of the ten issues, only two were decided. To make this slow and time-intensive decision-making process more efficient, in some cases, when only a few participants were hesitant about a specific issue, they were asked to use the “give-way” option. If they still insisted on maintaining their initial concerns, the decision was paused. Thus, the decision-making processes distinguish CICs from the conventional cooperatives in Turkey; it aims to be transparent, inclusive and participatory. In conventional cooperatives,

only the founding partners, as specified by the related legislature, make decisions. However, in CICs, both the founding partners and volunteers participate in the decision-making processes. Because the meetings are open to the public, even those who are not members or volunteers can join, observe and raise their concerns.

Alternative solutions provided by the consumer-initiated cooperatives for a more inclusive food provisioning system

The previous section analyzes the core values that guide the actions of activists engaged in AFNs and in CICs with an emphasis on their transformative capacity. This section discusses how these values contribute to the development of certain practices that enable a more inclusive food provisioning system. The central focus is how practices that encompass discontent with the prevailing neoliberal system enable the formation of an alternative food provisioning system. In so doing, we discuss three sets of practices: defetishization of agricultural commodities, surplus generation and distribution and forming free spaces of politics.

Activists involved in CICs have concerns about the impoverishment of farming and the exclusion of small farmers (urban and rural) from the capitalist food provisioning system. Instead, they want to re-shuffle the production relationship to re-include marginalized small farmers in the system in line with the values and practices of AFNs and the food sovereignty movement. Furthermore, it is expected that this alternative food provisioning system will enable a re-shuffling of power relations between consumers and producers. CICs also aim to change the prevailing agricultural production system with a more traditional system which values the autonomy of small farmers, importance of local knowledge and responsibility to the preservation of ecological system.

Defetishization of agricultural commodities. The social dimension of CICs in terms of job creation, community bonds, social cohesion and gender issues is very strong. In contrast to the prevailing food provisioning system where consumers purchase items without knowing their origin, without knowing the producer and production conditions, CICs in various ways (labeling products with information about the producer, production method and location of the producer, excursions to production sites, etc.) attempt to defetishize the agricultural commodities.

CICs aim to reach consumers by supporting producer organizations which supply reliable products that are not treated with chemicals and whose origin is known. Thus, they make regular visits to producer sites, and on each product, they provide information about the producer, production method and location of the producer. Recently, KCIC and UCIC started excursions to producer sites, which are open to interested locals. Other CICs follow this trend either by joining the excursions of KCIC and UCIC or organizing individual events. Those who participate in the excursions can see the production on site and can meet with the producers. Later, site notes, which provide further details about the foodstuff, are published on their social media accounts. In addition, announcements about the arrival of new products always indicate the origin, the producer and, if available, the social and political conditions producers face. Announcements such as:

[...] the chickpeas from a producer who was distanced from civil service because of political reasons [...] tomato paste from another cooperative known by its political standing [...] foodstuff from a cooperative established by seasonal women workers, fruit from an idealist farmer who aims to transform his farm to be self-sufficient has arrived are common practices.

As a consequence of these attempts to defetishize agricultural products, the power relationships between consumers and producers change. A volunteer in KCIC stated that:

We want to transform consumers' expectations. In fact, one of our basic aspirations is to shake the consumers by changing the perception of acquiring every product whenever they wish. We put producers not the consumer at the center.

As an alternative to the persevering dominant logic, CICs supply only seasonal products; consumers have to be satisfied with the available products in the shop (but of a reliable quality) and pay in cash (so that they buy as much as they can afford at that time) rather than with a credit card (which provides them with a purchasing power beyond their needs and means). In CICs, consumers are offered seasonal products, and, in some cases, they must pre-order. Pre-order sales and cash payments have also been instrumental in altering perception of the consumption activity. By pre-orderings, consumers indirectly develop the habit of looking for more information about the product they order, they must wait for that and thus can see the real value behind the product. All transactions, both with consumers and with producers, are carried out in cash. It is expected that his practice can be useful in reducing the financial burden for the producers and changes the consumption practices of the consumers. As stated by one of the members of the KCIC, they are sensitive in adhering to their obligations to the producers, "we either pay the producer immediately or at most within a month." Also, they promote a system where female labor is paid separately. Women in Turkey, especially in agriculture, are unpaid family workers. So, although women provide their labor in the production process and because of the prevalent patriarchal family structure, men control money. CICs ensure that whenever there is female labor in the production process, women are paid separately. Consequently, many women producers working for CICs opened their own bank accounts and started to take control of their earnings. One of the founders of KKCIC stated that:

[. . .] husbands also got used to this situation and whenever we want to talk about financial issues, they direct us to their wives. We are very sensitive about this issue and so far, have changed the habits of many producers.

Surplus generation and distribution. CICs also experiment with a different approach to surplus generation and distribution. Because CICs do not seek profit and are therefore different than the conventional cooperatives in Turkey, they do not distribute profits to their partners. Instead, they support practices based on self-sustainable social benefits; they do not negotiate with farmers over prices, and they ask farmers to offer a fair price which will provide them an income for a decent living. CICs operate with a minimum number of cost items: salary of an accountant (all the other work is done by volunteers), rent of the shop (except KKCIC, all have a small shop with a limited variety as opposed to supermarket chains, so the rent paid for the shop is reasonable) and expenses for holding a general assembly (a requirement for those CICs that have cooperative status). When calculating prices, CICs add a percentage over the cost to cover these expenses. KCIC and GCIC allocate 1% of the sales revenue to the social solidarity fund. This fund is used to support socially and politically disadvantaged groups; for example, at New Year, toys are given as gifts to children who have to stay in prison with their convicted mothers.

As indicated during the interviews, CIC members share and support the idea that prices should not be determined by the free-market. On the contrary, they claim that long-lasting, trust-based and ethical relations between the producer and consumer forge a regular and foreseeable demand for the producer. If intermediaries can be bypassed, both consumer and producer can benefit. A volunteer from KKCIC stated that:

[. . .] we work directly with small producers [. . .] our target is to buy all the products directly from small producers who are organized collectively like cooperatives or aim to be a cooperative in the future.

Bypassing intermediaries and establishing direct relations with the small farmers enable the control of quality and prices and have some indirect contributions: supporting producers with know-how on agrochemical safe production methods, establishing collaborative networks of producers to facilitate information sharing, expertise and materials exchange and empowering women producers. As stated by a volunteer from KCIC, this practice of bypassing the intermediaries would enable the inclusion of small farmers in the food provisioning system:

In the current system you cannot be small or if you are small you cannot survive. If you are small give your products to friends or to the intermediary who dictates price and delivery terms [...] small producers have no other choice [...] if we directly buy from the small producers, they can overcome their problems.

Furthermore, as CICs are based on solidarity and volunteer work, the prices of good and healthy food become much more affordable to all income groups. Within such a transparent and trust-based network, “naturally” grown, pesticide free-of foodstuff can replace organic foodstuff. This also will lessen the financial burden of the producers because they do not need to pay a fee for getting the organic production certification. Members of CICs consider organic certification companies as a part of capitalist system and claim that elimination of the certificate-providing organizations from the system will lead to much cheaper prices. Accordingly, “good,” “healthy” but not organic food will be affordable not only to the rich but also to the lower income groups.

Prefigurative spaces for organizing. As spaces of the alternative food movement, CICs show that political ideals and related acts are continuously developed and articulated. The political ideals, values imbued with these ideals and worldviews underlie the daily activities of CICs. The activists involved in CICs have deep concerns about the populist neoliberal policies implemented by the government and marginalization of some groups (especially small farmers and women) in the prevailing dominant food provisioning system. These cooperatives provide a space to re-socialize the politically and socially excluded groups and build counter communities that allow connectivity among them. It is expected that such a connectivity will enable them to rebuild impoverished socio-economic relationships and will be helpful in regaining lost positions in the political domain. One of the founders of KKCIC stated that:

Our concern is not to sell food within a specific price range [...] we want to sell better quality at a much lower price [...] we want to overcome quality and quantity erosion in food provisioning in this country [...] and establish the networks necessary to do so [...].

CICs are not only involved in food politics; they are also spaces of freedom (shop, public meetings, Web pages, social media accounts) to develop and articulate counter arguments to the populist neoliberal policies. As stated by one of the founders of KCIC:

Neoliberalism is a system that you can never control. We approached this system from food. Such a field where our opinion was never asked, we are not allowed to be part of, but we experience the consequences.

Finally, CICs, as spaces of freedom, provide autonomy from dominant groups and a milieu where oppositional movement identities, that challenge the existing socio-economic relations and practices, can be fostered. As stated by a volunteer from KCIC, these various mechanisms are helpful in developing a shared sense of “we” feeling:

Yesterday we were in another Coop. We all have similar problems, similar concerns, we all attend the same festivals, cafes. Thus, we are constantly exchanging ideas. We jointly participate with UCIC, GCIC, BCIC and KCIC in a congress to discuss our experiences. Anyhow we are all friends.

All CICs aim to connect people with diverse interests and agendas through various events and medium. They mainly use informal networks (such as workshops, festivals, public meetings, shop encounters) and social media to network with other constituencies and recount their model (in food provisioning and governance), their concerns and discontents. The shop is especially important in the creation of this public sphere; they function as meeting places for consumers and producers. They are not simple shops where products and money exchange hands. Shops are meeting spaces; cooperative members and consumers can meet, talk and exchange information and ideas. They are places where mutual understandings and futures are drafted and transparency for both sides is provided. As stated by one of the founders of UCIC:

Our *barrack* [shop] is a warehouse, is a store and most importantly a public space to share information about food, to put in other way it is a '*common*'. In this communal space when you come to buy a product you can meet and chat with a producer.

This characteristic of the shop is enhanced by various activities such as workshops and brunches organized in the shop. In one of the workshops organized by GCIC, on cheese making, a relatively small and well-known cheese producer was invited. The producer provided detailed information about types of cheese that are not harmful to health, what we should consider as consumers when purchasing cheese and how they determine the price. At the end of the workshop, the same producer did a demonstration on preparing healthy and cheap cheese at home. This was an occasion to discuss problems in agriculture, raise awareness and develop alternatives. Shops are also places where seeds of solidarity and responsibility are sown; in the "solidarity shelves" of UCIC, GCIC and KCIC, the products of disadvantaged groups such as Syrian refugee women, the products of a foundation in the name of a young student who lost his life during the Gezi events, the foodstuff of a producer whose farm was damaged in floods are sold. Solidarity shelves also provide full information about the producer and the problems encountered. CICs that do not have a shop (street coops) use either neighborhood buildings that belong to the municipality or cafés of their friends to sell their products. These places are not only for transactions, they are social spaces for organizing customers, volunteers and producers. During our visit to their shops, we have seen that the shops are important public places where customers and volunteers share knowledge and concerns about food politics. Thus, these shops function as a space where people committed to an alternative food provisioning system can meet and draft political work and establish networks. Similarly, the monthly public meetings of KCIC, BCIC and GCIC function as a prefigurative space where vigorous discussions on political/economic issues are held and solidarity with other constituencies (for example, environmentalist and feminist) are built. These meetings are open to everyone and usually held in buildings that belong to the local municipality. Meetings are usually run by two or three volunteers who start by explaining how and why they were involved in establishing the CIC, their core values and principles. Then, a question and answer session starts. In one meeting organized by KCIC, which we participated, some participants were interested in whether the foodstuff sold in the shop is "safe" (no pesticides are used) and has a certificate to indicate quality. In this instance, the volunteers provided a long explanation about the difference between "food safety" and "food sovereignty," and how they aim to improve the quality of healthy food. Then, with the questions from other participants, the discussion shifted to political issues where political concerns and practices used by the CIC were broached. Toward the end of this interactive meeting, participants were asked whether they would be part of the movement as volunteers: those who were willing stayed and were given an appointment for a member recruitment meeting. These informal networking activities

provide an opportunity to meet others and redefine boundaries between movement members and others. These informal events enable the development of a milieu where external social control is minimized, and individuals feel less constraint and, more easily, creatively explain their ideas.

All CICs also organize events such as the New Year celebrations, anniversaries, workshops, conferences, street festivals and picnics to publicize and share their ideals. These events also provide opportunities for networking and extending the boundaries of their political work. They have a dual function; they reinforce solidarity among in-group members and facilitate the inclusion of newcomers, thus securing enlargement. They signify bonding with people who have a similar worldviews and are devoted to the pre-figurative ideas, and provide a space where strategies for future steps are discussed and shaped. During a festival organized by the municipality with the participation of all CICs and other AFN initiatives, we witnessed how CICs share the same stands, promote their products collectively and use a similar discourse in explaining their ideals to the visitors.

Discussion

The five cases studied in this article support the argument that moral worldviews (Barnard, 2016) and values (Farias, 2017b) can drive action and shape practices that promote the development of an alternative economic and social system of exchanges. The attainment of practices that are inclusive is deeply rooted in the values shared by a specific group of activist consumers. The activists who founded and maintain the CICs share similar demographic characteristics: precariat, professional, middle-class and inhabitants of specific districts that are known to have a specific cultural and political heritage for alternative economic imaginaries. They were excluded from the economic and social realm by populist neoliberal policies which were aimed at including the new urban poor and informal sector workers through gentrification projects and social assistance services organized by charity organizations. The Gezi protests in the summer of 2013 was a moment where they first encountered each other and thereafter they collaborated in developing an alternative food provisioning system. Gezi provided the coalescence for the excluded actors and sowed the seeds of new initiatives for inclusion. Initially, the priority of the activists involved in CICs was not food provisioning but experiencing a totally new way of life, and they dreamt of a radically new world. During the park forums following the Gezi protests, they decided to translate Gezi “energy” to a much more inclusive domain that would touch everyone and that will unite everyone. The consumer cooperatives initiated by these activists are grassroots initiatives whose purpose is not capitalist accumulation but societal benefit and the transformation of the capitalist mode of production, distribution and consumption.

Consumer cooperatives in other geographies have been criticized for being embedded in market-based solutions that reproduce neoliberal arrangements and being silent on issues of inclusion and social justice (Goodman and Goodman, 2009; Allen, 2010; Wilson, 2013), exclusionary in terms of class, income, color and gender (Zitcer, 2015; Guthman, 2008; Slocum, 2006). This paper provides ample evidence that the CICs studied develop practices to be inclusive in the production chain, in surplus distribution and engagement with wider constituencies. Various means adopted by CICs in transforming the production–consumption nexus aim the inclusion of small farmers and particularly women farmers and disadvantaged groups to the production chain. Also, in this vein, CICs develop certain practices which aim to change the consumption habits of consumers located in urban areas with an emphasis on commodity defetishization that promotes the inclusion of small farmers and politicized consumers into the economy. The surplus generation and distribution practices developed by CICs enable the inclusion of low-income groups in the

consumption of good quality foodstuff and promote the inclusion of more small farmers to the system because they are paid a fair price, in cash, on time. Finally, networking practices as prefigurative spaces enable the inclusion of a wider audience, which in turn promotes a sustainable future for CICs. We also emphasize the role of context and the driving political, economic and social conditions that influence the choices of individuals in engaging with AFNs and forming consumer cooperatives.

In capitalism, because social relations are masked, consumers attach value to the material product but not the labor behind its production. As indicated by [Allen and Kovach \(2000\)](#), “by obscuring the relation between commodities and social relations, fetishization reifies those relations” (p. 226). This argument is built on the assumption that consumption is a non-political domain and consumers are passive ([Goodman and DuPuis, 2002](#)). In the cases studied in this paper, we have observed that by providing information about the product and production method in various forms, CICs reduce the separation between producer and consumer and try to make the production process more transparent. CIC organized excursions to production sites; product labels provide full information about the product and producer; and encounters with consumers in the shops are some of the methods devised to reduce commodity fetishism. Thus, CICs, in line with the premises of ethical consumerism, develop initiatives to make the production process more transparent, which in turn can be useful in the defetishization of agricultural products and a pivot for raising the awareness of consumers for food sovereignty. This transparency also enables consumers to make a political choice while purchasing; they can choose to buy the same commodity from a supermarket owned by a vertically integrated firm embedded in the capitalist form of production or from a producer cooperative owned by small farmers excluded from capitalist production relations by neoliberal policies. This choice is influential in re-shuffling the prevailing power relations between the small and big producers and re-politicizing economy.

CICs develop a set of practices related to surplus accumulation, appropriation and distribution that challenge the prevailing capitalist logic; goods and services are to be produced for a monetized exchange driven with a profit motive. The cooperative founders are the owners, but because the cooperative is a non-profit organization, disposable surplus for appropriation does not exist. Two practices, price setting and volunteer work, have been instrumental in accomplishing an alternative surplus distribution system. Prices are determined not in line with free-market logic of demand and supply but according to the expenses. In pricing, only a small percentage (1%) is added to the cost which is used to support disadvantaged groups. Because CICs rely on non-commodified volunteer work, they offer their services only during specific hours within a day. Although volunteer work is a means to cut down costs and thus prices, it can be a limitation to scaling-up. On the other hand, volunteer work is instrumental in the development of collective identities and ensures commitment to the ideals of the movement. Thus, the cases studied provide evidence that non-commodified labor, not driven by a profit motive but instead driven by intrinsic values such as “being alternative,” “being against,” perseveres within the capitalist system and a model based on the ethics of solidarity ([Gibson-Graham, 2003](#)) can be experienced. This specific surplus production and distribution system promotes an economic system where the consumption of good and healthy food is no longer the privilege of a specific group of consumers. In line with their inclusion claims, CICs are able to extend their boundaries to embrace low-income groups as well.

The transformative capacity of CICs is rooted in being prefigurative spaces for food politics. The cases we have studied provide ample evidence that prefiguration is a practice in which actors engaged in the movement enact and envision the values of an ideal society

(Maeckelbergh, 2009; Yates, 2015) and strategies related to the realization of this ideal world are collectively drafted. In prefigurative politics, actions have a priority over planning (Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Farias, 2017a). Everyday practices of the movement members, that are developed in line with the values of the movement, are influential in transforming the status quo (Reedy *et al.*, 2016; Fernandez *et al.*, 2017; Reinecke, 2018; Skoglund and Böhm, 2019). As prefigurative spaces, CICs re-socialize the economic relations so that the excluded and marginalized groups in the prevailing food production and consumption chain will be included in the new alternative system. In so doing, they are actively involved in building counter-hegemonic communities with different consumption habits and nourish networks with diverse constituencies for demonstrating what they have done in line with their values. In prefigurative politics, these counter-hegemonic modes of interaction are influential in developing a new system (Leach, 2013). CICs build connectivity among diverse and dispersed groups – farmers’ union, local municipalities, consumers of various socio-economic status, producers of agricultural commodities – that share similar concerns in respect of neoliberal policies and their implementation. This connectivity with a wider audience not only enables them to share ideals and values but also to establish a new food provisioning model with its own values and practices. As prefigurative spaces, CICs enable the creation of an alternative culture of exchange that demarcates the obscuring effects of the prevailing practices embedded in the capitalist logic. The “prefigurative spaces” are also taken as places where collective identities are built and maintained (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). The construction of collective identities is an essential part of activism; mobilization of individuals within social movements is promoted with a shared sense of “we” feeling. Within the process of developing the “we” feeling, free spaces provide autonomy from dominant groups and a milieu where oppositional movement identities, that challenge the existing social relations and practices, can be fostered. By developing mutual initiatives, CICs aspire to create a milieu where people decide collectively on issues related to their own lives and to construct mechanisms to reconcile existing conflicts between consumers and producers in food politics. Thus, they position themselves as part of a movement that intends to transform the economy by constructing new economic and social practices based on relationships of solidarity that is inspired by shared values. Because in prefigurative politics, action is not guided by instrumental rationality (Leach, 2013), the aim of the activists involved in CICs is not to maximize monetary gains but to practice a system that they aspire to. The cases studied provide evidence that the core values that are in opposition to neoliberalism can be translated into practices that are in opposition to a managerialist logic by those actors who reflect them to their daily practices.

Conclusion

One of the major arguments of this article is that alternative economies and forms of organizing are a viable experimentation in a neoliberal economy. Our cases of CICs provide ample evidence of how dreams can turn into action. Under the dominance of a neoliberal system, a group of “alternative” consumers, by building coalitions with other constituencies sharing similar concerns, realized their ideals. Furthermore, steps taken by these organizations have inspired many other initiatives in İstanbul as well as different parts of Turkey.

This study offers two major contributions to the extant literature; it provides evidence that AFNs and consumer cooperatives can develop practices that promote the inclusion of marginalized groups such as women, low-income groups and small farmers. Although initiated by middle-income groups, CIC members in our study aim for mutuality and solidarity with these excluded groups rather than assuming a benefactory role. Second, highlighting the importance of context (Jarosz, 2008; Allen *et al.*, 2003; Allen, 2010), this paper shows that, depending on local conditions – demographics of the participants, the

tensions in the prevailing economic and political conditions – CICs can develop and maintain practices that can re-embed the economic to the social. Our analysis is based on cases in a specific context, and confirmation of our discussions by other studies in other context will strengthen our arguments. Furthermore, because of political and economic volatility in Turkey, it is difficult to make a prediction about the prospects of such alternative economic models .

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