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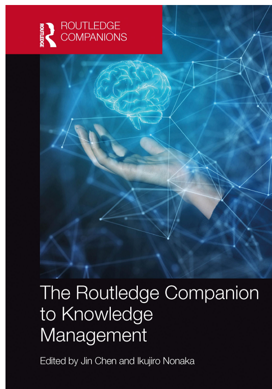

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18

COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL INNOVATION IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The Case of the Slow Food Movement in Italy

Luca Cacciolatti and Soo Hee Lee

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a novel knowledge management model for communities of practice (CoPs) to foster social innovation by leveraging collective knowledge. We use the case of the Slow Food Movement (SFM) in Italy to analyse how collective knowledge in a local population can be used by CoPs to enhance social innovation. The SFM is an organisation born in Italy in 1986 with the aim of promoting local food and traditional cooking as an alternative to fast food. As part of its remit, the SFM features the promotion of traditional and regional cuisine, small businesses operating in short food chains, sustainable farming of plants, seeds, and the rearing of livestock that are typical of a regional ecosystem.

In 1986, Mr Carlo Petrini started 'Arci Gola', a cultural association with the aim of spreading a new philosophy of appreciation of local culinary heritage that focused on the hedonistic pleasure deriving from the consumption of high-quality food and wine while having an eye of regard for that specialist knowledge that only food connoisseurs have, as reported in *Vent'anni a ritmo Slow da Arcigola a Terra Madre* (2006), published in the Italian national quality paper *La Stampa*.

In this chapter, we propose that collective knowledge gathered through market intelligence activity is a necessary social resource and input to the formation and development the CoP. We argue that collective knowledge contributes to the formation of a social structure and then leads to social innovation via mechanisms of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. More specifically, CoPs can leverage market intelligence as a social resource through customers' engagement and tacit knowledge embedded in the local culture of a geographical area can be captured by the CoP and made explicit so as to fuel participation and the reification process, typical of CoPs.

When looking at the case of the SFM, we see how the preservation of tacit knowledge (Von Krogh et al., 2012) enshrined in the local territory of the Piedmont region in Italy fuelled an anti-globalisation discourse that managed to spread like wildfire worldwide. The original trigger for the creation of the movement was the plan for the opening of a branch of MacDonald's in Rome's Spanish Steps in 1986. Although that specific attempt to prevent a MacDonald's branch opening failed, at a later stage the founding members of the SFM

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started working collaboratively with whoever was concerned about how fast food negatively affected their lives. The discourse on fast-food restaurants is centred around the idea of modernity and a fast-paced lifestyle. On the contrary, the SFM symbolises the fight against the speed and efficiency promoted by corporate rationality, which purports to maximise value for shareholders of large corporations while eroding value for citizens who find their local food heritage threatened by mass production and consumption of food (Bessière, 1998).

In this chapter, we posit that the SFM contributed to a form of social innovation in its own right and it is relevant to an enhanced understanding of knowledge management (KM) because of a particular characteristic of the SFM, that is, a CoP where the consumer is also the producer. We already know that the

> engagement in social contexts involves a dual process of meaning making. On the one hand, we engage directly in activities, conversations, reflections, and other forms of personal participation in social life. On the other hand, we produce physical and conceptual artifacts—words, tools, concepts, methods, stories, documents, links to resources, and other forms of reification—that reflect our shared experience and around which we organize our participation.
>
> *(Wenger, 2010: 180)*

In this regard, the innovativeness of the SFM goes beyond antagonising fast food restaurants where mass producers quickly feed the masses. It proposes an alternative discourse by which the local culture of the Piedmontese region allows for the producer-consumer duality typical of a healthier, slower-pace lifestyle. Furthermore, it also extends this discourse into a system of collective knowledge that acts as a catalyst for change to the benefit of societal advancement.

The negative effects of rationalisation can be seen in the emergence of undisputable leadership (Weber, 2002) and in the suppression of traditional values and emotions for the sake of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control (Ritzer, 1992). The SFM mitigated the effects of such a wave of rationalisation in the food industry by means of the founders' knowledge of the territory and the local culture. In this regard, their success is largely due to their ability in creating and manage knowledge effectively, proving that KM is functional to social prosperity. KM is useful for CoPs' understanding of the role that data and information play in generating knowledge that can contribute to the enhancement of social welfare and innovation.

While the SFM is a CoP with strong leadership, whether knowledge has to be managed by adopting a top-down rather than a bottom-up approach is a matter of debate (Fromhold-Eisebith and Eisebith, 2005). The issue of governance in the creation of knowledge is important because private and public actors have different agendas, with a predominant focus on social innovation issues in public sector organisations (Mulgan et al., 2007). Thus, it becomes paramount for countries to foster social innovation within the private and public sectors in order not to polarise power in either of the sectors, but should governments lead on social innovation?

Various forms of co-creation seem to be a successful model for innovation in many different parts of the world (Seltzer and Mahmoudi, 2013). Citizens can gather in association and find common solutions to common problems by trial and error (Lee et al., 2012) and they can become innovators under the condition of association into CoPs. CoPs set the ground for the cross-fertilisation of ideas, the creation of knowledge, and the pursuit of social innovation.

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Thus, in this chapter, the SFM is explored in light of the dynamics typical of CoPs. We explain the mechanisms underlying the creation, consolidation, and dissemination of knowledge via CoPs in a social innovation context.

The SFM is an iconic case where a bottom-up approach to social innovation bore tremendous success. Our novel KM framework adopts Wenger's (1998a) CoP framework to analyse how the SFM leveraged on tacit collective knowledge embedded in the local population, collected it through market intelligence (information deriving from the local heritage and from customers' engagement) and then used it to establish a specific common knowledge domain. The creation of such a domain allowed the build-up of the social fabric of the Slow Food community that enabled participatory behaviour and reification. In what follows, we introduce the theoretical background for our novel KM model for CoPs fostering social innovation.

Theoretical Framework

The Community of Practice as an Enabler of Social Innovation

Social innovation and social mission. Social innovation is defined as 'innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social' (Mulgan, 2006: 146). It is innovation for 'social needs of, or delivering social benefits to, communities – the creation of new products, services, organizational structures or activities that are better or more effective than traditional public sector [...] approaches in responding to social exclusion' (Moulaert, 2013: 1).

The boundaries of social innovation are defined by the motivation and diffusion of innovation. For instance, business innovation is 'motivated by profit maximization and diffused through organizations that are primarily motivated by profit maximization' (Mulgan, 2006: 146). Mulgan (2006) also acknowledges that there are several borderline cases to the definition of social innovation, e.g., products or services developed for a social purpose and then adopted by businesses or other for-profit organisations with a social mission.

To address these blurred definition boundaries, Cacciolatti, Rosli, Ruiz-Alba, and Chang (2020) point out that the social purpose is indeed important in determining the business motives of an organisation engaging with social innovation but not only social enterprises engage with social innovation. Therefore, they proposed that social mission should be incorporated in the definitions of social innovation and social enterprise as 'a lot of for-profit organisations engage in social innovation' (Altuna et al., 2015) as they could also have a social purpose without necessarily being classified as social enterprises.

As identified by Moulaert et al. (2005), three dimensions of social innovation are the satisfaction of unmet needs, changes in social relations, and an empowerment dimension that increases socio-political capabilities and access to resources. Although many definitions of social innovation have been developed over time (see Van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016), for the purpose of this chapter, we define social innovation as *'innovative activities that provide a solution to societal problems and that are underpinned by the pursuit of a social mission'*. At the basis of social innovation, there is a need to promote a social mission and often this is made possible because of knowledge sharing among users, be it individuals or groups of users. CoPs offer a fertile ground for the accumulation, utilisation, and diffusion of collective knowledge.

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Communities of Practice: domain and community. CoP as a concept originated from the situated learning theory (Lave, 1988). The constituting elements of CoPs are the participation of the members in the practices of a community and the identification of the members with that community, which gives them a sense of belonging (Lave, 1991). CoPs are 'are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger et al., 2002: 4). When looking at the boundaries of CoP, they differ from a club of friends or from a network because communities of practice need to satisfy the existence of a common *domain* of interest that justifies the members to get together and to engage with each other (Wenger, 2010). Examples of CoP are

> artists [that] congregate in cafés and studios to debate the merits of a new style or technique. Gang members learn to survive on the street and deal with an unfriendly world. Frontline managers running manufacturing operations get a chance to commiserate, to learn about upcoming technologies, and to foresee shifts in the winds of power.
>
> *(Wenger et al., 2002: 4)*

One of the fundamental processes observed in CoPs is related to CoP members finding

> their own ways of creating new work patterns, which are often different from those formally prescribed. […] three central processes of CoPs emerged: social construction, collaboration and shared language. By adapting to these three processes, participants were engaging in joint problem solving. Thus, the focus in CoPs is not the individual or his or her cognition, but rather the interaction among participants.
>
> *(Lundkvist, 2004: 97)*

The sense of *community* in the CoP differs from other forms of social aggregation. The members of a CoP have mutually defining identities even though they contribute to the community with different skills and knowledge (Wenger, 1998b). Cox (2005) points out that Wenger's use of the term community in a CoP context implies tight-knit relationships amongst members, generally of a small scale, not clearly bounded, often presenting conflictual relationships, yet purposive and creative. In this sense, CoPs leverage a common language rooted in the members' collective knowledge to produce a social structure and then lead on social innovation via a mechanism of *joint enterprise, mutual engagement*, and *shared repertoire* (Wenger, 1998b). These are the elements that constitute the community.

They form the basis for the existence of the CoP in the concept of community *per se*. More specifically, joint enterprise refers to the partnering characteristics of a CoP. The members of the CoP comprise individual members and organisations that build a social relationship based on co-production and deliver shared value to different entities. 'Communities of practice connect people from different organizations as well as across independent business units. In the process, they knit the whole system together around core knowledge requirements' (Wenger et al., 2002: 6). Joint enterprise is binding all the members of the CoP around the understanding that their practice and the knowledge shared around that practice identifies them as part of the CoP (Roberts, 2006). An example of a joint enterprise is given by Wenger (Wenger et al., 2002) when looking at how Chrysler Corporation tried to shorten the product development life cycle to increase the company's competitiveness: the employees of different functional areas started meetings informally to share their knowledge and the managers, after seeing that informal sharing of knowledge leads to improvements in the way

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different functional areas were working, encouraged the creation of technology groups, i.e. informal knowledge-based groups.

While joint enterprise and the common area of interest around which practice is centred contribute to the identity of the community, members' engagement is key to the cohesion of the community. Mutual engagement consists of the established norms and interaction routines that regulate the relationships amongst members (Roberts, 2006). The relationships to guarantee mutual engagement need to be sustained over time, irrespective of whether the nature of the relationship is conflictual or harmonious (Wenger, 1998b) and 'the presence of a relationship of trust between individuals indicates an ability to share a high degree of mutual understanding, built upon a common appreciation of a shared social and cultural context' (Roberts, 2006: 628). Mutual engagement, to be effective, requires members to adopt a psychosocial filter that enables thoughtful and deliberate knowledge sharing among the CoP members. This is possible if CoP members trust each other and perceive other members as being approachable, credible and trustworthy of the knowledge they want to share (Andrews and Delahaye, 2000).

Finally, a shared repertoire refers to the production of knowledge that derives from practice and knowledge sharing, and such knowledge is embodied in some resources that are communal to the member of the CoP: a specific language or jargon, routines and scripts of behaviour, stories and narratives, and artefacts (Wenger, 1998b). As highlighted by Roberts (2006), the production of artefacts within a CoP, the 'doing things together' (p. 625) and talking about the artefacts produced creates mutual engagement. The same author also indicates that CoPs are spontaneously formed because of members' interest in a domain of knowledge which stimulates mutual engagement, thus a shared repertoire strengthens and amplifies the sense of community built around the practice by reinforcing the interest in the knowledge domain.

The element of knowledge creation and diffusion via communal resources in a shared repertoire raises some important questions about the role of practice in CoPs and the role that collective knowledge plays in the formation of CoPs. For instance, if CoPs are domain-centric and practice-focused and such a practice is exercised by means of members' participation and their creation of a shared repertoire, i.e. reification (Wenger, 1998b), what mechanism underpins CoPs' ability to capture tacit knowledge and unarticulated know-how and translate them into explicit knowledge? Also, if tacit knowledge and unarticulated know-how are held by a collective, what mechanism underpins the harvesting of such knowledge and its utilisation in building a discourse that fosters participation and reification? The theoretical foundations to these questions are explored in the next section.

Collective Knowledge as an Input for the Development of Cops

Collective knowledge is discussed in an organisational context and identified with a form of knowledge within a specific culture that is shared within an organisation (Penrose, 1959). This implies that the existence of collective knowledge necessitates an organisational structure (e.g., a collective) and agency (e.g., actions or practice).

Collective knowledge also comprises the collective understanding of social definitions, which are dependent upon human judgement (Toulmin, 1999). It builds on the personal knowledge of individuals belonging to the social group (Polanyi, 2015). Most importantly, collective knowledge found in an organisation informs collective practice (Spender, 1994). In this regard, as we have explained in the previous section, CoPs centre on a domain of knowledge whose definitions are shared by their members. CoPs' members are united in a

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community by means of joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire. Thus, along with domain and community, the third constituting element of CoPs is practice.

Practice: participation and reification. Through practice, CoPs translate tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through processes of participation and reification (Wenger, 1998b), which determine the negotiation of the meaning within CoPs (Roberts, 2006). It is a way of 'coupling action and connection. [...] An employee carries out tasks, belongs to a work-group, has a sense of identity through his or her skills and derives meaning through his or her experiences' (Baxter and Hirschhauser, 2004: 210). Participation implies a certain level of activity and proactivity in the community, and it contributes to learning, the creation of meaning, and the strengthening of the CoPs' identity.

Participation is intimately linked to the idea of reification. In defining reification, Wenger (1998:58) maintains that 'any community of practice produces abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form'. An example from a quality management context is the following: reification can

> be applied to teaming as a process, statistical process control charts, the labels applied to the process, the corporate mission statements, the procedures in ISO 9000 documents, the specification of critical success factors. Improvement initiatives usually entail modifications to the way individuals participate and a new array of reification possibilities.
>
> *(Baxter and Hirschhauser, 2004: 210)*

Therefore, reification refers to the creation of tangible output or the embodiment of an abstraction into an object, or as reported by Wenger (Wenger, 1998: 58), 'we project our meanings onto the world and then we perceive them as existing in our world, as having a reality on their own'.

In summary, provided that the meanings, symbols, stories, concepts, tools, and artefacts make tacit knowledge explicit, it is not unlikely that once the reification process reaches critical mass in production and participation increases and creates some traction, then a spill-over effect may take place to enable the CoP to generate impactful social innovation. This could provide a plausible explanation for the mechanism underlying the generation of social innovation by a CoP, although the process of translation of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge within a CoP context is unclear in the current literature. This process takes place in organisations as Nonaka et al. (1996) shows how speed and flexibility are key factors in a firm's development process and adaptation to a changing external environment. The iteration between participation and reification supposedly also requires speed and flexibility. However, these do not provide a sufficient account of KM in CoPs. We posit that social resources provide intelligence on the collective knowledge that fuels the knowledge domain of a CoP, playing a critical role in the development of the CoP and consequently in its ability to innovate. In what follows, we discuss the role of social resources.

Social resources and collective knowledge. There is an overall agreement in the KM literature that tacit knowledge is actionable and partially or fully based on personal experience (Leonard and Sensiper, 1998). Tacit knowledge comprises different types of automatic skills (e.g., use of tools, the instinctive reaction to an event) and, although not being yet explicated, can be codified (Spender, 1993). Tacit knowledge sometimes is 'semiconscious [...] while the tacit elements are subjective, experiential, and created in the "here and now"' (Polanyi, 2009, cited in Spender, 1993: 58).

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Given the sense of the above definitions, tacit knowledge is a constituting element of collective knowledge as the latter is embedded in organisations or social groups (Holzmann, 2013) and allows organisations to share and recombine the individuals' tacit knowledge and to coordinate its diffusion (Zhao and Anand, 2009). Collective knowledge can fulfil the gaps of individual knowledge and reconfigure it in an instrumental way so to create value for the collective (Kogut and Zander, 1992).

The members of a collective represent a social resource (Lin et al., 1981) that CoPs can capitalise on to fuel their knowledge domain. In this regard, CoPs can leverage market intelligence to access collective knowledge through their social resources. Since CoPs are collectives in their own right, part of their knowledge may be harvested amongst like-minded adjacent collectives, and this creates a dyadic relationship between the knowledge seeker and the contributor of knowledge (Beck et al., 2014). However, the proximity of the two collectives blurs the boundaries of knowledge production. Both knowledge seekers and contributors are producers and consumers of knowledge at the same time (Jasanoff, 2004): their interactions co-produces the tacit knowledge that fuels the domain of the CoP. An example of collective knowledge is the tacit knowledge (Von Krogh et al., 2000) in the local territory (Shaw and McGregor, 2010) and

> to build a rich view of a community, a group of community members might collaborate to fully uncover heritage knowledge through conversation of joint story-telling – especially when individual knowledge might be insufficient, and requires a collective knowledge input to triangulate for accuracy and crude validation (p. 123).

CoPs can fuel their knowledge domain and feed their practice (participation and reification) by gathering intelligence on the knowledge embedded in a collective, thanks to a proactive engagement of customers (i.e., customers' engagement) and to the absorption of collective knowledge from the local culture. While this can help explain the acquisition of tacit knowledge that ignites CoPs and feeds their development, on its own, it is a necessary but insufficient condition for CoPs contribution to social innovation. In the next section, we discuss the contribution of the process of externalisation (Nonaka et al., 2000) to CoPs' innovation activity.

Thus, the ability to learn as an organisation (which fuels the CoP's knowledge domain) and a governance structure that allows for an involved and supportive leadership that facilitates community members' coordination and collaboration, set the basis for the CoP's innovation enabling role (Figure 18.1).

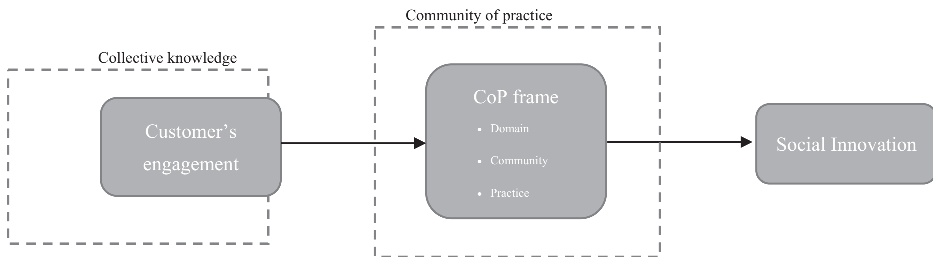

Figure 18.1 A conceptual model for collective knowledge and social innovation within communities of practice

Source: *CoP frame is adapted from Wenger (1998).

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Case Analysis

Following the launch of the SFM in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, the official manifesto of the movement was published in 1987 in the supplement of the national quality paper Il Manifesto, and signed by Mr Petrini along with prominent Italian intellectuals, artists, and public personalities of the likes of Nobel Prize recipient Dario Fo. Notwithstanding the social purpose of SFM's mission, a wide network of privately run activities sprang up from this movement and their ability to externalise knowledge contributed to its expansion to over 100,000 affiliated members, over 1m supporters, 2,400 food communities, and 1,500 branches or chapters (aka *convivium, -a*) in 160 countries worldwide as reported by Dumitru, Lema-Blanco, Kunze, and García-Mira (2016).

The analysis of the SFM case study focuses on how CoPs can foster social innovation by leveraging collective knowledge acquired via market intelligence. To demonstrate the mechanisms underlying this process of tacit knowledge acquisition and transformation into explicit knowledge and its use to develop the CoP and lead to social innovation, we need to divide the case analysis into three main thematic areas: the community of practice as an enabler of social innovation, the social resources and the collective knowledge gathered through intelligence in the innovation activity of CoPs. We apply Wenger's (1998b) CoP frame throughout the thematic analysis and what follows presents our findings.

The Community of Practice as an Enabler of Social Innovation

Domain. The SFM presents a very well-defined domain of knowledge that builds an anti-rationalistic and anti-globalisation discourse. The basic starting assumption that justifies the existence of the SFM lies in the idea of *us*, i.e. the SFM, whose members appreciate the slowness of the pure enjoyment of food, along with an aesthetic and ecologic awareness of the role that the local food plays in people's lives. This idea follows a *us vs them* logic (with *them* intended as fast food), as fast food is the emblematic example of what society started accepting as the sole rational solution to the fast pace of modern life since the wave of globalisation 2.0 started.

> *Without such a thing as fast food, there would be no need for slow food*
>
> *(Pollan, 2006: 380)*

Thus, the starting assumption of the SFM lies in the fact that there is an antagonistic position between the SFM (in this case the hero) and fast food (in this case the anti-hero). This is a particularly important point as this antagonistic position to the Macdonaldisation process brought about by globalisation fosters an anti-rationalism discourse rooted in an anti-globalisation perspective. Therefore, the rationalistic values of efficiency, speed, and the search for competitiveness through a race to the lowest price have to be fought against because they are damaging to the rural communities.

> The critics to the process of Macdonaldization brought to our eyes *'an account of the purely profit-driven processes by which most people's regular food and all fast food are produced, and the dismal, often stomach-churning manufacture of meat'*
>
> *(Fox, 2008: 114)*

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> On the other hand, the SFM '*represents an act of rebellion against a civilisation based on the sterile concepts of productivity, quantity and mass consumption, destroying habits, traditions and ways of life, and ultimately the environment'*
>
> *(Petrini in Hodgson and Toyka, 2007: 138)*

In light of this, the SFM picks the fight against that civilisation that destroys rather than nurture, that spoils peoples' lives and the environment by not respecting what centuries of local traditions taught people about the appreciation of food, the natural environment, and life itself on our planet.

> Thus, the code domain of knowledge of the SMF as a CoP is '*based on the intrinsic cultural value of local production that critiques the globalized and delocalized food production system'*
>
> *(Dumitru et al., 2016: 4)*

In this regard, the collective knowledge that fuels the SFM knowledge domain is embedded in the rural communities, where consumers are themselves producers of food but also have a life rooted in traditional values. The collective knowledge held in these communities is about the slow timings of mother nature, its seasons, the quality of food that is produced without putting the unnatural pressure of maximised yields in food production systems. This type of knowledge gives the identity to the SFM and allows them to distinguish between the SFM and *them* (i.e., fast-food whose production is all about efficiency and resources exploitation and consumption is focused on the delivery of convenience, fast service, and lower prices to urban citizens). Such collective knowledge contributes to the SFM's identity and puts the basis for its CoP development.

Community and practice. The level of enterprise, engagement, and the shared repertoire that define CoPs contribute to fostering social innovation, given the increase of political relevance and the ability to make changes in social dynamics. Thus, the community acts as an enabler of social innovation. The impact of the SFM on the global political scenario is undeniable and it created a novel organisational structure that brings social benefits to communities worldwide.

> The Slow Food ideology '*is taken literally as to 'put perspective on the Fast Life' (De Grazia, 2005: 458 ff.) and its foundation is mentioned – together with the fall of the Berlin wall – as one of the most significant events of the last decades to mark a shift in the dynamics of Americanization. Small and slow are placed as opposed to big and fast, but – thus claims De Grazia – this happens within the market rather than against it'*
>
> *(Sassatelli and Davolio, 2010: 206)*

In this regard, SFM's joint enterprise is evidenced by the initial engagement they started having back in 1983 when Petrini started the not-for-profit food and wine Arcigola association. Petrini leveraged his wide personal network as a former activist of the communist movement Partito di Unità Proletaria and as a former local political candidate for Marxist-inspired party Democrazia Proletaria in 1976 (Anon, 1976). The SFM engaged a wide number of followers through

> *The transnational network is present in 160 countries throughout the world with 1.500 convivia (local manifestations) formed by 100.000 affiliates and 1.000.000 of supporters. Slow Food also*

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> *counts with several national associations (Italy, Germany, Switzerland, USA, Japan, Netherlands, Brazil, Kenya and South Korea); two Slow Food International Foundations: The Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity and the Terra Madre Foundation; and one University of Gastronomic Sciences (Bra, Italy)*
>
> *(Dumitru et al., 2016: 5).*

The process of co-creation through joint enterprise is evident by the large involvement of a very diverse audience ranging from the director of the National State Television (RAI), entrepreneurs and discographic directors, poets, theatrical writers and actors, editors of the specialised food-related press like Gambero Rosso, which is known nationwide, and famous singers and other intellectuals and artists.

> *At the time, they'd meet in a tavern called Unione in Treiso, in the Langhe region: what with tajarin and some good Barolo, Folco Portinari, who was then a director at Rai, a critic and a refined poet, got the right idea. Portinari wrote the text, Petrini collected the signatures and on the 3rd November 1987 the manifesto was published in Gambero Rosso with a snail designed by Gianni Sassi. The signatures of Portinari, Petrini, Bonilli, Parlato, were followed by those of famous intellectuals and artists such as Dario Fo, Francesco Guccini, Gina Lagorio, Enrico Menduni, Antonio Porta, Ermete Realacci, Sergio Staino and more*
>
> *(Padovani, 2017)*

Such a networked start of the movement allowed them to gain traction in the local area but the SFM spread nationally quite fast, thanks to all the people involved at the initial stages of development, as all of them had their own followers in their own enterprises, be it music or theatre, cuisine, or journalism. In this regard, Petrini himself had his own influence on the local community as a writer on leftist quality papers such as Il Manifesto and l'Unità, and the national La Stampa (Menétrey and Szerman, 2016). This initial group of like-minded people who were collaborating and sharing ideas in a friendly manner, e.g. over a meal at a tavern as indicated in Padovani's (2017) article, contributed to a strong mutual engagement and their ideals of democracy coming from their militancy in the communist party started being shared in the idea of democratisation of high-quality food and in the preservation of the local heritage of the peasants' world that characterises the Langhe region in Piedmont, where the SFM started.

> *Slow Food proposes a consumption model where people are no longer consumers, but co-producers in a democratic society […] Slow Food has been able to introduce new ways of knowing, doing and relating in (mainly local) food systems, based on trust relations between food producers and consumers.*
>
> *(Dumitru et al., 2016: 8)*

> The SFM contributed to the creation of *'"food communities" worldwide that "break the cycle of wholesale, do not competing with the big brands but generate consumer demand of good local products, creating short marketing circuits that enhance different and direct relationships between consumer and producer. It also involves innovation in product selling...".*
>
> *(Slow Food activist, in Demetriu et al., 2016: 7)*

Petrini at the incipit of the SFM was already influent in the local area and had a good knowledge of local food production and consumption routines and scripts. However, the leverage the SFM got from their engagement with local and national media and with specialised press

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(e.g., Gambero Rosso) that sets the standards for food and drink culture in Italy was not indifferent, and this facilitated the creation of a shared repertoire via the intense reification process that leads to the production of artefacts (e.g., creation of membership cards, intervention projects that comprise the creation of news items, publications, and events), and the creation of meaning through a narrative (e.g., the creation of a SFM manifesto and the organisation of *presidia*, participation to left wing political mass gatherings such as the Unità festival, the engagement of small food and drink producers and enabling them to be in the spotlight).

> *The movement enhances the sustainable development of local and rural communities as well as the preservation of the local cultures and biodiversity through intervention projects -"Ark of Taste", "Presidia", "Earth markets".*
>
> *(Dumitru et al., 2016: 7)*

> *'"Carlin" harangues the crowds at the Unity festivals: "Enough, friends and companions, with the ribs and the wine in bulk... It's a shame, so much ignorance and sloppiness! A well-finished dish, a bottle of good wine are not bourgeois luxuries, they are honest pleasures of life". A speech welcomed at the beginning with some scepticism or even somewhat of a scandalous but prophetic statement. This is true particularly today that both L'Unità and Il Manifesto publish food and wine supplements and that 15,000 Italians (3,000 as privileged "connoisseurs" members) have the Arci Gola membership card in their pocket. The association is now also known abroad, especially after the recent publication of a wine guidebook (11,000 copies sold in a few weeks) which was sensational due to the proposal to have small producers till now unknown alongside big names in national oenology, and for the revaluation of the "austere reds" for aging, at the peak of the fashion for young and light wines.*
>
> *(Novellini, 1988)*

The SFM managed to build a strong community around their practice. However, that practice would not have been possible without the SFM's ability to gather intelligence from their social resources and harvest the collective knowledge present on the territory. The following section presents more in detail the relationship between social resources and collective knowledge in a SFM context.

Social Resources and Collective Knowledge

The SFM, founded and lead by Carlo Petrini, gathered collective knowledge on food and drink quality directly from those social resources that held knowledge about the local traditions and history. The market intelligence collection effort the SFM that has been operating since its incipit taps into the local collective knowledge deriving from an active engagement with the SFM's stakeholders. In a rural world where producers and consumers overlap in a co-creation effort, customers' engagement becomes an essential source of information. The main sources of intelligence the SFM engaged with are:

Food experts. These experts are very specialised producers, e.g. wine producers, sommeliers, chefs, and restaurant owners. Food experts contributed with their knowledge of culinary trends to setting the direction of the objectives that the SFM embraced at its incipit and would have subsequently developed later on.

> When referring to sommeliers, *'Carlo Petrini, national manager of the Arci and president of the Free and Meritorious Association 'Amici del Barolo', a club of enthusiasts who selected Langa*

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> *wines and delicacies and published a mail order catalogue, had summoned them from all over Italy. That experience of tastings and promotions suggested to Carlin Petrini (and to the others in the historical clique: Gigi Piumatti, Alfredo Bernoco, Silvio Barbero and Piero Sardo, all from Braida) the setting and objectives of what in a few years would become the most important Italian food and wine association and the international Slow Food movement. And that is to spread beyond the restricted sphere of specialists and gourmets the word of quality, territoriality, honest prices, the defence of the right to pleasure as one of the foundations of coexistence. «Wine - says Carlo Petrini (in the photo) - was immediately at the centre of Arcigola's interests'.*
>
> *(Anon, 1996)*

Farmers and producers, food processors, and artisans. Amongst the holders of collective knowledge, we find a plethora of actors in the food and drink supply chain, which in a local geographical area combined together in what we could interpret as the supply-side of the market (as opposed to consumers, i.e. the demand-side of the market). These supply-side actors engage proactively with each other and they immediately see opportunities in adhering to the SFM cause (be it for commercial reasons or for ideology, or both). The participation that derived from their engagement and their joint enterprise fuelled further the knowledge domain that strengthened the SFM identity.

> The SFM Carlo Petrini reports: *'I think that, in order to get out of a strictly "missionary" perspective in dealing with the problems of the most difficult areas, it is now absolutely necessary to carry out these exchanges, bringing farmers, artisans and producers to know other realities, to allow them to find simple solutions to problems that seem insurmountable or simply to find encouragement to continue and improve their humble but precious "gastronomic" work'.*
>
> *(Petrini, 2004)*

> A journalist of La Stampa, in an article that reports Petrini's words in double inverted commas, narrates that *In Italy, the success and attention to food and wine issues have also created distortions and cunning acts ("how much Colonnata lard is available in the market today?"). This gave birth to the new rich ("in my Langhe region, the hills are covered with vines with Nebbiolo to make Barolo, the sons of wine producers drive Porsche»). And "fusion" cuisine appears in restaurants with "celebrity chefs, no longer with memories of the tradition, and thirst for success on TV programmes". Carlin looks at the heroic farmers who have not given up: "And I would like our president Ciampi, when he chooses the appointments to Knighthood for Labour, on the 2nd of June, to provide in this sector not only the biographies of the owner of MacDonald's in Italy and of that Francesco Amadori, who produces industrial chicken, but also the biographies of some real farmers"*
>
> *(Miravalle, 2002)*

> *Petrini recognised that there cannot be a culture of good food, of good taste, without an agriculture that produces that quality. The defence of farmers and biodiversity is an important part of the transition of the food system from the culture of fast food, of toxic food, to what the Slow Food movement seeks to spread, that is, a culture of eating well'.*
>
> *(Shiva, 2005)*

Category associations. The SFM also built strong ties with category associations and in some cases it enables their creation, channelling their knowledge in different areas of the food and drink industry and enabling the creation of initiatives focused on specific products and produce, nationally and internationally, e.g. Piedmontese meat, cheese, wine, and Indian

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Basmati rice to mention just a few examples. Category associations, with their collective knowledge, inform the creation of the different *convivia* and fuel the SFM's discourse while enhancing their practices' legitimacy.

> *Special attention will be paid to Piedmontese meat, of which Fossano is considered the cradle. Proof of this is the fact that the first concrete Slow Food initiative on meat was born in the Fossano area: the "La Granda" association, which brings together about fifteen small Piedmontese cattle breeders, who adhere to very strict breeding regulations'.*
>
> (Anon, 2000)

> *Navdanya, the movement for biodiversity that I, Vandane have set up in India, has created two Presidia with Slow Food, one for Basmati rice and the other for mustard oil. It was necessary to protect Basmati - an aromatic rice that grows in my land, the Doon Valley - because a Texan company, RiceTec, had secured a patent claiming to have "invented" our rice, its aroma, its unique grain and even the cooking methods.*
>
> (Shiva, 2005)

Consumers. In a local geographical area, these actors combine together in what we could interpret as the demand-side of the market (as opposed to farmers, etc., i.e. the demand-side of the market, as seen in the previous few paragraphs). Customers include the end-user, i.e. households, and down-steam intermediaries such as wholesalers and retailers. Their collective knowledge is essential to stir the direction of the interventions of the different *presidia* and *convivia* and provide an audience, or some addressees, for the social innovation that is generated. The anti-globalisation discourse is also present in the engagement of the demand-side of the market, with the promotion of 'groups of purchase' as a practice to contrast supermarkets by influencing what the large distribution should offer to consumers. Ultimately, consumers hold some important collective knowledge but are also the recipients of the social innovation promoted by the SFM and their power is recognised as the power of collective action.

> *The next appointment will be characterized throughout Italy by consumers' purchasing groups - says the owner of the show [Petrini], overwhelmed by applause, in a room full of cameras and authorities – direct shopping centres that will calm the excessive power of large-scale distribution.*
>
> (Minucci, 2004)

> The SFM over time inspired consumers in different parts of the world, for instance, the Indian *presidium* of the SFM influenced Indian consumers and *'in 1998, after the banning of mustard seed oil, women from Delhi's slums refused to eat food cooked with soybean oil. Even the poor choose quality and diversity in food, unless a food dictatorship denies them the fundamental right to their own culture and freedoms.*
>
> (Shiva, 2005)

In light of these findings, the knowledge harvested by the SFM from different social resources via different forms of market intelligence contributed to the strengthening and development of the movement over time, allowing it to expand globally. Notwithstanding the importance of the domain, community, and practice, the success of the SFM might not have had the same magnitude without strong externalisation abilities (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2007) to support their organisation. Next section discusses how the SFM's KM fostered their innovation activity.

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Discussion and Conclusion

The idea of the bottom-up generation of social innovation is deeply rooted in the current literature on innovation. What is less known is the exact mechanism that enables social innovation, as most studies on social innovation address the role of the public and private sectors in fostering social innovation (Nicholls and Murdock, 2012), the link between social innovation and social entrepreneurship (Nicholls, 2008), and open source innovation, collaboration, and social innovation diffusion (Phills et al., 2008). Currently, three main mechanisms have been associated with the production of social innovation (Vasin et al., 2017): the exchange of ideas and values, the shift in roles and relationships, and the integration of private capital and public philanthropy. Notwithstanding the importance of these aspects, we acknowledge that social innovation is associated with the emergence of new routines and practices (Di Domenico et al., 2010). By this rationale, we consider essential the role of CoPs in fostering social innovation, given the striking similarities between CoPs and some elements associated with social innovation, i.e. the exchange of ideas and the creation of relationships amongst people with shared values.

This study focused on explaining the mechanisms underlying the creation, consolidation, and dissemination of knowledge by exploring the KM dimension of CoPs. By adopting Wenger's (Wenger, 1998a) CoP frame for the analysis of the SFM, we uncovered how CoPs acquire collective knowledge to be used in their reification process. We then explained two fundamental mechanisms that lead to social innovation: the acquisition of tacit collective knowledge from existing social resources (Zhao et al., 2004) and the utilisation of such knowledge within the CoP to increase the production of artefacts and participation, which makes implicit knowledge become explicit (Huang and Chin, 2018) and consequently leads to social innovation.

First of all, the SFM case study provides a new insight on understanding how a bottom-up approach to KM results in social innovation with a large impact. Such an impact perhaps would not have been possible without a clear anti-globalisation discourse that determined the boundaries of the SFM's social definition (Toulmin, 1999) and allowed to build on the personal knowledge of the SFM members (Polanyi, 2015). Collective knowledge that fed the SFM community also informed the SFM practice (Spender, 1994) while the local knowledge of the founder, i.e., a knowledge activist (Von Krogh, Nonaka, and Ichijo, 1997), was also extended to the overall organisation. Petrini's mindset, shaped by his Catholic upbringing and his subsequent affinity with the socialist ideology, and his collectivist approach to leadership allowed the SFM to build a learning organisation (Probst and Borzillo, 2008). Much of the adaptation of the SFM's practice is due to the flexible mindset of the founder, his collaboration abilities (e.g., involvement of media, journalists, TV and music celebrities, and food experts), and his coordination abilities (e.g., creation of events and interventions, establishment of *convivia* and *presidia* worldwide), coupled with learning capabilities that pushed for an organic adaptation to changing times through social action (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014).

Second, this case study also shows how the SFM developed the community and the practice elements of the CoP by fuelling its identity and knowledge domain with the elaboration of tacit collective knowledge embedded within the local community and gathered from the SFM's social resources (e.g., farmers, food and drink producers and processors, category associations, consumers, and artisans).

With this study, we contribute to KM theories by advancing our understanding of the role of tacit collective knowledge in social innovation and its utilisation as part of a CoP's practice of making it explicit by means of the reification process. We demonstrate how

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participation and reification in the practice of a CoP generates some shared repertoire used by the CoP to strengthen and expand the boundaries of their joint enterprise and mutual engagement through the transfer of tacit collective knowledge into its knowledge domain.

The implications of our study are to be found in (i) the efficiency of knowledge transfer and knowledge scalability within a CoP, (ii) the effectiveness of CoPs' governance, and (iii) the design of formal decentralised structures for knowledge sharing.

First, the collective knowledge generated in a CoP is deemed to be greater than the individual knowledge of their members (Johnson, 2001) within the context of the SFM. However, the unique phenomenon observed from the SFM case study is that the domain knowledge generated in the SFM scaled up quickly due to the processes of participation and reification. In this sense, the production of artefacts and interventions in the SFM has occurred at a very fast pace, compared with other common CoPs. This suggests the relative efficiency of CoPs that exist independently from a dominant business organisation, in terms of transferring knowledge (Roberts, 2006).

The transfer of knowledge takes place via the addition of each individual's knowledge to the community, which increases rapidly in the process of production as individual members' knowledge also bears partial collective knowledge from the social resources. For instance, a farmer who collaborates with the SFM brings to the movement not only his/her own individual knowledge but also the overall baggage of collective knowledge derived from the local territory, i.e., tacit knowledge that is traditionally shared amongst farmers.

Second, although the current literature recognises that 'authoritarian management is replaced by self-management and ownership of work'(Collier and Esteban, 1999), in the case of the SFM, self-management and ownership of work are backed up by a very charismatic leader with solid values matured in the course of his life (i.e., specific mindset) and strong collaboration and coordination capabilities. Thus, self-management and ownership of work may not be a sufficient condition to explain the governance effectiveness of a CoP. As demonstrated by our case study, leadership undoubtedly plays a crucial role.

Third, the CoP and KM literature show that CoPs emerge from 'an evolutionary process of learning in groups, [...] ubiquitous, [... and] form out of necessity to accomplish tasks and provide learning avenues' (Wenger, 1998a: 2). Thus, 'communities of practice evolve, they are not created. As such, they resist management as we generally think of it' (Liedtka, 1999: 7). However, the SFM did not evolve just by limiting itself to encouraging learning. Along with creating a great deal of knowledge, it also managed to design and deploy a formal decentralised structure of *predisia* and *convivia,* and even a university to facilitate knowledge sharing within a global network. This peculiar finding can enable other CoPs to design and deploy a knowledge-sharing structure that can be decentralised and yet connected to a network, like in the case of the *presidia* and *convivia* that are spread worldwide.

Fourth, during the severe lockdowns experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, while some consumers improved the quality of their diets, a lot of others experienced food insecurity due to the disruptions to large-scale food production (Lasko-Skinner and Sweetland, 2021). Furthermore, inequality was exacerbated even amongst farmers and food producers around the world due to restrictions on open food markets (Slow Food, 2020). CoPs can provide policymakers a means to access local tacit knowledge quickly and build communities that are resilient to crises.

Our study is not without limitations that can be addressed by future research. CoPs can gather collective knowledge from social resources that are accessible to them. Such knowledge can fuel the CoP's knowledge domain, enhance its identity, and transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge via a process of participation and reiteration. Our proposed

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framework explains how such a mechanism can be conducive to social innovation. However, other significant factors such as local heritage or environmental regulation could impinge upon CoPs' KM for social innovation. Future research could investigate how these factors influence participation and reiteration in more depth. The findings of this single case cannot be generalised to a wider population, future research could develop testable hypotheses out of the proposed model and test them in a variety of CoP settings.

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