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# Organic food and consumers' expanding notion of health

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# The expanding notion of health

- Health: an inherently moral notion, a strong statement, an action-orientation induced by the qualitative distinction for the Higher
- Including bodily health, emotional health, economic health, environmental health, social and cultural health
- Ample statistical and 'pointillistic' evidence of lack of health across the living system – even to 'perpetually sick selves'
- Causal and heterogeneous chains intertwined across societal levels and economic sectors impacting on health
- How do morals apply to construction of food chains?
- Focus: on moral sources enabling organic network dynamics

# Outlines of future food systems

- Four scenarios: new era, just a blip (BAU), food inflation, food crisis (Marsden, 2013, JoRS)
- Two scenarios: Technofood/bioeconomy - local and organic food/eco-economy (Tomlinson, 2013, JoRS)
- New era: Local food entailing socio-economic (affordability, availability) and bodily relations (food security, safety) embedded for actors
- These entail socio-technical niches as spatial and social decentralization of labour and knowledge – powered by reflexive governance
- Currently disengaged relations through the market with highly centralized supply chain activities – powered by retail giants

# Modern identity and moral sources

- Modern identity tensioned and often inarticulate in terms of its moral sources (C. Taylor, 1989)
- 'Constitutive goods': freedom, equality, justice, respect for life, avoidance of suffering, self-fulfilment, value of ordinary life agreed upon broadly
- Metaphysical embarrassment with framing of goods
- In global economy problematic connections
- Historical sources of these basic 'goods' opaque, offering no map for orientation
- Historically layered, mutually modified and coexisting streams of sources with their current embodiments

# Moral sources

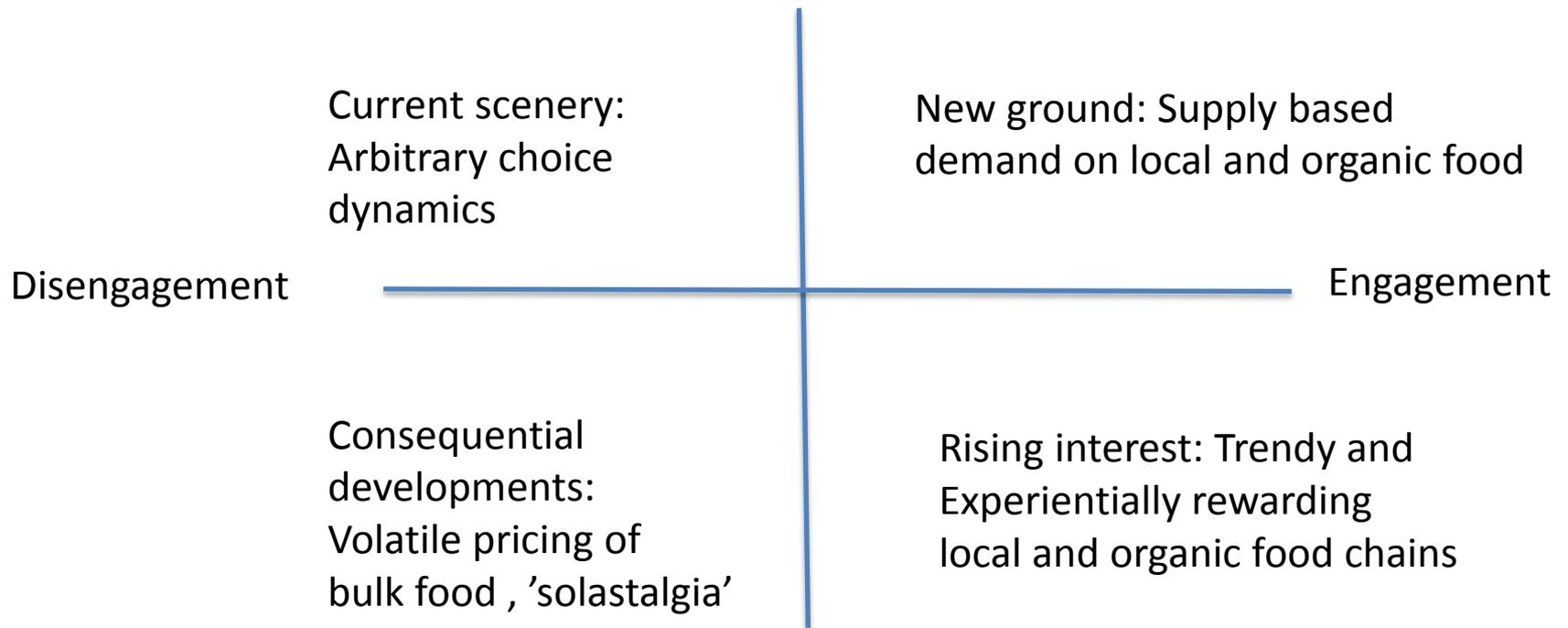
- Theistic and philosophical orders of the world: order in living system entailing intrinsic value for life, respect, commitments and (self)sacrifice, meaningfulness in life
- Disengaged reason, scienticism, instrumentalism threatening experiential and public domain, 'iron cage', atomism, The market, pitiable comfort, capitalist and technological society, procedural ethics, emptiness, sick selves, mass consumption, 'Entzauberung'
- Romantic expressivism for fuller life, human potential, spontaneous morality, epiphany, creativity

# Methodology

- Focus on how food chain actors are empowered by moral sources as drivers of their food chain actions
- Food chain actors' (farmers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, restaurateurs, customers, consumers) interviews and focus groups
- Observations of retail, restaurant, catering spaces
- Analysis based on identification of actors' moral sources and the systemic strength of their articulation
- Construction of moral constellations of organic food
- Suggesting barriers and supporting aspects as well as the way forward

# Results

Relative systemic strength of articulation



Relative systemic weakness of articulation



# Current scenery

- Arbitrary choice dynamics, centralization across global supply chains and retailers (locals losing trade)
- Ever growing stable selection and food choice
- Efforts to please the consumer “always the right choice” – “what would you like to have dear?”
- More consumer communication through (organic) labels and quality schemes
- Serving consumer’s worlds of worth (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006) – less moral pressures
- Strong retailers while others suffer from mild ‘solastalgia’

# Consequential developments

- Consumers with very limited means tend to focus on prices while increasingly losing their own capacity to know food, prepare and enjoy it
- Emphasis on discounters
- Domestic producers lose trade and vanish, processors buy imported food, even more opaque and unsafe food system
- Addictions and unhealthy eating habits
- Political instability adds to volatility to both directions
- Strong 'solastalgia' as depressed and passive leaning on food system managed by unknown 'others' "Supermarket will take care of us"

# Rising interest

- Trendy and experientially rewarding food chains:
  - Customers meet the familiar or novel tasty food in new scenery endowed with SME relations
  - Satisfaction of trendy and novel business concept
  - Social warmth and support
  - Limited selection of variously labelled food
  - Self-expression as personal satisfaction and presentation

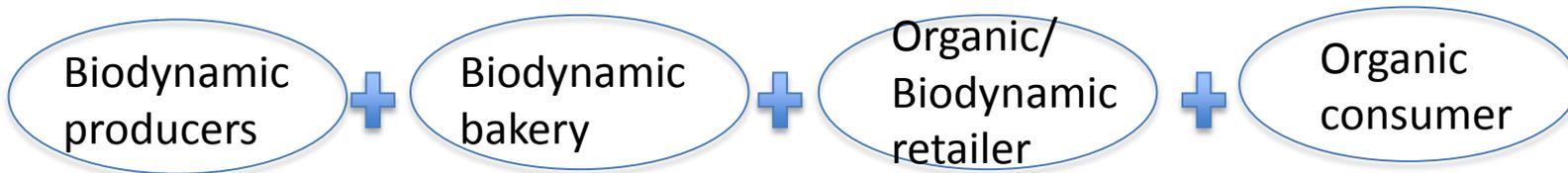
# New ground

- Local and organic food as principled production accepted by buyers and consumers
- Limited price negotiations by producers
- No high financial rewards or positions
- Continuous development and quality schemes for marketing products (translations for socio-technical regime)
- Consumer's and producers mutual closeness and dependence as antidote to solastalgia

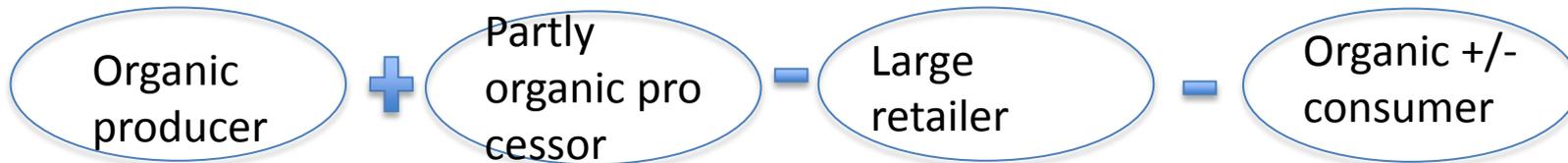
# Network constellation with articulated moral sources

- + Principled or romantic
- Disengaged or solastalgia

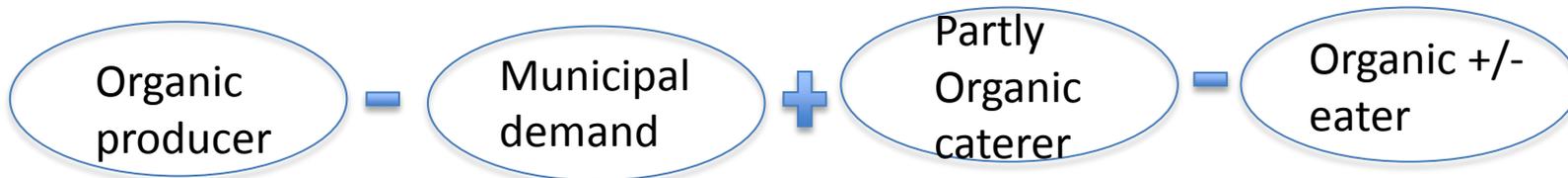
## Unbroken organic/biodynamic food chain



## Partly unbroken organic food chain



## Partly unbroken organic food chain



# Moral tensions as barriers

- Current scenery: Scientific evidence for organic superiority needed by disengaged retailers, processors, caterers, customers – basic thrust turnover and competition
- Legitimazation of organic required
- (Social) scientific evidence acknowledged by engaged retailers, processors etc.
- Consequential developments: democratic prices required for change, no-market no-professional behavior by producers not accepted
- Rising interest requires 'warm concept' and 'sensory assertion' as well as certainty about pure food, disengaged actors
- New ground principled actors, benefit from all kinds of scientific information and translations but cannot achieve these alone

# Moral tensions for support

- Organic farmers often represent moral ground and long-term engagement (such as sustainability, biodynamic, Christian, others) among conventional ones
- Not always; disengaged seekers of livelihoods
- Processors, retailers, caterers and customers may represent moral grounds for organic, entailing subsidies and methods for organic sales and compensation for organic
- Also presentation of self as 'good' on the agenda
- Morality seems to build up from internal and external connections – 'sincerety' sincere or strategic

Thank you!