

Article

# Alternativizing markets: the framing of moral commerce

Jonas Båath <sup>1,2,\*</sup> and Christian Fuentes<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of People and Society, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Lomma, Sweden, <sup>2</sup>CIRCLE—Centre for Innovation Research, Lund University, Lund, Sweden, <sup>3</sup>Department of Service Studies, Lund University, Helsingborg, Sweden

\*Correspondence: [jonas.baath@slu.se](mailto:jonas.baath@slu.se)

## Abstract

How are moral markets organized? While previous research has shown that moral markets combine conventional and alternative elements, it has failed to explain how these hybridizations can ensure the organization of moral markets. To this end, we take an economic-sociological approach using ethnographic materials from a study of Swedish Reko-rings, a direct-to-customer market for local foods, to analyse how actors address the key coordination problems of value, competition and cooperation. The analysis shows how participants of these markets enact an ‘alternative framing’, emphasizing economic certainty as instrumental for moral certainty, which enables them to develop and implement ‘alternativized’ solutions to market coordination problems. Thereby, participants make economic and moral values certain by making the former instrumental for the latter. We advance previous research by showing that moral markets require not just hybridization, but hybridization guided by a specific economic-moral framing that enables these markets to avoid co-option.

**Key words:** coordination, economic sociology, ethics, markets

**JEL classification:** D49; Q13; Z13

## 1. Introduction

Markets are often seen as producers of social and economic inequality while also perpetuating overconsumption and overuse of scarce and finite resources (Fourcade and Healy, 2017; Mair and Rathert, 2021; Sahakian et al., 2022). *Conventional* markets (i.e. capitalist, globalized and industrialized) are commonly argued to drive anthropogenic climate change, animal welfare problems, epidemic obesity, poor labour conditions and the exploitation of the global south (e.g. Carolan, 2021). *Moral markets*—specific types of markets where

explicit morality is the key principle of interaction—are often proposed as a (partial) solution to the problems of conventional markets (Balsiger, 2021). While all markets are shot through with morality (see Fourcade and Healy, 2017; Beunza, 2019), moral markets differ from others by singling out, and prioritizing, moral concerns over economic concerns. Thus, in moral markets, producers articulate and follow specific moralities and consumers buy products that align with these moralities (Balsiger, 2021). In contrast to conventional markets, exchange in moral markets is not coordinated primarily to generate and secure economic ends such as growth or profits, but moral ones such as sustainability or justice (Venkataraman et al., 2016; Mair and Rathert, 2021; Schiller-Merkens, 2024).<sup>1</sup> The actors creating moral markets commonly view them as moral alternatives to conventional markets (e.g. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Fitzmaurice et al., 2020; Bååth, 2022, 2024). For these actors, markets focused on economic concerns are amoral or immoral. Concrete examples of moral markets include Fair Trade markets, markets for ecological goods, local food markets, CSAs (community supported agriculture) and sharing platforms.

The argument for developing moral markets has often been, implicitly or explicitly, that conventional markets lack the capacity to address and solve environmental and social (i.e. moral) problems, at least partly because their focus is purely or mainly economic (e.g. Huddart Kennedy et al., 2019; Fitzmaurice et al., 2020; Schiller-Merkens, 2024). The underlying argument is thus that conventional market arrangements focused on economic values cannot foster moral markets.<sup>2</sup> Instead, moral markets presuppose alternative forms of market organization capable of ensuring morality. How then can markets be organized to ensure morality?

While research on moral markets supports the claim that these markets must be organized in an alternative manner to conventional ones (e.g. Venkataraman et al., 2016; Beunza and Ferraro, 2019; Mair and Rathert, 2021), there is disagreement as to how or even if this can be accomplished. The conventionalization approach argues, and at times also shows empirically, that commercial or capitalist forces co-opt efforts to construct moral markets. The argument is that market practices—competition in particular—eradicate alternative, communal practices performed in the pursuit of morality. Thereby, market practices (re)impose the unequal and unsustainable economically-driven practices that characterize conventional markets (e.g. Guthman, 2014; see Rosol, 2020 for an overview). Similarly, Rhodes (2022) argues that morally committed businesses leverage morality as a corporate resource, hindering democracy by substituting socially meaningful tax payments, fair wages and adherence to legal obligations. Thus, according to the conventionalization approach, even when morality is introduced into markets it ends up becoming a means to generate economic value rather than vice versa.

- 1 While the literature on moral markets has predominantly focused on environmental sustainability or social good, the definition encompasses any market that prioritizes moral concerns over economic ones. Therefore, an informal market for right-wing political merchandise could also be an example of a moral market as long as both sellers and buyers prioritize the moral value of contributing to the 'cause' over economic concerns.
- 2 One could argue that being economic or seeking profit is a form of morality in itself. However, the moral markets concept and the studies conducted in this tradition build on the economy/morality dichotomy as a way to bring to the fore and analyse markets that are not governed by economic motifs. For the purposes of this article, we do the same.

Critics of the conventionalization theory offer a more nuanced perspective on market organization. What has at times been termed the ‘multiple markets approach’ (Balsiger, 2021) argues that it is possible to enact moral markets and that this involves the organizing of hybrid markets, i.e. markets that include and interconnect both conventional and alternative forms of economic coordination. In line with the sociology of markets, research in this vein argues that market and non-market elements can be balanced by (collaboratively) organizing markets in ways alternative to conventional, capitalist ones (e.g. Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Michel, 2020; Schiller-Merkens, 2024). Thereby, marketization does not necessarily lead to the subordination of moral values in favour of economic ones. Indeed, it is contended that these types of hybridization processes have resulted in, for example, alternative food networks’ integration of community and market (e.g. O’Neill, 2014; Le Velly and Dufeu, 2016), organization for fair pricing principles in Fair Trade (Reinecke, 2010), NGOs’ adoption of markets as a means of socio-economic development (Venkataraman et al., 2016), new forms of cooperation between firms and NGOs on the market for responsible investment (Beunza and Ferraro, 2019) and new relational forms among market actors in sharing economies (Fitzmaurice et al., 2020). All these studies are examples of the successful organization of moral markets. In all these examples, the prioritization of morality is made possible by ‘alternative’ economic arrangements that combine or hybridize alternative elements of market organizing with conventional, economic ones.

In this article, we contribute to this second stream of research. We argue that while the multiple-markets approach offers a far more nuanced and sophisticated analysis of the organizing of moral markets through hybridization, the question that remains largely unanswered in research is *how* these hybrids are made to facilitate morality. Merely hybridizing a market does not make it moral. That is, the mere existence of hybridity is no guarantee for the creation of a moral market. The sociology of markets has convincingly shown that to function all markets, by necessity, combine conventional market elements such as competition and economic valuation, with alternative elements such as cooperation and moral valuation (e.g. Beckert, 2009; Zelizer, 2011; Fourcade and Healy, 2017). Therefore, hybridity is not a trait specific to moral markets. We contend that the answer to how actors achieve those hybrids that enable moral markets lies in examining specifically how actors combine conventional and alternative market elements.

Our aim, therefore, is to empirically examine and theorize how market actors hybridize economic and non-economic practices to organize moral markets. We start from Beckert’s (2009) observation that all markets must solve the same three coordination problems and propose that for a market to be moral, its actors must create alternativized (non-conventional) solutions to these problems. As explained in more detail below, economic sociology offers different theories of how hybrids that offer alternative solutions for these problems may be achieved. Drawing on critiques of these explanations, we investigate how actors in a market create hybrids that solve these problems in ways that guarantee that moral rather than economic values organize interactions and exchanges in this market. To this end, we draw on ethnographic materials from Swedish Reko-rings (a direct marketing scheme for local food) to examine and explain how Reko-actors create hybrids that achieve alternativized solutions—i.e. non-conventional solutions that, in our case, are enacted to guarantee moral, rather than economic, certainty. The results show how a moral market is only possible when actors in that market share an ‘alternative framing’.

## 2. Analysing moral market organization: coordination problems and their solutions

As indicated in the introduction, we draw on economic sociology to construct an analytical framework for investigating and explaining the organization of moral markets. Our general approach is that actors in all markets must solve certain problems of economic coordination to facilitate the orderly exchange of priced offers under competition among buyers and sellers (i.e. a market). While this is also true for moral markets, actors therein must solve additional challenges of moral coordination to facilitate a market that attempts to solve moral (e.g. social and environmental) problems. Their ability to solve such problems in a way that does not prioritize economic value is therefore the key to how moral markets may be facilitated.

As a starting point, we draw on [Beckert's \(2009\)](#) observation that to organize any functioning market, its actors must solve three specific (economic) coordination problems by creating economic certainty (or reducing economic uncertainty): the value problem (making prices certain by agreeing on the economic value of offers); the competition problem (making profits certain by avoiding perfect competition); and the cooperation problem (making it certain, by fostering trust, that others will not be financially exploited).

Beckert's conception of markets as centred on solving coordination problems has been criticized for an over-reliance on rationalism, methodological individualism, and general under-theorizing of history, culture, power and other factors that necessarily affect the organization of markets ([Robotham, 2009](#); [Gemici, 2012](#)). While we agree with much of this criticism, it applies foremost to Beckert's proposed solutions to the coordination problems and their causal role in fostering social order in markets. We acknowledge the three problems, and that solutions to them means creating certainty. Yet, we also acknowledge that these problems and their sociological effects may very well be best explained by, or in combination with, theories other than the embeddedness theory proposed by Beckert.

Theoretically, actors might reduce economic uncertainty purely by competing against each other ([Aspers, 2018](#)). However, in practice, markets create economic certainty by (to some extent) organizing market actors cooperatively, either through valuation and mutual adjustment (in a relational rather than rationalistic sense) or through organizational decisions made by authorities (either powerful market actors or market-makers such as governments) ([Aspers et al., 2020](#); cf. [Aspers, 2018](#)). An example of the former is that market actors actively or indirectly agree not to compete over certain qualities. An example of the latter is the EU's labels for authentic origins of different foods, which effectively stifles competition between, and thus increases the economic certainty of, certain national food industries ([DeSoucey, 2010](#)). Thereby, market actors (jointly) integrate the 'market practices' of economic valuation, competition, and knowledge concealment with the (voluntary or mandated) 'communal practices' of moral valuation, cooperation and knowledge sharing.

Economic sociology offers several conceptualizations of how such integration is achieved. Examples include 'embedding' markets in institutions ([Beckert, 2009](#)), 'agencing' actors' performativity through the use of market devices ([Callon, 2016](#)), and through actors' 'relational work', wherein plural values and relations intermingle ([Zelizer, 2011](#)). However, as recent studies show, these explanations are often wrongly assumed to be incompatible and thereby exaggerate certain practices of market organizing while obfuscating or ignoring others ([Bååth, 2023](#); [Beunza, 2019](#); [Beunza and Ferraro, 2019](#); see also [Pellandini-Simányi, 2016](#)). Thus, we focus on the practical dimensions of solving the

coordination problems in the organization of moral markets. Our approach, therefore, is in the spirit of Beunza and Ferraro's 'performative work', which:

... emphasizes the gains from jointly considering the emphasis on materiality that characterizes the performativity literature with the attention to norms, roles and resources that is found in institutional theory. (2019, p. 535)

The different types of market practices previously outlined may thus be understood as performative work that allows actors to use and hybridize performative knowledge and materiality, institutional powers and relational negotiations for organizing moral markets.

From this vantage point, a *conventional* market is one where communal practices may be included, and even genuinely engaged with, yet remain only a means to an end when solving the three economic coordination problems (or at least not threatening their solutions). What, then, distinguishes the alternativized solutions to coordination problems on moral markets? We clarify this further in relation to each of the three problems.

The *value problem* concerns the uncertainty of an offer's economic value. This is reduced by setting a mutually acceptable price on the offer, which moreover enables market actors to form preferences. To set a price means to use economic valuations to produce a commensurate, quantified monetary measure of the offer's qualities. The pricing practice can thus be either hierarchical, drawing on enforced standards and classifications, or informal, relying on negotiations and socially shared judgments (Bååth, 2023).

Any alternativized solution must thus involve valuations that make the offer's moral value certain as well as making its economic value certain in terms of a price. Extant studies suggest that moral markets make economic values instrumental for realizing the moral ones (e.g. Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Bååth, 2022; Schiller-Merkens, 2024), as the de-commensuration of economic and moral values may lead to the latter being marginalized as financially worthless (cf. Zelizer, 1994). Market alternativizing thus has to make economic values certain as an instrumental means of realizing moral ones.

The *competition problem* concerns the uncertainty of economic profits, as these would be eradicated under perfect competition. Imperfect competition is thus a prerequisite for making profits certain (Beckert, 2009). Conventional solutions to this problem are to differentiate products from competitors' offers, to position oneself in a market niche without any direct competition, or to enforce (market-internal) price-controlling standards (White, 1981; Callon et al., 2002). Moreover, states or other non-market actors may set rules, or foster norms, that prohibit defined types of competition and thus keep imperfect competition from becoming perfect (Zelizer, 1994; Fligstein, 2001). Thus, solutions that make profits (sufficiently) certain all rely on market actors organizing themselves to be competitive while avoiding perfect competition, by dissociating themselves from competitors and thereby avoiding competition, or by cooperating (Arora-Jonsson et al., 2020).

Any alternativized solution must thus involve cooperation to secure imperfect competition over moral gains, making moral gains certain in addition to financial gains. Extant studies suggest that actors in moral markets cooperate to ensure instrumental profits for funding the realization of moral gains (Chiffolleau, 2009; Le Velly and Dufeu, 2016; Chiffolleau et al., 2019), as cooperation in itself may practically eradicate competition and yet be instrumental for securing profits collectively (cf. Sonenshein et al., 2017). Market alternativizing must thus make profits certain as an instrumental means of realizing moral gains.

The *cooperation problem*, lastly, concerns the uncertainty of avoiding economic exploitation as actors who are uncertain of whether they will be exploited will not engage in economic exchange. Trust is thus a prerequisite for such exchange to take place (Beckert, 2009). Trust may be ensured by reputation or other informal means (Diekmann and Przepiorka, 2019). In addition, influential authorities may enforce legislation and standards that assure market actors will not be exploited (Reinecke et al., 2012). In the end, all these solutions presuppose that actors share knowledge that enables others to trust them or a third party. However, knowledge sharing might jeopardize the certainty of profits or prices. Concealing knowledge is thus equally important for fostering the necessary trust to get people to pay the agreed-on prices and thereby generate profits.

Any alternativized solution would thus have to ensure trust not only in economic but also in moral ‘non-exploitation’. Extant studies suggest that moral markets foster trust not only in economic certainty but also in a ‘common normative basis’ (Thorsøe and Kjeldsen, 2016; see also Fitzmaurice et al., 2020). To achieve such a basis, and eventually mutual trust, market actors must foster relations for sharing knowledge, risk and meaning (Zelizer, 2011, p. 276; see also Bååth, 2024; Thorsøe and Kjeldsen, 2016). However, the deceptive moral claims of ‘greenwashing’, and the obfuscation of moral conduct in production, a practice called ‘silent green’, are both examples of how concealing or distorting moral knowledge might be detrimental for fostering trust in economic non-exploitation (cf. Solér et al., 2015; de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). Market alternativizing must thus make trust in economic non-exploitation an instrumental means for realizing trust in moral non-exploitation.

The organization of moral markets thus creates alternativized solutions to coordination problems as a means of ensuring moral certainty. To achieve this, the market actors have to frame the market organization in a manner that ensures its morality. As defined by Goffman, a *frame* is a premise of social involvement; ‘[a principle] of organization which govern[s] events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them’ (1986, pp. 10–11). In this context, the framing of a market indicates the key principle of interaction and organization that distinguishes legitimate or other meaningful ways of solving coordination problems.

In a conventional market, such a framing means that the involved actors all engage with it, and thus organize it, according to the principle of ensuring and safeguarding economic certainty; all other forms of certainty would then be instrumentally created. An alternativized solution thus, in some manner, requires an alternative framing that deviates categorically from the convention. Thus, in an alternativized market, actors must trust each other’s adherence to some alternative, or non-economic, principle.

In the analysis that follows, we will therefore not only identify, analyse and illustrate alternativized solutions to the three market problems, we will also identify, analyse and illustrate the alternative framing that enables and legitimizes these solutions. We will discuss and show how this alternative framing organizes the creation of solutions to both economic and moral coordination problems. Furthermore, we will show how said framing hinders conventionalization or commercial co-option, thereby ensuring that the market arrangement keeps its ‘promise of difference’, to speak with Le Velly (2019).

### 3. Fieldwork and analysis: an ethnographic study of a moral market

To examine market alternativization and the organization of a moral market, we draw on an ethnographic study of Swedish *Reko-rings*—a type of Alternative Food Network (AFN)

in which suppliers, customers and administrators co-arrange direct-to-customer markets for local, small-scale and occasionally organic food.

'Reko' stands for reliable or fair consumption (Reko is an abbreviation of 'Rejäl konsumtion' in Swedish). Local consumers and food producers join together to create a Reko-ring to sell local, small-scale (often organic) produce and foodstuffs without any intermediaries (Hushållningssällskapet, 2023). Producers and consumers join Reko-groups on Facebook, where producers market their products and consumers pre-order food to be collected at an arranged pick-up site, typically organized weekly or bi-weekly in the form of car boot sales at urban parking lots. Typically for AFNs, the focus is on developing a close relationship between food producer and consumer, while also selling locally produced, sustainable and healthy food. Reko-rings started in Finland in 2013 and subsequently spread, mainly to the Nordic countries but also to Italy, Ireland and Canada (Leipämaa-Leskinen et al., 2022). The first Swedish Reko-ring was established in 2016; by the end of 2021, there were around 220 active Reko-rings and around 800,000 members (Hushållningssällskapet, 2023).

Reko-rings are an appropriate case for this paper as these markets are generally conceived of as a moral alternative to conventional food supply, emphasizing the morality of sustainable food provisioning and support of local, small-scale farmers. In addition, this concept is well established and relatively widespread, suggesting that its organization is fairly stable and resilient. Studying these markets ethnographically allows us to examine if, and how, their participants provide alternativized solutions to coordination problems, by mapping plural experiences and meanings of a diverse group of people (see Marcus, 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

The authors and two other researchers conducted the fieldwork in late 2019 and early 2020. We generated materials through interviews and participatory and digital observations in six Reko-rings. To recruit study participants, we advertised on Reko-ring Facebook groups, contacted potential interviewees directly through Facebook, and were given referrals from interviewees. While Reko-rings involve customers, administrators and suppliers, many of the interviewees ( $n = 41$ ) were active in more than one of these roles, and no one was an administrator only. For transparency, it is worth mentioning that there is a female dominance among the interviewees, which mirrors the study participants' general impression of customers being primarily female.

We interviewed the informants individually ( $n = 31$ ) or in pairs ( $n = 10$ ). Interview guides provided the basis for the interviews. However, we actively engaged with the informants' statements, and prioritized themes and issues that the informants introduced, so as to include the context and emic narratives of the interviewees' Reko-ring engagement and experiences (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). To ensure ethical validity, we presented the interviewees with an ethical statement that explained the purpose and data treatment procedures of the study, including the pseudonymization of quoted statements. Each interviewee reviewed and signed the statement before their interview.

While Reko-ring customers pay for their orders in advance, participant observations of delivery meetings ( $n = 15$ ) allowed us to study the organization of suppliers' delivery of goods to their customers, and the social interaction among the Reko-ring participants during these meetings (usually a weekly 30 to 60-minute time slot in the early evening on a weekday). We observed six Reko-rings in both urban and rural areas, taking field notes and photographs. We also conducted digital observations ( $n = 26$ ) of the Reko-rings' Facebook

groups close to the time of their delivery meetings. The digital materials include multiple screenshots of suppliers' ads and customers' orders and queries in relation to 26 different delivery meetings.

The analysis meant coding the transcribed interviews, field notes, photographs and screenshots in *Nvivo12* (a qualitative analysis software). Following the theoretical approach previously outlined, we analysed how the Reko-ring participants engaged with and challenged economic valuations, competition and opacity, and how they sought to nurture non-economic valuations, cooperation and transparency. The analysis thus identified the presence and use of different practices of valuation, competition and cooperation, as well as knowledge concealment and sharing among the participants and how these related to solving the coordination problems.

We have quoted selected excerpts from the interviews that illustrate our findings. The observational materials have been used to contextualize and make sense of the interviews. These excerpts have been translated into English and edited for readability.

#### **4. Accomplishing alternativization: ensuring moral and economic certainty**

Reko is a highly decentralized grassroots initiative and has few formalized rules. Instead, the Reko-rings are guided by a set of shared principles stipulating that (a) no intermediaries are allowed (you can only sell food that you have produced), (b) the food sold should be locally produced, (c) all products have to be pre-ordered, and (d) it should be free to participate in a Reko-ring (see [Hushållningssällskapet, 2023](#)). Versions of these principles are reproduced by the Reko-rings locally, often, but not always, as formal rules of conduct.

Despite this loose approach to governance, a public report ([Nyström, 2020](#)) and extant studies suggest that they are, in practice, organized in quite similar manners, irrespective of whether or not those principles have been locally codified as rules ([Bååth, 2024](#); see also [Bååth 2022](#); [Fuentes and Fuentes, 2022](#)). Typically, suppliers and customers meet on the local Reko-ring's Facebook group. In these groups, suppliers market their products by posting ads, and customers place orders. Customers receive information about how to pay and can also provide feedback to producers. Suppliers and customers meet physically at an organized pick-up site, typically a car park, although other locations are possible ([Hushållningssällskapet, 2023](#)). Pick-up events are organized weekly or bi-weekly and tend to last between 30 and 60 minutes. Foods sold included, but were not limited to, varieties of meat, honey, vegetables, berries, eggs, cheese, baked goods, flowers, chocolate and other sweets. Consumers commonly order goods from several producers and make the rounds at the pick-up site to collect the items. A few producers also offer pre-selected produce bags containing assorted goods. The pick-ups are social events and consumers typically chat with producers and other consumers as they go about their business of collecting their pre-ordered items.

The following three sections analyse how Reko-ring participants, as they perform their Reko-ring practices of marketing, selling and acquiring local food products, enact alternativized solutions to each of the coordination problems; if, and how, they solve the problems in a manner that ensures both economic and moral certainty, and how it reveals the presence and use of an alternative framing. The final section draws on these three solutions to distinguish why the Reko-ring participants' shared framing is indeed alternative, and how



their solutions to the coordination problems rely on, ensure, and safeguard the organizational principle that economic certainty is only attained to the extent that it is instrumental for moral certainty. Such an alternative framing, we contend, is what sets apart the hybridization that enables moral market organization from the hybridization in general market organization.

#### 4.1 An alternativized solution to the value problem

As in conventional markets, economic values are imperative for Reko-ring participants. When setting prices, suppliers consider production costs and the prices of competing suppliers, both in the Reko-ring and, sometimes, organic or local offers in mainstream outlets (cf, [Bååth, 2023](#)). Customers, on the other hand, review the prices of different offers and may relate them to the prices of competing offers, and their personal finances and ability to pay (although the former rarely seems to be the case, see [Bååth, 2022](#)). Economic valuations are thus fundamental for both suppliers and customers to navigate and participate in Reko-ring trade. In this sense, Reko-rings solve the value problem, like any conventional market, by setting prices that cover production costs, secure profits and facilitate exchange.

Reko-rings seek to offer a moral alternative to conventional food provisioning, and thus involve not only economic valuations but moral ones, too. Among customers, such moral valuations include environmental values such as organic production practices or minimal transportation, and social values such as good working conditions for farmers and an appreciation for their personal engagement with supplying them (the customers) with sustainable and high-quality food. Suppliers display similar valuations, describing ‘a passion for heirloom plants and old varieties’ (Producer 2) and ‘I think that all the involved suppliers appreciate meeting their customers. It’s fun—darn fun!’ (Administrator 1). It is of no surprise, surely, that Reko-rings harbour both economic and moral valuations of food and food production practices. What is of interest here is how participants hybridize moral and economic valuations to solve the value problem.

Considering their purchases of Reko-ring offers, customers reason that their payments are not limited to economic value but an economic means of realizing environmental and social values. For example, ‘... a great way to spend your money as a consumer there, instead [of the supermarket]. That way, you facilitate this sector [local and sustainable food]’ (Customer 12), and ‘we want the countryside to thrive. To buy from local businesses is a means of supporting that end’ (Customer 4). Thus, largely, the customers treat prices as a way of paying what it costs to make moral values certain in food provisioning.

Turning to the supply side, a similar relation of economic and non-economic valuations emerges. A vegetable supplier outlines his economic valuations as follows:

This marketing idea and our dream of abstaining from working outside the farm has evolved over time. To a large extent, it means limiting our living costs, our own consumption patterns. But we do need some small source of income. It would be fantastic if the land and us working it could provide that income. That’s largely our utopia and why we do all this. The Reko-rings offer a great opportunity. They enabled us to start reaching for the dream, because of the low barrier to start selling [our produce]. (Supplier 2)

The supplier explains that money is important not for its own sake but because it supports a specific set of moral values—a simple but independent life in harmony with nature that he calls ‘utopia’. Here, the framing shows as an organizational principle for solving the

value problem, making economic value instrumental for moral value. This framing also appears when an administrator and egg supplier explains how she convinces customers of the legitimacy of the premium price-point of her eggs:

You can address all the ethical discussions regarding food production in a particularly direct manner with people [in the Reko-rings]. These are not conventional “bad eggs” that you’re buying. You know how the hens are faring—it’s completely different. The eggs fetch a premium price, of course. But ... you can’t breed hens or supply eggs in line with the prices [of conventional eggs] without making somebody else pay instead. (Administrator 1)

This way of marketing—a kind of mutual adjustment through negotiation—draws on and enacts an alternative framing, as it makes the economic value instrumental to assuring the ethical values of the supplier’s operation (cf, [Aspers, 2018](#)). The main problem, it seems, is to make customers certain about the moral value of these eggs. The egg supplier addresses this by engaging with potential customers to build a relation of trust in the mutual appreciation of the morality ([Zelizer, 2011](#), p. 276; see also [Bååth, 2024](#); [Thorsøe and Kjeldsen, 2016](#)). If that is achieved, the eggs then qualify their price as instrumental in creating moral value, and the alternative frame effectively organizes the solution to the value problem.

Conventionally, the value problem is solved by setting or agreeing on the economic value of a marketed offer. The Reko-ring participants, however, use a different kind of solution; by making the offer’s moral value certain, the economic value also becomes certain as it is treated as instrumental for ensuring the moral value. The suppliers ask premium prices and justify them by the fact that to supply non-economic values costs money—lower prices would eradicate the possibility of supplying them. The customers, in turn, pay these prices because they trust that they are putting their money towards a moral end, thus acknowledging the instrumental role of economic value for realizing that end. This solution contains a hybridization of market and communal practices that enables the organization of a moral market. However, this hybridization depends on Reko-ring participants sharing an alternative framing that distinguishes a certain combination of economic and moral valuations as the legitimate solution: one where the acceptance of an offer’s price (economic certainty) is decided by the ability to make its moral values certain. This way, the valuations are integrated to make the economic valuation secondary to the moral. Thereby, economic values become instrumental for moral ones, because economic certainty is framed by, and thus limited to, its ability to facilitate moral certainty. This alternativized solution to the value problem enables the organization of a moral market by treating moral certainty as a guarantee of economic certainty (cf, [Callon et al., 2002](#)).

#### 4.2 An alternativized solution to the competition problem

As in conventional markets, suppliers and customers in Reko-rings compete. The competition primarily emerges in two regards. First, suppliers may use price and quality to compete over the possibility of selling fungible, or at least similar, offers. For example, one supplier of lamb explains the role of such competition as follows.

Firstly, of course, we calculate roughly how much we must pay to supply it. Then we look around to see what our competitors are asking—their prices. And then you must ask about the same price ... and if your prices are too high, I guess you won’t sell anything. (Supplier 1)

The quote outlines conventional price competition. The interviewee explains that to participate in the Reko-ring, he must compete with the other lamb suppliers by asking prices that do not undercut his production costs (e.g. labour costs) or exceed his competitors' prices. Otherwise, he assumes, the customers will not purchase his lamb (or he will lose money). The competition problem thus lies in how to achieve imperfect competition and thus make profits (sufficiently) certain.

As in all markets, solutions to the competition problem in Reko-rings generally draw on cooperation (cf, [Beckert, 2009](#)). While many Reko-ring suppliers regard (some) price competition as a given, others problematize the price competition of commercial and hobby suppliers. The latter group occasionally price lower than the former, which is usually explained by the fact that hobby suppliers do not have to cover labour costs (i.e. make as much profit) because they have other sources of income. Price competition is thus largely unintended, and primarily the effect of lower production costs. The solution to the competition problem is to ask the hobby suppliers to raise their prices to the level of the commercial ones. An informal form of cooperation—mutual adjustment—makes the commercial sellers' profits certain, which thereby shapes the market (cf, [Aspers et al., 2020](#)) and fosters new relations among the competitors ([Arora-Jonsson et al., 2020](#)). By fostering these relations, they may establish sufficient trust in each other's capacity to refrain from price competition ([Zelizer, 2011](#), p. 276; see also [Bååth, 2024](#)). This solution to the competition problem is thus framed by the organizational principle that profits are made instrumental to ensure moral gains.

More formal forms of cooperation are fundamental to Reko-rings, as a subset of engaged participants communally organize them. This subset includes several suppliers and (generally fewer) customers who shoulder the joint responsibility of being administrators (or 'ring leaders'), managing the Facebook group and arranging delivery meetings. The administrators' work is thus to make organizational decisions for the Reko-rings' infrastructure (see [Fuentes and Fuentes, 2022](#)), and for surveying and enforcing rule adherence within the market (cf, [Aspers et al., 2020](#)). One supplier who is also an administrator explains the cooperative management of competition in a Reko-ring as follows:

... a couple of weeks ago, someone wanted to join the ring and sell beef. Thus, we contacted the meat suppliers we already had. We told them: "now there's someone new who sells beef who has applied—is it okay to let them in?", since it isn't me or the other admins who decide that. Our role is more of convening the group. Although we might have a comparatively influential role, the Reko-ring doesn't run solely because of us. And, of course, you attract customers together. Therefore, we find that communal decisions are a kind of right. (Administrator 7)

This quote outlines a kind of democratic decision-making, imagining the Reko-ring as a collectively shared and organized entity. Therein, the existing suppliers who would be competitors with the new supplier have a say in whether they can handle more competition, thus cooperating to make profits certain. This solution might in some sense be seen as unusual; however, it is still a conventional solution to the competition problem because it is a means of securing profits from imperfect competition, ensuring that the Reko-ring suppliers do not have to struggle with price competition or competition over demand. As others have described it, 'resource scarcity leads to cooperation, not competition' ([Sonenshein et al., 2017](#)). Such cooperation is, moreover, different from the kinds of negotiations that might be described as 'a peaceful kind of 'contest'' (cf, [Aspers, 2018](#), p. 145), because cooperation presupposes mutual interests, not opposing or competing ones.

However, Reko-ring participants not only cooperate to mutually ensure profits for the suppliers; Reko-ring principles mandate that only those who offer ‘locally supplied food without any intermediaries’ may participate as suppliers (Hushållningssällskapet, 2023). This principle is vague, yet allows for excluding competitors who the participants, in practice usually the administrators, do not acknowledge as (a) local, (b) a food supplier and (c) without intermediaries. In addition, while not mandated by the principles, the interviewees generally assume that Reko-rings only involve comparably small-scale suppliers.

Formulating and enforcing the Reko-ring principles is a cooperative way of making profits certain, because they effectively prohibit offers and suppliers that are too price-competitive and, moreover, form a kind of market niche (Beckert, 2009). However, they make moral gains certain. One administrator retells an episode when an egg supplier was caught acting as a covert intermediary. This led to an ‘almost virulent situation’ in the Facebook group (Administrator 3). The supplier violated the principle but furthermore undercut the ability for customers to support the ethics of Reko-ring trade by supplying eggs which *de facto* were not supplied without intermediaries. Thus, these eggs jeopardized the moral gains of Reko-ring participation and the market actors’ trust, not only profits for suppliers and economically competitive offers for customers. What happens here is that the fraudulent egg supplier revealed that they did not share the same framing for solving the competition problem, thus posing the risk of driving it towards perfect competition. Perfect competition over morality would mean that moral gains fall towards zero, just like competition over money makes profits fall towards zero.

The Reko-rings offer an alternativized solution to the competition problem by cooperating to make profits certain but, moreover, to make moral gains certain and trustworthy. This solution contains a hybridization of market and communal practices that enable the organization of a moral market. Reko-ring participants combine competition and cooperation in a manner whereby the certainty of moral gains warrants the certainty of profits. To some extent, this is because Reko-rings organize themselves as a niche market that disables direct competition from other food outlets who accept less (or no) moral gains for supplying food. However, it also displays a framing of the solution to the competition problem that makes it rely on a principle whereby economic profits are ensured by making them instrumental to moral gains, effectively barring perfect competition—because it would be immoral. This is translated into organizational practices, ranging from asking hobby suppliers to raise their prices, to social exclusion of suppliers who do not share such framing.

This alternativized solution to the competition problem ensures the organization of a moral market by framing moral gains as a guarantee for profits.

### 4.3 An alternativized solution to the cooperation problem

As is in all markets, Reko-ring suppliers share knowledge about their operations to make customers and other suppliers certain that they can be trusted not to exploit others. Reko-rings generally seek to promote knowledge sharing, as implied by the Reko-ring principle of focusing on food provisioning ‘without any intermediaries’ (Hushållningssällskapet, 2023). Some customers point out that the Facebook group ads provide them with transparency by granting access to knowledge about how the food is produced:

... many suppliers link their homepages to the Facebook ad. So, you can visit the page and read up on the farm. I’ve checked up on the business of those I purchased from; how the farm looks and what kind of people they are and so on. (Customer 10)

The ads are thus a means of making customers certain of the suppliers' trustworthiness. The knowledge makes them certain that there is an operation (usually a farm) supplying the food in question, and who the supplier operating it is (whose face is often depicted, and who may be contacted through Facebook). Similarly, suppliers might review each other's ads, homepages, etc to evaluate their trustworthiness. By placing orders and paying for them beforehand, suppliers can, in turn, be certain that the food will be paid for and picked up. Thus, pre-ordering reduces uncertainty about demand (that may otherwise result in food waste or missed opportunities for trade). The ads and the ordering system in the Facebook groups thus generate trust among the Reko-ring participants in that they will not be economically exploited by other actors.

Reko-ring participants, however, not only share knowledge that reduces uncertainties about economic exploitation; the suppliers' ads also communicate—and thus assure customers of—the sincerity of the operation regarding moral values. In addition to pictures of their offers, suppliers share images and descriptions that visualize and thus prove their adherence to and engagement with food production in line with the Reko-ring principles. One example is the following line of reasoning regarding the use of images in the Facebook ads: 'our animals lead a good life ... I believe that showing how they fare is also a way of promoting sales' (Supplier 3). Here, morality is put at the forefront by framing it as a means to ensure economic non-exploitation. While the good life of the animals is not used to promote sales, displaying it to customers is a means of assuring customers of both economic and moral sincerity. In a similar manner, customers highlight the value of having a more personal relationship with the supplier: 'You have *your* supplier. Nobody recognizes me at the supermarket' (Customer 11). As in the previous quote, this shows how trust in moral values is intertwined with trust in economic ones. Trust in the supplier simultaneously ensures there is no financial or moral exploitation, because the customer and supplier recognize, and thereby trust, each other.

While most knowledge is generously shared by the suppliers, they do, however, conceal some of it to ensure trust; for example, how much of certain wares a supplier has available for a delivery meeting, and the exact composition of produce bags. By disclosing this knowledge, suppliers may adjust their offers in relation to their supply:

... the customers have no real say in what goes into the produce bag. Or they can't ask me to include or exclude certain produce. The whole point of the bag is that we compose it. Thus, its contents can vary, both week to week and also within the same week. Say we end up with an excess harvest of some produce due to a misunderstanding, or excess supply that won't keep to the next week. Then you put in extra or sometimes offer "giveaways" to loyal customers and bonus produce to large buyers. (Supplier 10)

By concealing knowledge about the bags' composition, the supplier can adjust them to whatever harvest he has available. While this is an opportunity for extra giveaways, it is certainly also a means of ensuring customers' trust. Scarce supply of certain produce may result in inconsistently composed bags or the risk of advertising quantities or items that in the end cannot be supplied. Concealing supply this way thus reduces the risk that customers might find the supplier untrustworthy or exploitative by over-selling their offers, and moreover makes the suppliers engagement with seasonality and quality conventions of local and small-scale produce trustworthy.

In addition to dealing with an uneven or unpredictable supply (mainly a problem for vegetable and egg suppliers), knowledge concealment allows suppliers to privilege loyal and otherwise important customers. To conceal this knowledge is key so that other customers do not feel discriminated against, which could jeopardize their trust in the supplier. Privileging certain customers is seen as controversial in some Reko-rings. While not formally against the Reko-ring principles, some administrators find it goes against the spirit of transparency and community. Thus, some Reko-rings mandate that all orders should be posted as publicly visible replies to ads. In contrast, one supplier admitted to having left a Reko-ring due to such a rule. Because of the rule, he could allegedly not ensure the trust in supply he sought to offer loyal customers, whose returning business might make premium prices and profits, and thereby morality, certain.

The examples above illustrate that practices of both concealing and sharing knowledge are present in Reko-rings and that both have their uses for ensuring trust. Generally, suppliers share knowledge about *what* food is offered and its production, while (to a varying extent) concealing *how* it is reified and exchanged on the market. Customers, in turn, share knowledge in their orders about what they desire to buy and ensure that these are paid for beforehand. While customers do not actively conceal any relevant knowledge, the fact that suppliers often market their offers in multiple Reko-rings and that Facebook groups easily get cluttered with orders and substantial ads (including several images and long price lists of offers), to some extent conceals what others are ordering and whether there is a risk of some offers running out.

The practice of sharing and concealing knowledge solves the cooperation problem in Reko-rings. The alternativized solution to the cooperation problem is to treat knowledge about economic and moral dimensions of offers as intertwined. To share knowledge in this manner simultaneously makes customers certain about suppliers' morality, as well as the economic value of their offers. In line with the solutions to the previous two problems, Reko-ring participants organize a moral market by hybridizing the sharing and concealing of knowledge in a manner where moral certainty warrants economic certainty. The framing is less visible in this case but shows how the market and communal practices are integrated in a specific manner—according to the principle that any knowledge perceived as morally irrelevant can be concealed to solve the cooperation problem. Conflicting views on concealing orders shows that such irrelevance is not a given, because some see such concealment as jeopardizing customers' trust in the morality of Reko-ring suppliers, while others primarily treat it as a legitimate means of solving the competition problem (ensuring instrumental profits). The framing is thus not as widely established and shared in this case as it was in relation to the previous two coordination problems. However, despite one's view of concealed orders, this alternativized solution to the cooperation problem ensures and safeguards the organization of a moral market by framing knowledge sharing, which makes moral non-exploitation certain, and thus a guarantee for economic non-exploitation.

#### 4.4 Qualifying market alternativizing: how alternative framing ensures a moral market

In the previous three sections, we have shown how Reko-ring participants organize a moral market by enacting alternativized solutions to the three market coordination problems. We also argued that this was done by simultaneously drawing on and enacting an

alternative framing that allowed the participants to ensure the subjugation of economy to morality.<sup>3</sup>

The alternative framing includes both cognitive and material elements of organizational practice, which enact shared conceptions of what morality is and how it may be organizationally attained by the involved actors (cf, [Goffman, 1986](#), pp. 345–6). In the case of Reko-rings, being moral means valuing locally and sustainably produced food over its more conveniently available and inexpensive alternatives found at regular supermarkets or convenience stores. Importantly, for the alternative framing to work, i.e. to enable alternativized solutions to the three market coordination problems, it must be shared among multiple actors—all or at least the most influential ones.

The alternative framing is thus what allows the Reko-ring participants not only to offer but moreover to deliver on [Le Velly's \(2019\)](#) 'promise of difference'. As recognized by [Beunza and Ferraro \(2019\)](#), the alternative framing is what allows the Reko-ring participants to jointly carry out the 'performative work' of assembling materials and knowledge in a manner that challenges institutionalized (i.e. conventional) market organization, thereby organize a moral market. The alternative framing makes it possible to organize a market that is not only alive with morality (see also [Beckert, 2009](#); [Zelizer, 2011](#)) but also privileges moral certainty over economic certainty.

However, the alternative framing not only makes the organization of a moral market possible; it also safeguards this market against conventionalization or commercial co-option. After all, the mere existence of moral markets requires measures which both enable their organization and also safeguard them from co-option or conventionalization. How is the latter accomplished? To answer this question, we return to the alternativized solutions to the three coordination problems to explain how the alternative framing both enables and safeguards alternativized solutions to coordination problems—and how these solutions function as mechanisms that enhance the framing.

*The value problem's alternativized solution* was to valueate, and thus make certain, the moral values of an offer were sufficient to qualify for a given price. Thereby, the actors jointly ensured that the economic value was made instrumental for the moral value. The organizing principle involved was to treat economic value as instrumental for moral value, thus safeguarding morality by subjugating economic value to it. However, this subjugation is in itself also a mechanism that acknowledges the adherence to and viability of the alternative framing. As the value problem is solved in an alternativized manner, it fosters a hybrid that ensures economic value to the extent the moral value allows. This hinders conventionalization or commercial co-option by making such attempts easy to identify and act upon because they violate the framing.

*The competition problem's alternativized solution* was to hybridize cooperation and competition in a manner that ensured profits as a means of moral gains. This included both formal cooperation over the principles for Reko-ring participation and informal, mutual adjustment among Reko-ring participants to ensure the profits' instrumental role in achieving moral gains. This demonstrates the alternative framing: an organizing principle to privilege the certainty of moral gains through specific forms of cooperation, thereby guaranteeing

3 This framing is thus alternative, because it is an alternative to the conventional market framing in which all other certainty is subjugated to economic certainty, fostering solutions to coordination problems which privilege such certainty (cf, [Beckert, 2009](#); [Callon, 2016](#)).

profits to the extent possible within the moral framing. This hinders conventionalization or commercial co-option by cooperating in ways which would be difficult, or impossible, to partake in for a supplier who did not share the frame—others would simply refrain from cooperating with them. Solving the competition problem in this manner also enhances the framing, because the cooperation relies on mutual acknowledgement and reliance on shared organizational principles.

*The cooperation problem's alternativized solution* was to form a hybrid of sharing and concealing knowledge that ensures trust in moral non-exploitation. Knowledge ensuring economic non-exploitation is thus only shared to the extent that it facilitates trust in moral non-exploitation. This indicates an alternative framing because it solves the cooperation problem, and thereby organizes a moral market based on the principle that economic exploitation is legitimate given that it ensures moral non-exploitation. This dynamic relies on the principle that it is legitimate to exploit customers financially as long as it realizes a moral, or sustainable, food provisioning, which is often associated with making customers pay more for their foods (cf, Bååth, 2022, 2024). Thus, it assumes that the customers can afford to be exploited, at least to a certain extent. This solution also hinders conventionalization or commercial co-option because it allows for inflating prices and enables suppliers to ask for and get paid steeper prices, thus lowering the risk that, due to economic exploitation, they would have to turn to conventional means of food supply.

The hybridization taking place through these solutions demonstrates an alternative framing that restricts solutions to those which adhere to the principle that economic certainty is instrumental for, and thus cannot violate or jeopardize, moral certainty. While foremost pronounced in relation to the cooperation problem, such framing relies on and promotes relations of mutual trust among the market actors (see also Thorsøe and Kjeldsen, 2016). Yet the trust is not taken for granted, but actively promoted and ensured as the market actors frame the market in an alternative manner. Thus, the alternative framing also safeguards the alternativized market from conventionalization or commercial co-option. As several examples show, the framing enables the identification of practices or other organizational elements that violate said principle and, moreover, legitimizes taking both formal and informal measures against them.

Consequently, as previously mentioned, while all markets are shot through with morality (see Fourcade and Healy, 2017; Beunza, 2019), not all markets are organized in a way as to make a moral value the key principle of interaction. An alternative framing, we contend, is what sets apart the organization of moral markets from the mere commercialization of morality (Fuentes, 2014). Our analysis has shown how the organization of such markets is possible.

Finally, while alternatively framed markets may offer real moral alternatives to conventional markets, they may still suffer similar issues as other markets in terms of people's unequal access to money, time, education, networks and other instrumental resources for participating in them. Such resources might be necessary for customers to engage beyond their conventional role (Huddart Kennedy and Givens, 2019), including but not limited to the ability to pay premium prices (Bååth, 2022). Similarly, alternativized supply might presuppose engaging with customers in ways that are novel and unusual for producers (Baumann et al., 2023). Thus, market alternativizing risks being something which only a limited sub-set of people might participate in if its organization relies on solutions to the



coordination problems, and thus effectively an alternative framing, that is only available for a small, privileged group of people.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we have studied how people organize moral markets, focusing on how exactly they create hybrids of market and communal practices that facilitate such organization. Our answer to this query is that they rely on an alternative framing—an amalgam of shared understandings and practices for organizing a market that creates economic certainty but as a means of achieving moral certainty. This framing is thus alternative because it privileges moral certainty over economic certainty, contrary to the conventional framing of markets in which economic certainty is the key principle.

The identification and conceptualization of alternative framing in the organization of moral markets complements extant literature. Alternative framing adds to the ‘multiple markets’ literature because it identifies an observable difference between conventional and moral (or otherwise alternative) markets in general, and in terms of how they form hybrids to solve coordination problems in specific ways. We agree with [Balsiger \(2021\)](#), who points out that individual actors in moral markets do not all share the same principles. Nevertheless, we show that their (joint) organization of a market still relies on, and thus adheres to, some key principles that they, at least nominally, agree with and rely on to create alternativized solutions to coordination problems. We also agree with [Mair and Rathert \(2021\)](#) that alternativized markets pursue multiple goals, not just economic ones. However, alternative framing adds to this conversation by identifying how moral goals can be made a priority, and how moral certainty can be combined with, but also privileged over, economic certainty to achieve a meaningful alternative.

Our findings thus support the understanding that it is possible to ensure morality in the organization of moral markets. Hybridizing conventional and alternative market arrangements does not necessarily lead to the former colonizing and subjugating the latter (cf, [Guthman, 2014](#)). While few businesses may actively commit to harming their profits, our findings show that markets may be organized in manners that subjugate profit-seeking to an instrumental means of financing moral conduct (cf, [Rhodes, 2022](#)).

In addition, beyond merely confirming the possibility of moral markets, our analysis has shown what is involved in making these markets possible. Our analysis also demonstrates that the existence of moral markets is not mainly dependent on a set of actors or organizations with specific moral values ([Fitzmaurice et al., 2020](#); [Balsiger, 2021](#); [Mair and Rathert, 2021](#)), but on the development and application of an alternative framing which allows them to organize alternativized solutions to coordination problems. While this alternative framing has to be shared among (most of) the actors involved in the market, it is not an inherent quality of the actors, but instead performed and externalized, consisting of cognitive, relational and material elements of organizational practice. The absence of such a framing is, we argue, what demarcates businesses and markets that exploit or co-opt morality for commercial ends (cf, [Guthman, 2014](#); [Rhodes, 2022](#)), or leaves business and markets defenceless against such treatment by third parties (cf, [Solér et al., 2015](#); [de Freitas Netto et al., 2020](#)).

More generally, our conceptualization of alternative framing neither completely confirms nor refutes previous theoretical concepts about how hybridity is achieved in markets.

Instead, it includes parts of all three. For example, the participants' knowledge about economic and moral dimensions of food provisioning, which is partly developed by drawing on Reko-ring principles as a kind of institutionalized rule-set (cf, [Beckert, 2009](#)), to some extent shapes or influences their actions (cf, [Callon, 2016](#)) and allows them to negotiate moral and economic dimensions of food provisioning (cf, [Zelizer, 2011](#)). The alternative framing is what enables Reko-ring participants to use these different practices for organizing a moral market. Thus, in line with recent critiques of economic-sociological theory, our concept of alternative framing opens up an analytical vantage point where diverse theoretical conceptualizations can be treated as complementary tool kits rather than competing ontologies of markets (see [Beunza, 2019](#); [Beunza and Ferraro, 2019](#); [Bååth, 2023](#); cf, [Aspers, 2007](#); [Callon, 2016](#)).

Our findings thereby conclude that the organization of moral markets refers as much to attempts at organizing alternatives to conventional markets as attempts at re-organizing existing markets or institutions (cf, [Guthman, 2014](#); [Venkataraman et al., 2016](#); [Beunza and Ferraro, 2019](#); [Michel, 2020](#)). This is an important critique of studies that limit morality on markets as being embedded by external, moral forces (e.g. [Beckert, 2009](#); [Chiffoleau, 2009](#); [Chiffoleau et al., 2019](#)). Moreover, it raises questions regarding if and how moral re-organizing of existing markets, such as the introduction of sustainability standards ([Reinecke et al., 2012](#); [Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013](#)), differs from the deliberate organization of moral markets as alternatives to conventional ones. The latter is certainly a better description of Reko-rings, sharing economy platforms, and other attempts at social change through market organization (e.g. [Le Velly, 2019](#); [Fitzmaurice et al., 2020](#); [Bååth, 2022, 2024](#); [Fuentes and Fuentes, 2022](#); [Schiller-Merkens, 2024](#)).

Finally, there are some limitations to this study that are worth addressing, and which also suggest important avenues for future research. First, we have studied Swedish Reko-rings, a specific type of moral market. Other types of moral markets certainly allow for further understanding the variations on uses and hybrids of market and communal practices within an alternative framing, and how these offer variations on alternativized solutions of coordination problems. For example, future studies could investigate if and how Fair Trade markets rely on alternative framing, or whether their scale and geographical dispersion prohibit such framing and thus the ability to organize moral markets. Secondly, due to the qualitative study design, our findings cannot account for aspects such as whether some practices or hybridizations are more dispersed than others among the Reko-ring participants.

To conclude, this article has shown how our concept of alternative framings enables hybridizations that facilitate the organization of moral markets. As an analytical tool, this concept complements studies of how people attempt to organize alternative economic arrangements, to identify whether and how ideals and ambitions integrate with practices and material conditions. Thereby, the concept offers possibilities for unifying different theoretical conceptions of how hybridity may be achieved in moral markets, and thus explain how institutions, performative knowledge, materiality, relational work, etc. enable their organization (cf, e.g. [Chiffoleau et al., 2019](#); [Fitzmaurice et al., 2020](#); [Le Velly and Dufeu, 2016](#); [Venkataraman et al., 2016](#)). This approach, we contend, is useful because it acknowledges that the practical reality of organizing moral markets includes all these different organizational elements, and thus allows for analysing how those elements may be combined for moral pursuits.

## Acknowledgements

The authors want to thank the study participants for sharing their time, effort and experience, Emma Samsioe and Maria Fuentes for fieldwork cooperation and two anonymous reviewers for constructive comments on previous versions of the article.

## Funding

The research was supported by the FORMAS funded project 'Alternative Food Markets: Promoting new modes of food provisioning and consumption', grant nr: 2017-01604. PI Christian Fuentes.

## References

- Arora-Jonsson, S., Brunsson, N., and Hasse, R. (2020) 'Where Does Competition Come From? The Role of Organization', *Organization Theory*, 1, 1–24.
- Aspers, P. (2007) 'Theory, Reality, and Performativity in Markets', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 66, 379–398.
- Aspers, P. (2018) 'Forms of Uncertainty Reduction: Decision, Valuation, and Contest', *Theory and Society*, 47, 133–149.
- Aspers, P., Bengtsson, P., and Dobeson, A. (2020) 'Market Fashioning', *Theory and Society*, 49, 417–438.
- Bååth, J. (2022) 'How Alternative Foods Become Affordable: The Co-Construction of Economic Value on a Direct-to-Customer Market', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 94, 63–72.
- Bååth, J. (2023) 'Towards a Unified Theory of Market Prices: Turning to Pricing in Practice', *Socio-Economic Review*, 21, 5–23.
- Bååth, J. (2024) 'Relational Work in an Alternative Food Network: On the Fundamental Role of Shared Meaning for Organising Markets Differently', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 64, 592–612.
- Balsiger, P. (2021) 'The Dynamics of "Moralized Markets": A Field Perspective', *Socio-Economic Review*, 19, 59–82.
- Baumann, S., Johnston, J., and Oleschuk, M. (2023) 'How Do Producers Imagine Consumers? Connecting Farm and Fork through a Cultural Repertoire of Consumer Sovereignty', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 63, 178–199.
- Beckert, J. (2009) 'The Social Order of Markets', *Theory and Society*, 38, 245–269.
- Beunza, D. (2019) *Taking the Floor: Models, Morals, and Management in a Wall Street Trading Room*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.
- Beunza, D., and Ferraro, F. (2019) 'Performative Work: Bridging Performativity and Institutional Theory in the Responsible Investment Field', *Organization Studies*, 40, 515–543.
- Callon, M. (2016) 'Revisiting Marketization: From Interface-Markets to Market-Agencements', *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 19, 17–37.
- Callon, M., Méadel, C., and Rabeharisoa, V. (2002) 'The Economy of Qualities', *Economy and Society*, 31, 194–217.
- Carolan, M. S. (2021) *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture*, 3rd edn, London, Routledge.
- Chiffolleau, Y. (2009) 'From Politics to Co-Operation: The Dynamics of Embeddedness in Alternative Food Supply Chains', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 49, 218–235.
- Chiffolleau, Y., Millet-Amrani, S., Rossi, A., Rivera-Ferre, M. G., and Lopez Merino, P. (2019) 'The Participatory Construction of New Economic Models in Short Food Supply Chains', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 68, 182–190.
- DeSoucey, M. (2010) 'Gastronomicalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union', *American Sociological Review*, 75, 432–455.

- Diekmann, A., and Przepiorka, W. (2019) 'Trust and Reputation in Markets'. In Giardini, F. and Wittek, R. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Gossip and Reputation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 383–400.
- Dubuisson-Quellier, S. (2013) 'A Market Mediation Strategy: How Social Movements Seek to Change Firms' Practices by Promoting New Principles of Product Valuation', *Organization Studies*, **34**, 683–703.
- Fitzmaurice, C. J., Ladegaard, I., Attwood-Charles, W., Cansoy, M., Carfagna, L. B., Schor, J. B., and Wengronowitz, R. (2020) 'Domesticating the Market: Moral Exchange and the Sharing Economy', *Socio-Economic Review*, **18**, 81–102.
- Fligstein, N. (2001) *The Architecture of Markets: An Economic Sociology of Twenty-First-Century Capitalist Societies*, Princeton, NJ/Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- Fourcade, M., and Healy, K. (2017) 'Seeing like a Market', *Socio-Economic Review*, **15**, 9–29.
- de Freitas Netto, S. V., Falcao Sobral, M. P., Bezerra Ribeiro, A. R., and da Luz Soares, G. R. (2020) 'Concepts and Forms of Greenwashing: A Systematic Review', *Environmental Sciences Europe*, **32**, 1–12.
- Fuentes, C. (2014) 'Green Materialities: Marketing and the Socio-Material Construction of Green Products', *Business Strategy and the Environment*, **23**, 105–116.
- Fuentes, C., and Fuentes, M. (2022) 'Infrastructuring Alternative Markets: Enabling Local Food Exchange through Patchworking', *Journal of Rural Studies*, **94**, 13–22.
- Gemici, K. (2012) 'Uncertainty, the Problem of Order, and Markets: A Critique of Becker', *Theory and Society*, **41**, 107–118.
- Goffman, E. (1986) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Boston, MA, Northeastern University Press.
- Guthman, J. (2014) *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press.
- Hammersley, M., and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, London/New York, NY, Routledge.
- Holstein, J. A., and Gubrium, J. F. (1995) *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA/London/New Delhi, Sage.
- Huddart Kennedy, E., Baumann, S., and Johnston, J. (2019) 'Eating for Taste and Eating for Change: Ethical Consumption as a High-Status Practice', *Social Forces*, **98**, 381–402.
- Huddart Kennedy, E., and Givens, J. E. (2019) 'Eco-Habitus or Eco-Powerlessness? Examining Environmental Concern across Social Class', *Sociological Perspectives*, **62**, 646–667.
- Hushållningssällskapet (2023) 'REKO-ringar i Sverige', accessed at <https://hushallningssallska.pet.se/forskning-utveckling/reko/> on September 8, 2023.
- Le Velly, R. (2019) 'Allowing for the Projective Dimension of Agency in Analysing Alternative Food Networks', *Sociologia Ruralis*, **59**, 2–22.
- Le Velly, R., and Dufeu, I. (2016) 'Alternative Food Networks as "Market Agencements": Exploring Their Multiple Hybridities', *Journal of Rural Studies*, **43**, 173–182.
- Leipämaa-Leskinen, H., Närvänen, E., and Makkonen, H. (2022) 'The Rise of Collaborative Engagement Platforms', *European Journal of Marketing*, **56**, 26–49.
- Mair, J., and Rathert, N. (2021) 'Alternative Organizing with Social Purpose: Revisiting Institutional Analysis of Market-Based Activity', *Socio-Economic Review*, **19**, 817–836.
- Marcus, G. E. (1998) *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.
- Michel, S. (2020) 'Collaborative Institutional Work to Generate Alternative Food Systems', *Organization*, **27**, 314–336.
- Nyström, M. (2020) 'REKO-rings—a new way of reaching the consumer', European Development Fund, accessed at [https://agrovaast.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/rapport-reko-rings\\_updated-201125.pdf](https://agrovaast.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/rapport-reko-rings_updated-201125.pdf) on August 23, 2024.

- O'Neill, K. J. (2014) 'Situating the "Alternative" within the "Conventional"—Local Food Experiences from the East Riding of Yorkshire, UK', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 35, 112–122.
- Pellandini-Simányi, L. (2016) 'Non-Marketizing Agents in the Study of Markets: Competing Legacies of Performativity and Actor-Network-Theory in the Marketization Research Program', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 9, 570–586.
- Reinecke, J. (2010) 'Beyond a Subjective Theory of Value and towards a "Fair Price": An Organizational Perspective on Fairtrade Minimum Price Setting', *Organization*, 17, 563–581.
- Reinecke, J., Manning, S., and von Hagen, O. (2012) 'The Emergence of a Standards Market: Multiplicity of Sustainability Standards in the Global Coffee Industry', *Organization Studies*, 33, 791–814.
- Rhodes, C. (2022) *Woke Capitalism: How Corporate Morality is Sabotaging Democracy*, Bristol, Bristol University Press.
- Robotham, D. (2009) 'Afterword: Learning from Polanyi 2', In Hann, C. and Hart, K. (eds) *Market and Society: The Great Transformation Today*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 272–283.
- Rosol, M. (2020) 'On the Significance of Alternative Economic Practices: Reconceptualizing Alterity in Alternative Food Networks', *Economic Geography*, 96, 52–76.
- Sahakian, M., Wahlen, S., and Welch, D. (2022) '(Un)Sustainable Consumption: A Contested, Compelling and Critical Field', *Consumption and Society*, 1, 244–254.
- Schiller-Merkens, S. (2024) 'Prefiguring an Alternative Economy: Understanding Prefigurative Organization and Its Struggles', *Organization*, 31, 458–476.
- Solér, C., Baeza, J., and Svård, C. (2015) 'Construction of Silence on Issues of Sustainability through Branding in the Fashion Market', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31, 219–246.
- Sonsenshein, S., Nault, K., and Obodaru, O. (2017) 'Competition of a Different Flavor: How a Strategic Group Identity Shapes Competition and Cooperation', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 62, 626–656.
- Thompson, C. J., and Coskuner-Balli, G. (2007) 'Enchanting Ethical Consumerism: The Case of Community Supported Agriculture', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 7, 275–303.
- Thorsøe, M., and Kjeldsen, C. (2016) 'The Constitution of Trust: Function, Configuration and Generation of Trust in Alternative Food Networks', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 56, 157–175.
- Venkataraman, H., Vermeulen, P., Raaijmakers, A., and Mair, J. (2016) 'Market Meets Community: Institutional Logics as Strategic Resources for Development Work', *Organization Studies*, 37, 709–733.
- White, H. C. (1981) 'Production Markets as Induced Role Structures', *Sociological Methodology*, 12, 1–57.
- Zelizer, V. A. (1994) *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton, NJ/Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- Zelizer, V. A. (2011) *Economic Lives: How Culture Shapes the Economy*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

© The Author(s) 2024. Published by Oxford University Press and the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For commercial re-use, please contact [journals.permissions@oup.com](mailto:journals.permissions@oup.com)

Socio-Economic Review, 2025, 23, 183–203

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwae068>

Article