

Solidarity and practices of sustainable consumption: analysing a consumer cooperative in Taiwan

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Abstract

In the past decade, many alternative food networks (AFNs) are formed in Taiwan to address issues of food safety, agriculture, and environment. This paper aims to explore how Polanyi's concept "economy as instituted processes" helps us understand the ways consumers change food production and consumption in such AFNs. The paper focuses on the first of these AFNs, the Homemaker Consumer Cooperative, and draws data from its publications, website, social media content, media coverage and interviews of organizers. The analysis found that the Coop organizes regular learning activities around cooking, parenting, and leisure that socialize consumers with sustainable consumption practices. The organizing of these activities require consumers' active participation and embody extended solidarity with families, farmers, and the environment, thus also change consumers' subjectivity. It is these practices and subjectivity that stabilized the Coop economic processes of food production and market exchange. The paper argues that a Polanyian approach enables us to see how the building of new social processes by consumers are crucial for changing consumption practices that extend to broader economic processes.

Keywords: Social economy, Instituted economic process, sustainable consumption, Taiwan, and Alternative Food Networks