A dissertation submitted to the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy of Central European University in part fulfilment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Keeping the Huerta alive: social landscape creation through an alternative economic space established by agro-entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION submitted by:
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This dissertation explores how just a few dozen small-scale agro-entrepreneurial initiatives managed to revive the contemporary representation of the rapidly disappearing, degrading and abandoned periurban fields of the Metropolitan Area of Valencia. These initiatives became widely recognized for being able to provide viable alternatives to the classic cultivation models that used to characterize these fields, the Huerta de Valencia.

The Huerta has always been a "site, medium and outcome of historically specific relations of social power" (Brenner 2009: 198). It has always played an important role in the self-definition of the Valencian regional identity. However, since the 1960's the growth of the metropolitan area accelerated and devoured over half of the historical territory of the Huerta. Meanwhile the socio-economic viability of the remaining fields also got compromised as with such a highly fragmented land-structure they were unable to compete on an increasingly globalized food market. At the same time a strong civil movement developed for the protection of these fields. It developed a massive amount of mostly defensive discourses and most typically organized around fighting specific territorial aggressions.

These agro-entrepreneurial initiatives developed cultivation and distribution models that could adapt well to the contemporary challenges present in the Huerta. They were able to address well the concerns that derived from their embeddedness, which were originally voiced by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. They also proved to have the ability to mobilize the social capital that derived from it. As the movement apparently embraced these initiatives, they are recognized as the most recent milestone in the evolution of the movement. Their proactive efforts created a strong sense of place around the Huerta. The alternative economic space developed around these initiatives assumed the challenge to keep these 'fields alive'. Despite their marginality, soon they took over the lead both in the material and the dialectical (re)construction of these fields (Rose, 2002; Wylie, 2007).

A qualitative, exploratory case study research was conducted under a constructivist grounded theory methodology. It aimed to identify the main discourse themes, patterns and categories of meaning in the discourses that characterized the alternative economic space that developed around these initiatives.

Keywords: periurban, alternative economic space, embeddedness, social landscape creation, agro-entrepreneurship

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Dedication

Among other writers of naturalist literary tradition of the 19th century, the novelist Blasco Ibáñez was eager to faithfully describe the social tensions within the Valencian society. His most well-known descriptions of the fields surroundings of the city and of the Valencian society was presented in his exemplary novel, *La Baracca* (1898). His novel started with the idyllic description of the awakening of the Huerta, but soon invited the reader to learn about a range of conflicts deeply rooted within the Valencian society. I selected his description of the Huerta's awakening in order to share the moment, when crossing these Huerta in the stillness of the dawn I suddenly felt the past projected onto the fields that surrounded me:

> "The vast plain stretched out under the blue splendour of dawn, a broad sash of light which appeared in the direction of the sea.
> The last nightingales, tired of animating with their songs this autumn night, which seemed like spring in the balminess of its atmosphere, poured forth their final warble, as if the light of dawn wounded them with its steely reflections.
> Flocks of sparrows arose like crowds of pursued urchins from the thatched roofs of the farmhouses, and the tops of the trees trembled at the first assault of these gamins of the air, who stirred up everything with the flurry of their feathers.
> The sounds which fill the night had gradually died away: the babbling of the canals, the murmur of the cane-plantations, the bark of the watchful dog.
> The *huerta* was awaking, and its yawning were growing even noisier. The crowing of the cock was carried on from farm-house to farm-house; the bells of the village were answering, with noisy peals, this ringing of the first mass which floated from the towers of Valencia, blue and hazy in the distance. From the corrals came a discordant animal-concert; the whinnying of horses, the lowing of gentle cows, the clucking of hens, the bleating of lambs, the grunting of pigs, … all the noisy awakening of creatures who, upon feeling the first caress of dawn, permeated with the pungent perfume of vegetation, long to be off and run about the fields.
> Space became saturated with light; the shadows dissolved as though swallowed up by the open furrows and the masses of foliage; and in the hazy mist of dawn, humid and shining rows of mulberry-trees, waving lines of canebrake, large square beds of garden vegetables like enormous green handkerchiefs, and the carefully tilled red earth, became gradually more and more defined.
> Along the high-road there came creeping rows of moveable black dots, strung out like files of ants, all marching toward the city. From all the ends of the *vega*, resounded the creaking of wheels mingled with idle songs interrupted by shouts urging on the beasts; and from time to time, like sonorous heralding of dawn, the air went rent by the furious braying of the donkey protesting so to speak against the heavy labour which fell upon him with break of day." (Blasco Ibáñez, 1898, La Baracca)

Needless to say, the awakening of the Huerta these days consists of early metro trains crossing the fields and cars filling up the roads surrounding them commuting to the city from the villages. There are some people jogging and biking on the bike roads at the edges of the fields, others taking their dogs for an early walk. Of course, there are still some farmers arriving to their small plots, mostly from their homes from a neighboring village. On the weekends, things get a little busier in the fields with the hobby gardeners and some families picking up their vegetable boxes from farms or their oranges from their family farms.

Traces of these romanticizing discourses were still present in the contemporary representation of the Huerta. However, many of my informants highlighted that the idealized picture some people have in their minds about the Huerta often fail to register the social tensions within and tend to underestimate the difficulties and uncertainties faced by the people of the Huerta. The local media reporting on the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives that emerged in the Huerta also tend to romanticize them and often fail to elaborate on the uncertainties they face. The historical romanticism developed around the Huerta also served as the basis for strong emotional attachment people could develop towards the Huerta. Nostalgia often strengthened the sense of loss they felt over the disappearing fields of the Huerta and it motivated them to support the modern day guardians of these fields. I argue that there is much to learn from the naturalist literary tradition of Blasco Ibáñez to skillfully complement those romanticized discourses used to describe the alternative economic space that developed in the Huerta over the last few decades. One must be aware of the need to counterbalance them with a fresh and raw insight into the everyday realities of those in charge of the initiatives around which this alternative economic space developed.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This dissertation investigates how a few dozen small-scale agro-entrepreneurial initiatives managed to revive the periurban fields of the Metropolitan Area of Valencia through their alternative production and distribution systems. They contributed to the critical political and ideological contestation of the contemporary representation of the Huerta, as they highlighted the importance of allowing the Valencian people to gain access to these processes. This study aims to understand how the alternative economic space created by these initiatives reshaped the contemporary representation of the Huerta.

This study fits into the school of critical urban theory, which "emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested … character of urban space – that is, its continual (re)construction as a site, medium and outcome of historically specific relations of social power" (Brenner 2009: 198). A representational approach to landscape understands that it is a venue where systems of cultural, political and economic power can manifest through both material and dialectical construction (Rose, 2002; Wylie, 2007).

A qualitative, exploratory case study research was conducted under a constructivist grounded theory methodology. It aimed to identify the main discourse themes, patterns, or categories of meaning in the discourses developed around the role of these initiatives.

The first analytical part (chapters 4 and 5) analyzes the cultural and socio-economic context where alternative economic space is embedded. It focuses on the evolution of the Huerta's agrarian landscape and the challenges its contemporary cultivation models face. It presents those historical discourses that were responsible for the development of the contemporary representation of the Huerta. It discusses how the Huerta's representation

evolved over time and highlights those aspects of these discourses that prepared the ground for the emergence of the alternative economic space this study focused on.

Each era in the history of Valencia developed its own characteristic discourse about the Huerta and its urban utility. The constantly changing agro-landscape of the Huerta usually faithfully reflected them. There were two main historical eras proved to be decisive in the political and ideological evolution of these agro-landscapes (the era of folkloric regionalism and the era of entrepreneurial regionalism). The alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives were rooted in and influenced by these specific discourses. The role of the Huerta in the metropolitan imaginary of Valencia was historically defined by the power relations among those who supported a given vision about the importance and utility of these fields. Since the late 19th century, Valencia built its reputation around being a strong regional center supported by its agro-industry. During the romanticizing era of Renaixença, the city of Valencia embraced the cultural patrimony of the Huerta. The political elite supported the development of a bucolic agrarian iconography by having borrowed the riches of the Huerta. It aimed recognize Valencia as a strong Catalan regional center with a powerful agrarian bourgeois class. However, the social tensions present in the idealized Huerta were left unattended.

The political restructuring of the Huerta "from material way-of-life into folkloric regional symbol" (Prytherch 2009) originated in the discourses developed during this era. Since the 1960's, the establishment and growth of the metropolitan area was presented by the political elite as structural exigencies (Pryterch 2006) necessary to increase the region's competitiveness and its attractiveness for further global capital investments. The metropolitan area's uncontrolled urbanization agenda regarded the Huerta as a land reserve, providing space for greenfield investments, real estate and other infrastructural projects (e.g., highways, railways, marinas). Since the 1990's the local legislative environment promoted the emergence of a new class of entrepreneurs, the urbanizing agents. These entrepreneurs were

heavily interested in accelerating the rate of urban development, which soon became to dominate the skyline of Valencia.

The uncontrolled expansion of the metropolitan area brought along unprecedented competition for the fields at the edges of the urban cores. The land speculation created unrealistically high expectations about the value of certain fields, which quite often compromised the actual cultivation of these fields. These trends heavily contributed to the degradation and abandonment of these fields, and compromised the very existence of the Huerta de Valencia.

Another factor that compromised the profitability of the classic but highly fragmented smallholder land structure was how the retail prices of the increasingly globalized food market stagnated. The local producers gradually lost their access to their traditional markets and they were unable to compete with the industrialized agro-production units of Southern Spain. The crisis of the classical cultivation model, with those trends that contributed to the demolition of the economic and social viability of the initiatives set out to cultivate these fields, marked the Huerta as an expendable, transitional territory. This justified why the disappearance of these fields under the concrete edges of the metropolitan area was refused to be seen as an issue of importance.

The second analytical part (chapters 6 and 7) explores the way the alternative economic space that developed around these simple agro-entrepreneurial initiatives challenged the dominant representation of the Huerta. It focuses on how these alternative agrarian models took advantage of and adapted to the historical discourses curated by the movement for the protection of the Huerta.

Since the 1960's, the Valencian civil society has been actively contesting a wide range of territorial aggressions through various methods of resistance, like publishing formal

statements, organizing public assemblies, mass petitions, street demonstrations, boycotts, and reclaiming certain fields through cultivation etc. Their defensive discourses highlighted the importance of safeguarding the patrimonial heritage that these fields represented and how they contributed to Valencia's regional identity. They developed a wide range of social networks, through which the civil society, characterized by substantial sensibility towards the difficulties faced by the Huerta, could be easily mobilized when needed. In the late 20th and early 21st century, the emergence and success of a diverse range of agro-entrepreneurial initiatives proved that the socio-economic viability of these fields could be improved through the development of cultivation and distribution models that were appealing to a clientele with greater consciousness towards the critical state of the Huerta and of the contemporary food market in general.

These initiatives set out to cultivate primarily the historical fields surrounding their own communities. In order to secure demand for their mostly organic produce, they targeted and developed local markets through direct sales strategies. Some of them invited their clientele to participate in certain tasks or provided them with designated plots for cultivation. These farmers were perceived to have finally provided access for the Valencians not just to the quality produce of the fields of the Huerta but to the fields themselves.

These initiatives could be regarded as entrepreneurial. They emerged amid challenging conditions and managed to mobilize and further develop social networks with great sensibility towards the issues faced by the Huerta to support their innovative business models. Most of them require and enjoy the support of a local clientele concerned about the degradation of the Huerta and the implications of the increasingly globalized food system. They offered an alternative to the mostly non-organic fresh produce with non-seasonal, easily transportable, high yielding varieties that the Valencian consumers were provided with

through complex supply chains. They offered locally produced, mostly organic, fresh produce of autochthonous varieties. However, the way these initiatives invited their clientele to participate in their cultivation and distribution processes served as a more significant feature that differentiated these initiatives from the conventional agrarian enterprises of the contemporary Huerta. They managed to revitalize the Huerta's representation and to challenge the trends that indicated that with the fragmented minifundio land structure the Huerta's socio-economic viability could not be secured anymore. The alternative economic space created by these initiatives and their supporters became the primarily reference point in the Huerta's redefinition, as their strong dialectical presence counterbalanced to some extent their marginality.

These initiatives gained reputations for their ability to reconnect the people of Valencia with these fields through their participatory cultivation and distribution models. They challenged the inequalities historically present in the social landscape creation processes when they invited their clientele to participate in both the new dialectical and material reconstruction of the Huerta's representation.

Studying the social landscape creation dynamics indicated that historically the establishment of the so-called 'Valencian difference' often denied the social tensions within the Valencian society. The gradual destruction of these fields could be perceived as the contemporary manifestation of these historically present tensions around the Huerta. However, the alternative economic space created around these initiatives managed to empower their promoters and participants to take part in reshaping the current representation of the Huerta in line with their concerns. The emergence of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives contributed to the development of a new scenario with a revitalized cultivation model.

Prytherch (2009) argued that "...the Huerta has been politically restructured from material way-of-life into folkloric regional symbol", eventually blurring it into a historical landscape. Contrasted to these trends, these initiatives managed to break out of this logic of representation through their efforts to convert the Huerta into a living landscape. The new cultivation and distribution models developed by these entrepreneurs encouraged regular interaction between the farmers and their supporters to share the adventure of cultivating these fields together. The question is to what extent and how these alternative agro-entrepreneurs have been able to fight the 'urbanize all' attitude of the local authorities reflected in the dominant discourses of the era of regional entrepreneurialism. How much could their presence change the representation of these fields? Could they challenge how the public administration views the urban-utility of these fields? I argue that the strong dialectical presence of these initiatives and the civil support they received counterbalanced their economic marginality and proved that with such cooperative models the Huerta's socio-economic viability can be restored. Their success displayed these agro-entrepreneurs and their supporters as agents of change, and their initiatives as primarily reference points in the Huerta's redefinition.

Chapter 2. Case study design

This dissertation is the outcome of a qualitative, exploratory case study research. It aimed to discover how a set of alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives managed to redefine the contemporary representation of the fields they set out to cultivate.

2.1 Research paradigm and methodology

The preliminary interviews conducted to gain a better understanding of the research area indicated that the alternative economic space, which is the focus of this dissertation, emerged within broader "relational, institutional, and cultural contexts" (Ghezzi and Mingione 2007: 11). The case study format allowed the selected alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives to be observed in their real-life context (Yin 2003 in Swanson and Elwood 2005). In order to gain an accurate insight into the selected case study area with its contextual conditions, a constructivist grounded theory methodology was applied. The constructivist form of grounded theory encourages the discovery of multiple social realities, while it emphasizes how people actively participate in the everyday creation of their realities (Charmaz 2000).

This research aimed to provide an 'interpretative portray' based on a wide range of discourses collected that described those multiple realities that were "mutually constructed by the researcher and the researched" (Wertz et al. 2011 in Higginbottom 2014:11). It focused on those specific discourses that contributed to the clarification of these alternative initiatives' wider societal importance (Jessop 2001) as they contributed to reshaping the Huerta's contemporary representation.

2.2 Data collection procedures

Besides having conducted over 80 interviews with stakeholders active in the selected case study area, a diverse range of data sources were consulted in order to increase the credibility and validity of the research.

Primary data collection

I conducted over 80 semi-structured, in-depth interviews between 2009 and 2012. The successive field visits, each between two to five weeks, added up to about six months. A wide range of stakeholders from the supply, support-connecting and the demand dimension of the agro-food system were asked to participate in the research (see Table 2.1 below). This allowed me to gain insight into the initiatives discussed from multiple viewpoints and to enhance the objectivity of the research (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Table 2.1. Stakeholder dimensions of the agro-food system (Based on FAO 2003)

Supply dimension	Support-connecting dimension	Demand dimension
• Laborers, volunteers • Small-scale organic/non-organic producers • Large-scale organic /non-organic producers • Producer associations • Cooperatives	• Researchers • Local advisors and consultants • Regulatory authorities • Certifiers • Credit organizations • NGOs • Specialized press • School program coordinators	• Retailers • Cooperatives • Consumer associations • Restaurants

The participants were picked through purposeful selection and snowball sampling (Taylor and Bogdan 1984), when they were asked to propose further informants. Equal chance of representation was given to stakeholder group. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured, directed conversations (Charmaz 2003). They were structured around an

interview guide that constituted the basic instrumentation of the interviewing process and secured the consistency of the research. The interview guide consisted of a list of tentative, open-ended questions (see in Annex I.). The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for an almost unlimited range of themes to emerge. The participants who were perceived as primary 'meaning makers', encouraged to identify new issues of importance (Mills et al. 2007). 'Theoretical saturation' (Strauss and Corbin 1998) was reached when no more new categories or themes emerged anymore.

Most of the interviews were recorded by a digital audio recorder, and later were transcribed. When the circumstances were not optimal for making audio recordings, the interviews were documented through audio commentary later that day. The interview transcripts were complemented with notes that documented the evolution of the research. The interviews took at least about an hour, but there were several cases when the conversation lasted over three hours. Most of the interviews took place on the fields of the Huerta, which allowed me to make further observations about the everyday realities of these initiatives.

For respondent validation, about a dozen informants were revisited. They were presented with a list of specific statements that reflected on controversial discourse themes that emerged as issues of importance during the previous interviews (see in Annex I.). The wording of the statements intentionally lost their neutrality in order to invite the informants to and share their own understanding of these issues.

Archival records and secondary sources

A wide range of secondary sources and some archival records were also consulted to complement the material gathered during the interviewing process. The collection of such background material was necessary to gain a deeper understanding about the evolution of the

movement for the protection of these fields from a wide range of angles, including material from agrarian, rural and urban development studies.

There were several blogs dedicated to the protection of the Huerta, only some of these were developed by civil organizations. Most of these were private initiatives that aimed to document the changes in the Huerta's cultural landscape and the struggles these changes entailed. Most of these blogs and the relevant articles published online were followed with a vigorously commenting activity.

During the interviewing process the participants often referred to newspaper editorials to justify the relevance and validity of their arguments. Most of them agreed that the local media influenced how the people of Valencia perceived the Huerta. Those cases in the history of the movement for the protection of the Huerta that received substantial media coverage were much more often referred to as the milestones of the movement. The interviewees often argued that the support of the local media contributed to the success of several initiatives organized by the movement. Besides two local newspapers, the media coverage of one national newspaper was also analyzed (*Las Provincias*, *Levante-EMV*[1] and the local supplement of *El País*).

Besides the written material, there is a wide range of visual material available online that document the changes in the Huerta as the territory surrounding the urban cores of the Metropolitan Area. Most of them aimed to document the destructive trends that characterized the Huerta over the last few decades. While others aimed to capture, and celebrate the beauty of this unique cultural landscape.

[1] The average circulation of both papers was well over 40,000 printed copies. The *Levante- EMV* had about 285,000 daily readers, while the *Las Provincias* about 142,000 (AIMC 2012). Las Provincias was often presented as a conservative paper, representing regionalist values; while the *Levante-EMV* as supporting 'progressive, liberal' values. Using the search word "huerta" for the period between 2008 and 2011, I had over 1200 hits in the *Levante-EMV* and over 3000 hits in *Las Provincias.*

Literature review

The role of literature consulted before engaging in interviewing process is quite controversial when grounded theory is applied. This research used literature as 'another voice' (Mills et al. 2007) to stimulate the construction of the conceptual framework (Strauss and Corbin 1998). It allowed to contextualize the research (Goulding 1998) within the available body of research and increase my theoretical sensitivity (Glaser 1978). This theoretical background allowed me to compare the concepts, categories and patterns identified during the data analysis with those that had been already documented in the relevant literature.

2.3 Data analysis techniques

Discourse analysis was the predominant method of data analysis applied in this study. This method was suitable to discover the "basic social processes within the data" as it allowed for the "inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize" the data collected about the initiatives (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001: 160). The grounded nature of the data allowed me to learn about the collective framing of the studied initiatives. The categories that emerged from the analysis provided more structured information about these initiatives. These categories allowed me to make sense of the data and the events described by them. The purpose of the discourse analysis was to identify the conditions that these core categories developed and to understand how the dynamics described by these categories characterized the initiatives.

The aim of data analysis was to identify the important themes, patterns, and categories of meaning within the discourses that characterized the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives this dissertation set out to study. It aimed to provide insight into how the research

participants perceived the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives and to detect which issues they found to be the most relevant, what kind of solutions and actions they proposed (Mills et al. 2007).

The data analysis started simultaneously with the data collection. This way the emergent themes could be identified at an early stage (Charmaz 2003). This made data analysis a true driver of data collection (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The emergence of the relevant discourse themes throughout the research required notable changes in the interview guide. These changes reflected on how the focus of the data collection shifted (Coyne 1997 in Chen and Boore 2009; Glaser 1998). Besides continuing to discover new themes of relevance with the original questions, gradually more directed questions were asked to collect further insight about the newly discovered issues of relevance.

At such an initial phase, data analysis consisted of writing structured notes and developing conceptual maps to organize the emerging themes into distinguishable categories. Later it became a structured and systematic study of the collected material.

Media analysis

The aim of the media content analysis was to monitor the cultural temperature (Hansen et al. 1998) of the Valencian society regarding the way they react to the changes in the landscape of the Huerta. It provided a more in-depth analysis of the discursive context in which the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives emerged.

The search word 'huerta' was used in the online archives of the selected papers for the period between 2008 and 2014. In 2011 alone, there were over 200 correspondent hits in *Levante-EMV* and 835 in *Las Provincias.* Over 75% of these articles that corresponded to the keyword 'huerta' indicated stories that reported about the fields of the Huerta. From this pool two types of articles were selected to be analyzed. The first type included editorials that set out to

discuss the contemporary challenges of the Huerta. These articles by documenting the historical milestones of the destruction and protection of the Huerta, contributed to the development of the contemporary representation of the Huerta. The second type covered news articles that reported on the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives that emerged in the Huerta over the last decade.

The analysis was based on a process of inductive category development (Mayring 2000 in Macnamara 2010), which aimed to identify the narratives and their patterns within the local media coverage on the Huerta. Besides these narratives, the analysis aimed to map what kind of visual imaginaries were developed in these articles, and what kind of tonal qualities were used to describe the Huerta.

Discourse analysis

The data preparation process started with the transcription of the already available interviews, the organization of the field notes and some data reduction where it was necessary. The vast number of recorded interviews resulted in data overload, which would have made it difficult to analyze all the material with the same thoroughness. Therefore, only those interviews and interview parts were selected for transcription that could improve our understanding of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives in question.

The prepared material was subjected to data conceptualization through both open and selective coding. Open coding aims to identify a wide range of concepts in the data analyzed, paying special attention to their characteristic narratives and dimensions (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Selective coding is a more delimiting, comparative theoretical sampling process, which allows for the emergence of the more refined core categories among the concepts identified during the previous step (Glaser 1998, Scott 2009, Strauss and Corbin 1998).

The deconstruction and reintegration of data through these analytical processes led to a greater degree of conceptual abstraction (Scott 2009; O'Connor et al. 2008). Conceptual abstraction is a process of precisely isolating the core concepts in the data, focusing on their characteristic aspects while remaining sensitive to their differentiating details as well (Danermark et al. 2002).

The study paid special attention to the interrelations and interactions among the emerging concepts. These were charted through conceptual maps and mental diagramming. These conceptual maps made the patterns among the core categories more visible. The development of these conceptual maps was based on those theoretical assumptions that developed during the interviewing process and literature review.

These core categories and the patterns among them together constituted the building blocks of the conceptual framework developed through this analytical process. This framework aimed to present the causes, conditions, and consequences that characterized the initiatives studied (Charmaz 2003).

The available information organized within these conceptual maps was subjected to data interpretation, which followed the guidelines presented in Table 2.2 below. It allowed for the identification of the most relevant information available from the data collected.

Table 2.2. Guidelines for data interpretation (Source: based on Krueger 1994)

Ask the following questions:

- What was known and then confirmed or challenged by the data?
- What was suspected and then confirmed or challenged by the data?
- What was new that wasn't previously suspected?

Look for the following criteria:

- words used and their interpretation, meaning for them
- context (how the certain theme emerged in the discussion)
- internal consistency of the text
- frequency and extensiveness of the issues that come up
- specificity of comments
- intensity of comments (emotional filling)
- big ideas (larger concepts and themes that emerge from the text)

2.4 Practicalities and ethical considerations

Language issues

Even though most of the local initiatives used Valencian[2] as their working language, the participants agreed to have the interviews conducted in Castilian. In order to preserve the informants' original words, the interview transcripts were always in the language of the interview. At the stage of data preparation the working language of the study switched to English. This means that memos and codes applied on the transcribed interviews were written in English. The field journal, field memos and other working materials on the field are both in Castilian and English.

My insufficient knowledge of Valencian caused fewer difficulties than expected. Even though most of the local press releases, conferences and presentations were held in Valencian, there were always sufficiently informative proceeding materials in Castilian. Moreover, when it was needed the organizers were always cooperative and agreed to discuss

[2] a regional co-official language in Valencia

their presentation. However, the originally planned focus group discussions had to be cancelled as the participants interviewed together unintentionally switched to the Valencian dialect. This would have made it difficult to follow and fully comprehend such group discussions.

Ethic codes

The research followed specific ethics codes. Each interview session started with a general introductory discussion where the prospective participants were provided with sufficient information about the practicalities and implications of the research project (see Table 2.3 below). This allowed them to make an informed decision about whether they want to participate in the study. Those who decided to participate were asked to state at the beginning of the interview that they understood both the conditions and implications of their participation.

Table 2.3. List of topics covered during the informed consent process (Source: based on Eckstein 2003)

Topics covered during the process of obtaining informed consent:

- Introduce the nature of the research project, its purpose and procedures
- Elaborate on the prospective participant's involvement
- Ask permission to record the interviews
- Emphasize the voluntary nature of participation
- Highlight that the participants may decline to answer any question or withdraw from participation at any stage
- Describe the expected benefits/harms from participation in the study
- Guarantee confidentiality (actively remove elements that might indicate the identity of the informants or the institutions they represent)
- Guarantee the security of personal data against unauthorized access or disclosure
- Guarantee access to the final report (full report in English and executive summary in Castilian)

During the fieldwork I developed ongoing relations with the research participants. Visiting their fields, assisting in smaller chores and driving around in the passenger seat

allowed me to understand better the dynamics that characterized the Huerta. Spending time with them increased my sensitivity towards their concerns. Such experiences were recorded in my personal journal, which gained 'field diary character' during those months on the field.

After a short time, I noticed that the local community started to be aware of my presence and showed particular interest in my work. This resulted in expectations towards asking them certain line of questions or feeling that they push their agendas during the interview. I also became aware of my 'consequential presence' (Emerson et al. 1995). Some of my informants noted that they welcomed our discussions as they had the chance to formulate and organize their thoughts along those discourse themes that emerged during the interviewing process.

Chapter 3. Conceptual framework for an alternative economic space

This research focuses on the dynamics of the alternative economic space that developed around a diverse range of agro-entrepreneurial initiatives in a selected case study area, the Huerta de Valencia. For the better understanding of this alternative economic space, this chapter provides a theoretical background to the concepts that frame the dynamics that characterize it. This alternative economic space became the venue where the Huerta's compromised socio-economic viability could be contested and its representation could be challenged.

This study fits into the school of critical urban theory as it aims to analyze how such an alternative economic space contributed to the political and dialectical reconstruction of the Huerta's representation. It assesses the way this alternative economic space emphasized that the Huerta has always been a "site, medium and outcome of historically specific relations of social power". This study does not aim to provide a critique of these power relations. Instead, it analyzes the dynamics of how this alternative economic space developed a venue where the mainstream political economy and the representation of the Huerta could be contested.

3.1 What is an alternative economic space?

An alternative economic space is a 'niche space' (Sayfag 2007, Mitchell 2003 in Degen 2008). It provides a venue for constructive political action that contests certain aspects of a market economy, and it has the potential to address demands the mainstream economy failed to accommodate (Gendron et al. 2008:73). It is usually led by the civil society. An alternative economic space is a venue where new ideas could be tested "for their own intrinsic value, or explicitly aiming to diffuse into wider society" (Seyfang and Smith 2007 in Seyfang 2007). If the socio-economic viability of such an alternative economic space

becomes apparent, and if there is a welcoming environment, it could be considered as a point of reference for future regulatory policy reforms (Polányi 1944 in Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011). However, the "nature and extent of reform or transformation possible" is likely to be determined by the balance of forces both within the given alternative economic space and its relation to the market economy it set out to challenge (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011:113).

3.2 The embeddedness of an alternative economic space

An alternative economic space is usually characterized by solid community bonds based on shared understandings about the change they want to see in the society and the economy (Lyson 2004, Obach and Tobin 2014). The models promoted by such an alternative economic space are characterized by community problem solving, cooperative and mutually supporting social relations, rather than individual competition (Lyson 2004: 41, 63–64). The concept of social embeddedness recognizes that such an alternative economic space exist within "relational, institutional, and cultural contexts" (Ghezzi and Mingione 2007:11). Its embeddedness is defined by the way it interacts with these contexts (Granovetter 1985, Polányi 1944). Furthermore, the depth of its embeddedness depends on the social ties that develop around them (Hinrichs 2000 and Murdoch et al. 2000 in Obach and Tobin 2014), the extent to which it is limited or empowered by these contextual conditions (Block 1990 in Obach and Tobin 2014).

Categories of embeddedness

The embeddedness of food systems can be characterized by three interrelated categories: their social, spatial and natural embeddedness. Their social embeddedness "is a package of values associated with 'economies of regard' … trust, social interaction and responsibility generally… [associated with] socio-cultural, non-economic sentiments like: connection, belonging, knowledge, community, tradition, place and loyalty" (Faegan and

Morris 2009:236). It occurs through the establishment of "familiarity and the accumulation of memories … through the actual expedience of meaningful or moving events and the establishment of individual or community identity, security and concern" (Pred 1983:49). Their spatial embeddedness "includes a group of motivations associated with the desire to buy food produced locally … [associated with] values like: freshness, proximity of production, community support, community sustainability" (Faegan and Morris 2009:236). Their natural embeddedness implies "consumer desires for food associated with more ecologically embedded values like organic production, sustainable farming methods, addresses concerns regarding fossil fuel and 'food-miles' discussions tied to global warming" (Faegan and Morris 2009:236).

Disembeddedness

As a result of the general trends of upscaling that characterizes the contemporary supply chains of the globalized agro-food systems, the social ties and activities that used to be intrinsic to the food markets weakened. This manifested through symptoms of disconnectedness. Such trends implied the prioritization of advanced economies of scale, with complicated value chains (Oosterveer 2007 in Wiskerke 2009). In order to counterbalance the lack of direct contact and personal trust, these systems invented more formalized 'relationships' with more detailed documentation to secure their traceability and transparency. The agro-food systems that specialize in supplying such complex value chains often fail to maintain many of their traditional functions, like the maintenance of the landscape they operate within, "the sustainable management of renewable natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity, and contribute to the socio-economic viability of many rural areas" (Wiskerke 2009, Maier and Shobayashi 2001, OECD). This implies that their multifunctionality gets heavily compromised.

Qualifiers of embeddedness

When certain agro-entrepreneurial initiatives make efforts to deepen their embeddedness, especially to fight trends of disconnectedness, these efforts could easily become based on which they differentiate themselves on the market, which could convert them into 'totems of localism' (Winter 2003). The concept of 'local trap' (Born and Purcell 2006), however, warns us that even though their efforts in establishing a stronger sense of place are indisputable, this alternative economic space with shorter supply chains and deeper embeddedness might not necessarily provide a more sustainable, socially just, higher quality, fresher, healthier food with lower food miles or more transparency. It is a false assumption that just because these initiatives promote a local agro-food system and involve face-to-face interactions, they "automatically demonstrate all the putative benefits of social embeddedness" (Portes and Landholt 1996 in Hinrichs 2000:297). Therefore, marketness and instrumentalism should be seen as "necessary qualifiers of embeddedness and as a means to avoid an overly sentimental view of face-to-face interaction" (Hinrichs 2000 in Sage 2003: 58).

Marketness is a concept "used to describe the simple and largely abstract quality of monetary transactions modelled in neoclassical economics" (Faegan and Morris 2009:236). Even though embeddedness is "commonly contrasted with the concept of marketness, … [it remains] a useful concept for making more apparent the transaction environment within which other values exist alongside that of price in the purchasing behavior of consumers" (Faegan and Morris 2009:236). "If marketness expresses the relevance of price in the transaction, instrumentalism captures the nature of individual motivation. High instrumentalism occurs when actors prioritize economic goals and engage in opportunistic behavior to achieve them. In contrast, low instrumentalism reflects prioritization of such non-economic goals and concerns, as friendship, family or ethnic ties, morality or spirituality"

(Hinrichs 2000:297). The recognition of "how marketness and instrumentalism complicate social embeddedness is critical for understanding the viability, development and prospects of local food systems" (Hinrichs 2000:295). Meanwhile the "tension between embeddedness, on the one hand, and marketness and instrumentalism, on the other … [warns us against ignoring] how dynamics of power and privilege continue to characterize – sometimes subtly – many direct agricultural markets" (Hinrichs 2000: 296). When studying the social embeddedness of an alternative economic space, one should study the dynamics of how its marketness and instrumentalism developed and how those processes complete our knowledge about the dynamics of its embeddedness. Local food system analysis can only benefit from a critical view of embeddedness from an economic sociology perspective that "recognizes that price may still matter and that self-interest may be at work, sometimes even in the midst of vigorous, meaningful social ties" (Hinrichs 2000:297) and maps the tensions within the alternative economic space in order to understand it. Local food systems tend to specialize in high-end products, which often implies higher price levels. This means that they restrict access to their products and services to consumers with higher purchasing power. This scenario shows that "social inequalities can exist in direct agricultural markets, just as they can in sustainable agriculture" (Allen and Sachs 1991 in Hinrichs 2000:297) or any other food systems. This "conceptual shadow to social embeddedness" (Block 1990:51 in Hinrichs 2000:297) should be seen as equally important part of the scholarship that aims to understand alternative economic spaces.

3.3 Social landscape creation through an alternative economic space

"Every place is a part of some landscape and, conversely, every landscape is part of some place" (Karjalainen 1986: 141).

Landscape as a materialized discourse

A landscape is "a time dependent, spatially referenced, socially constituted template or perspective of the world that is held in common by individuals and groups and which is applied in a variety of ways to the domain in which they find themselves" (Darvill 1999: 111). It is "the intermingling of the background and context, or space, and the particular, or place" (Hirsch 1995:22 in Aistara 2008:38). The socially constructed nature of landscapes entails that they are the temporary outcomes of continuous processes of categorization, appreciation and renegotiation (Bender 1992 in Marju Kõivupuu *et al.* 2011). "Through the accumulation of these embodied practices in the past and present, the landscape itself can be understood as a process, not just a snapshot or momentary state of existence" (Hirsch 1995; Ingold 2000 in Aistara 2009:136). Landscapes are 'materialized discourses' (Schein 1997 in Johnson, Schein, and Winders 2013), the "embodiment of human practice" (Aistara 2009:136). They are interactive elements that document the evolution of past societies (Beneš and Zvelebil 1999). The maintenance of landscapes require "interaction between people and groups, institutionalized land uses, political and economic decisions" and the development of an efficient language of representation (Saar and Palang 2009:6). There is a strong positive correlation between place attachment, sense of loss and place-protective behavior of local residents (Ryan 2005, Cheng et al. 2003, Vaskem and Kobrin 2001). The "willingness to engage in place-protective behaviour is maximized when attachment is high, revealing the importance of the place" (Stedman 2002 in Soini et al. 2012:125-126). They are more likely to support conservation oriented development plans that aim to sustain place-specific economies (Walker and Ryan 2008 in Soini et al. 2012:126).

Sense of place

A sense of place is a combination of a given region's physical characteristics and the social activities developed there (Soini et al. 2012). The components of a sense of place are place attachment, place satisfaction, place dependence and place identity (Jorgensen & Stedman 2006 in Soini et al. 2012: 125). Place attachment is "the bonding established between people and places… [where] place refers to the physical and social setting and attachment relates to the perception and experience of place. [It] is constructed mainly as a result of people interaction with a place, the constructed meaning(s) and its corresponding attributes" (Shamsuddin and Ujang 2008: 399). Place satisfaction reflects on the "utilitarian value of a place to meet certain basic needs ranging from the sociability of services to physical characteristics" (Jorgensen & Stedman 2006 in Soini et al. 2012: 125). Place dependence "concerns how well a setting serves goal achievement … reflecting the importance of a place in providing conditions that support an intended use" (Jorgensen & Stedman 2006 in Soini et al. 2012: 125). Place identity reflects on how an individual's or community's identity could be influenced by their physical environment "by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment, and how the physical setting provides meaning and purpose to life" (Jorgensen & Stedman 2006 in Soini et al. 2012: 125). The sense of place is a "product of the ongoing relationships between individuals, society, practice and structure, occurring in historically specific situations" (Perkins 1989: 62). A sense of place could be weakened by any trends of globalization that compromise the "authentic connection to local landscapes, ecosystem, history, culture and community" (Shamsuddin and Ujang 2008: 406). However, the awareness of a certain sense of place is often fully realized when a loss occurs (Egoz et al. 2006: 59). The desire to cultivate a stronger sense of place derives from this sense of loss. The efforts of these communities

usually aim to improve the "accessibility, legibility, vitality, diversity, choice, transaction, comfort and distinctiveness" of their territory corresponds to this sense of loss (Shamsuddin and Ujang 2008: 406) and manifests through their place making efforts (Tuan 1974 in Perkins and Thorns 2012).

Social landscape creation

Such place-making efforts could transform an alternative economic space into a venue where the promoters and supporters engaged in it could participate in the social landscape creation processes to challenge the representation of the fields where the given alternative economic space operates. The mobilization of the resources that derive from the original embeddedness of this alternative economic space empowers these stakeholders to engage in this social landscape creation process (Granovetter 1985 in Akgün et al. 2010).

Social landscape creation is a negotiation process manifested through discourses that continuously shape the material and dialectical representation of the given landscape. The socially constructed nature of landscapes entails that they are continuously subjected to a wide range of categorization, appreciation and renegotiation processes (Bender 1992 in Marju Kõivupuu et al. 2011).

The perception of these landscapes largely depends on the filters through which they are looked at. These filters are influenced by the socio-cultural background of the observer. Therefore, the very same landscape could mean something entirely different to people from different cultures (Layton and Ucko 1999). Built landscapes institutionalize our identification with our modernized society, reminding us about our cultural traditions with iconic spatial references (Bell 1999). These landscapes allow for narratives of national and regional identities to nest in our collective social constructions. These continuously contested landscapes serve as building blocks of those urban imaginaries that are the 'catalysts' of the

"symbolic and emotional construction of urbanity" (Hasse 2012: 58). These constructs, the so-called urban imaginaries with the representation certain territories within, portray a wide range of "unconscious social desires" and "construct imaginary social alternatives which form part of a long utopian tradition" (Bloomfield 2006:43). An alternative economic space could be a venue where these imaginaries are expressed and experienced through (Cohen 1993 in Kõivupuu *et al*. 2011).

The cities are both products and conditions of "ongoing social processes of transformation" (Harvey 1989:3). These processes are often negotiated within the virtual global economies that influence local economies and societies partially through the induced changes in their built environment. Urbanization and urban restructuring are clearly the most intrusive processes over the periurban landscape, changing its social characteristics and economic opportunities. The process of landscape creation often has the clear intention of consolidating the political autonomy of those who engage in it. It is about "dismissively rearranging cultural and historical resources into new patterns" that are in line with their values and/or serve their interests (Waitt and Markwell 2006). However, "history represents selective memory" (Spirn 1995:110) and the faith of 'what perishes and what persists is decided in this negotiation process (Hobsbawn 1983 in Kõivupuu *et al.* 2011). A given landscape's identity inherited to future generations, is always an outcome of power struggles over which directions should be taken in a territory's development (Masuda and Garvin 2008).

Chapter 4. Features and challenges of the contemporary Huerta

This dissertation is about the alternative economic space that developed in the Huerta. Since the most important feature of this alternative economic space is its embeddedness, chapters 4 and 5 analyze the cultural and socio-economic context where it is embedded. This chapter provides an in-depth introduction to the evolution of the Huerta's agrarian landscape and to the challenges its contemporary cultivation models face. Chapter 5 will complete the analysis of the context by introducing those historical discourses that contributed to the development of the contemporary representation of the Huerta.

This chapter begins with basic facts about the Huerta, so that the reader can have a general idea about the case study area. Then, the first section of the chapter elaborates on how the agrarian landscapes of the Huerta have been changing throughout history. It emphasizes that the people of Valencia tend to have a romanticized idea of the Huerta and they often forget that it is the result of the accumulation of historically changing agrarian landscapes. The second section of the chapter introduces the contemporary challenges of the Huerta's characteristic cultivation models.

What is the Huerta?

The Romans established the city of Valencia on the Eastern Coast of the Iberian Peninsula in 138 B.C. The fields surrounding it, the Huerta de Valencia, benefitted from the characteristic rich torrifluvent soils and the fields closer to the coastline were covered with soil from the coastal sand dunes (Maroto Borrego 1994). The Romans also built a gravity based irrigation system to provide equal access to all the surrounding fields. This irrigation system has always been maintained by the active participation of agriculturists who cultivate the fields of the Huerta under a highly fragmented smallholder (minifundio) land structure

(see Figure 4.1 below). The legendary fertility of these fields made the Huerta de Valencia an emblem of the region's prosperity.

Fig.4.1. Aerial view of the Huerta, presenting its typical land structure with the irrigation channels that mark the boarders of each individual field (Source: PATH 2011 working document)

The irrigation system

The only feature of the Huerta that has remained somewhat intact over the centuries is its irrigation system. The system as a whole still reflects the deep medieval Arabization of the area (Glick 2011). The irrigation community of the Real Acequia de Moncada is among the best preserved examples. It serves over 15.000 agriculturists on the remaining 4600 hectares of the Huerta de Valencia, with its roughly 30 kilometers long canals. This 'hardware' (Glick 2011) of channels, dams and other structures has secured continuity in the basic morphology of the Huerta over a millennium. Meanwhile its self-governing institution, the Water Court has overseen the order of irrigation, and it has secured equal and just access to water even at times of shortage for all of its members (Ortega et al. 2011). This 'software' (Glick 2011) of

the Huerta's irrigation system has been recognized by UNESCO as cultural patrimony of humanity. The key of the system is its ability to respect the autonomy of their members, and still being able to keep them accepting the order of irrigation. This has benefitted the community as a whole (Ortega et al. 2011). Each landowner or tenant has been expected to prepare their parcels before their turn to flood their fields, to contribute to the maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure and to keep the order of irrigation (Guinot Rodríguez 2008). Participation in such irrigation community of the Huerta has required serious commitment and continuous presence on the fields from the members, thus it strengthened the social cohesion, a crucial element of keeping these fields alive.

4.1 The changing agrarian landscape of the Huerta

The agrarian landscape of the Huerta de Valencia has undergone several changes over time. The remaining fields of the Huerta coincide with the fields of the L'Horta region[3] of the Province of Valencia (see Figure 4.2 on the next page). The total surface of the L'Horta region is 62.881 hectares, out of which about 30.769 hectares are still under cultivation (GVA 2010), but only about 22.900 hectares belonged originally to the historical territory of the Huerta de Valencia (PATH 2011). The Metropolitan Area of Valencia, which almost coincides with the territory of the L'Horta region, was established in 1946. It is the third largest metropolitan area in Spain, with its 1.55 million inhabitants (Ayuntamento de Valencia 2011). To protect some of the remaining historical fields of the Huerta from the excessive growth of the metropolitan area's excessive growth 11.393 hectares of its territory was classified as non-urbanizable by the Territorial Action Plan for the Protection of the Huerta (PATH 2011).

[3] The L'Horta region is made up by four so-called "comarques": L'Horta Nord, L'Horta Oest, Valencia, and L'Horta Sud; with 45 municipalities. The Metropolitan Area of Valencia also includes the territory of San Antonio de Benagéber, which is a neighboring comarca's municipality

Fig.4.2. The strict and extended areas of the Huerta de Valencia (Source: GVA 2011)

Each historical era developed a new characteristic agrarian landscape that reflected on the Valencian society's actual needs and developed new characteristic morphologies. This led to an accumulation of landscape layers that still characterize the Huerta (Guinot Rodríguez 2011).

The Romans (138 B.C. – 304 A.D), who established the Huerta, had large plantations around their villas and specialized in the cultivation of mostly the Mediterranean Triad: grains, grapes and olives. The Al Andalus era (711-1492) was characterized by populous rural communities scattered around farmsteads in the Huerta. They applied polyculture, which included multi-cropping, intercropping, companion planting – this resulted in higher plant diversity. They took advantage of the climate[4] of the Huerta, which allowed for specialization in thermopile crops, like tomatoes, eggplants, peppers even during most fall and winter months just with minimal protection. After the Christian Reconquista in the 13th century, the Huerta adopted a new feudalist structure. It was expanded to provide the emerging class of nobility with land as a fix source of income. This entailed the enlargement and intensification of the Huerta's irrigation system as well. The new landowners' fields were cultivated by tenant families who preferred to live in villages. They mostly grew grains and vines. Nevertheless, many Muslim families were allowed to stay in the Huerta. They kept the tradition of cultivating vegetables on their fields.

The open landscapes of the Huerta got fragmented with mulberry trees planted on the edges of its fields. The leaves from these trees were meant to feed the silkworms that fueled the city's flourishing silk industry between the 15th and 18th century. When the silk industry collapsed, most peasant tenants lost their additional income secured by their mulberry trees, many of them turned to the rediscovery of producing fresh produce for the markets of Valencia. It became a significant addition to their grain, alfalfa and corn production. The disappearance of the mulberry trees also brought back the characteristic open landscapes, which remained the center of the Huerta's romantic imaginary ever since. This preference

[4] Based on the Papadakis (1964) classification, the climate of the Huerta de Valencia corresponds to a Citrus winter type (Ci), a Gossypium Less Warm (g) summer type within a Mediterranean Dry (Me) and Subtropical (Du) thermal regime.

towards open landscape explains the hostile reception of the increasing dominance of orange plantations that gradually took over the Huerta at the beginning of the 20th century. These orchards were perceived as 'visual obstacles' that fragmented the 'traditional' open landscape of the Huerta (Guinot Rodríguez 2011). The invention of steam engines and electric motors allowed for the further invasion of citrus plantations even into the more arid areas outside of the historical fields of the Huerta. By the 1950's, the heavily expanding citrus industry had devoured a great portion of the fields closer to the urban cores that were traditionally dedicated to other crops (like vegetables, potatoes, tigernut).

4.2 Challenges of the contemporary cultivation models of the Huerta

The cultivation models of the Huerta face various challenges. The ones most relevant to the context of the alternative economic space will be listed in the following section.

Changing crop rotations

The golden age of vegetable production, supported by the irrigation system presented above, was in the late 19th century. The crop rotations that allowed one field to provide up to 2-3 harvests annually used to be an important factor in strengthening the viability of family farms. However, since the 1970's a narrowing produce mix resulted in the negligence of these impressively fertile rotation mixes (Buriel de Orueta 1971). By the 1990's only a few rotations remained, primarily those that focused on rotation and production of potatoes, tigernuts, onions, artichokes, watermelons, melons, tomatoes and peppers. Some non-traditional new rotation elements were also introduced to the characteristic produce mix, as a response to the demand from export-oriented cooperatives (such as cauliflower, chard, broccoli, spinach, fennel, celery). The gradual aging of the people of the Huerta, the lighter demand for vegetables during the new 'vacation oriented' summer season, the nature of the international markets' demand, and the appearance of some stronger seasonal viruses led to

the gradual abandonment of the fields during the productive summer cycles. This resulted in less harvests circles, reaching hardly 1.5 annually (Maroto Borrego 1994).

Substitution strategy: deprofessionalization

Over the last decades, there were significant changes in the crop mix that characterized the remaining fields of the Huerta. There was a progressive substitution of labor intensive varieties, cultivated mostly on family farms of the Huerta, with those that require less dedication and compatible with part-time agriculture (Sánchez Velasco et al. 2005). Since the early 1990's, the advance of the so-called 'substitution strategy' entailed the de-professionalization of the Huerta. It meant the abandonment of those traditional cultivation strategies that required the presence of agriculturists with full time dedication. For instance, in the Province of Valencia in 1982 over 30.000 hectares were occupied by vegetable production, which declined to around 6300 hectares by 2009.

Table 4.1. Main agrarian produces of the L'Horta region (almost coinciding with territory of the Huerta de Valencia) in 2010, hectares occupied

Produce	L'Horta Nord	L'Horta Oest	Valencia	L'Horta Sud	SUM: L'Horta
Cereals (99% rice)	0	3	829	2348	3180
Potatoes	99	46	73	35	253
Tigernuts	226	0	113	-	339
Vegetables	733	291	671	358	2053
Citrus total	5286	4563	590	6224	16663
Other fruits	269	643	21	246	1179
Other	1785	2656	589	2046	7076
Cultivated land (total)	8398	8202	2886	11283	30769

Source: based on MARM (2010)

Meanwhile, the coverage of citrus orchards grew by over 20.000 hectares under the same three decades (MARM 2010). By 2010, the contemporary produce structure of the Huerta (see Table 4.1 above) was dominated by two crop categories: citrus on over 16.000 hectares and vegetables on over 2000 hectares (not taking into account the rice plantations in the South). These two categories together covered over 60% of the Huerta's agrarian output.

The dominance of citrus plantations is recognized as a sign of the de-professionalization of the Huerta. By 2010, more than half of the fields of L'Horta region, over 16 thousand hectares, were covered with citrus orchards (MARM 2010). The citrus plantations, mostly orange, do not require full-time dedication, many land owners decided to plant such orchards so they could take up an urban based job. The more labor intensive tasks such as pruning and harvesting were often outsourced to agro-service providing entrepreneurs. Outsourcing became a trend also because the typical socio-demographic profile of an average citricultorist were to present an urban based man in his 60's, who got his skills mostly through experience on some fields owned by his family.

The sector faced several internal difficulties, such as the increasing production costs (labor, handling, logistics, packaging, high installation costs of traceability systems required by the globalized distribution structure, and fertilizers and other chemical products needed to protect the trees and the produce). The characteristic citrus plantations also operate within a smallholder land structure as a family business on fields smaller than one hectare, which makes it impossible to reach sufficient economies of scale through mechanization. If a family decided to make their living entirely from citrus production, they would need to have a territory five times larger than what they would have required about thirty years ago (Noguera Tur 2010), due to the much lower retail prices and the much higher production costs. As the urbanizing expectations artificially increased the land prices in the region, it became virtually impossible to create larger plantations through mergers or land acquisitions. Farmers could still try to improve their efficiency by joining or creating producer associations in order to commercialize their raw produce together on better conditions. However, they were still unable to "penetrate more efficiently into the circles of commercialization" or to prevent their distributors and intermediaries to impose their conditions on them (Noguera Tur 2010: 93). Among the most pressing external factors identified were the appearance and

consolidation of more competitive producer regions on the international and domestic market as well. There was a notorious flight of capital executed by Valencian citrus companies targeting Southern regions of Spain, like Huelva and even North African countries, like Morocco. In these other regions, they found conditions that help to reach economies of scale easier, with less structural restrictions, lower production costs as well as less strict environmental requirements and quality control. The social and economic importance of citrus plantations goes far beyond the profitability of these exploitations, as there is a significant chain of businesses evolved around this sector.

Compromised socio-economic viability

Over the last decades even the traditional local markets of these small-scale producers were gradually taken over by retailers who could source their supplies from plantations with higher efficiency. They were unable to compete on the recently intensively globalized markets (Sánchez Velasco et al. 2005). Several cooperatives were established to improve the efficiency of these fields through having centralized the relevant managerial tasks (e.g.. getting better deals on input materials, securing deals and access to certain markets). However, the agriculturists often complained about the low wholesale prices they were offered through these cooperatives. These trends heavily demoralized most small-scale agriculturists and drove them towards part-time agriculture and the progressive substitution of their labor intensive varieties (Biot Gimeno 1998) or towards the gradual abandonment of their fields.

Still, the efforts some agriculturist made to keep their micro-fields afloat were often found to symbolize certain kind of resistance to the global trends and unwillingness to abandon these fields, even long after the field had become insufficient means to support the agriculturist who kept cultivating it (Caballer Mellado and Segura Garcia del Rio 1993).

In the most intact region of the Huerta, the comarca L'Horta Nord (where 55% of its still close-knit fields were kept under cultivation), only about 3.4% of the region's working population was employed in the agrarian sector in 2004 (Sánchez Velasco et al. 2005). The employment opportunities offered by the agrarian sector were mostly limited to seasonal and outsourced tasks like pruning, fumigation, and harvesting. The agrarian sector could no longer present itself as an attractive option for new generations. In 2004, about 35% of the farmers were above 50 years old, while only 13% were younger than 25 years old (Belenguer in García Augustín et al. 2004). It turned to the use of migrant workforce for most of the sector's outsourceable tasks to balance out the absence of younger generations.

Difficulties of the minifundio land structure

The minifundio land structure provided a difficult environment to improve the production efficiency and to cut the production costs. The physical fragmentation of the fields and their atomized ownership disable the establishment of satisfactory economies of scale that could secure their competitiveness on rapidly globalizing food market. Nevertheless, several agriculturists recognized that there were ways to improve the overall efficiency of these fields by outsourcing certain tasks (especially on citrus plantations).They also promoted various forms of cooperation.

The agrarian sector was characterized by its indebtedness due to the mismatch of the high production costs and recessed retail prices producers could achieve in the market controlled by intermediaries (Belenguer in García Augustín et al. 2004). These tendencies explain the de-professionalization of the fields and the spread of part-time farming with crops suitable for that. Sánchez Velasco et al. (2005) argued that capitalization could be a central strategy to halt the abandonment of these fields and to attract visionary agro-entrepreneurs. Besides the slight profit from agro-operations, such capitalization could be covered by

revenues from selling a portion of the available fields for some urbanization or infrastructural project or by rechanneling of non-agrarian paychecks into these operations. Sánchez Velasco et al. (2005) concluded that "in this unfavorable environment, the strategies to maintain agrarian activity can't be dependent only on the farmers themselves, but require significant public support as well … a radical reorientation regarding the political decisions. … [It] could only be maintained if the small collective of young farmers committed to agriculture could be strengthened and expanded. Their commitment could continue to exist only if there were at least a minimum level of profitability, which would allow them to live with dignity based on their work." (Sánchez Velasco et al. 2005:404). His report suggested that the progressive adaptation alternative (integrated or organic) agrarian models or a protected geographical indication (PGI) scheme could improve the viability of their enterprises. He argued that these models could raise awareness about the agriculturists' role as guardians of the territory and might improve their reputation and the market position of their differentiated products.

Land speculation

Land speculation and the urbanizing expectations of landowners heavily influenced the market value of the fields in the periurban fringes of the metropolitan area. Between 1983 and 2003, the cultivated surface dropped from 63% to 56% of the total surface of the available agricultural fields. It is alarming that the surface reductions between 2000 and 2003 were the same magnitude as between 1983 and 2000 (Sánchez Velasco et al. 2005). The actual reduction of cultivated surface was greater if we take into account the gradual abandonment of those fields that were in the immediate proximity of constructions. The prospects of easy reclassification of their rustic lands created high urbanization expectations in many landowners, which prevented them from continuing to invest in and cultivating their

fields. The promises of modernity represented by the powerful metropolitan imaginaries encouraged people to overlook and accept these irrevocable territorial changes.

Both Naredo and Montiel Márquez (2010) argued that the local autonomies consciously and systematically ignored the provisions of other legislations on territorial planning and the normative to protect the region's natural and cultural patrimony. This resulted in the massive loss of the agrarian lands with special economic, environmental and landscape interest. By 2004, over 62% of the Huerta's historical territory had disappeared (GVA 2008, with 1863 baseline data).

The average land prices in the Community of Valencia compared to the average of the land prices in Spain increased significantly faster. In 1990, a hectare of land was worth 11.313 EUR in the Community of Valencia; meanwhile the national average was only 4.586 EUR. In 2008, slightly after the crisis had hit the construction sector in the Community of Valencia, the average land prices were 28.857 EUR/ha compared to the national average of 10.974 EUR. After having reached the historical record in 2007, with 32.708 EUR/ha in Valencia, the price of agrarian land suddenly dropped by 11.8 % in 2008 and further by 10.4% in 2009. This decline was more than the double the national average. However, in 2009, the Community of Valencia still had the second highest average land prices in Spain with 25.845 EUR/ha (with 44.773 EUR offered for irrigated orange fields in 2009, significantly lower than the 75.290 EUR offered in 2006 – as these fields were usually closer to the expanding urban cores). The national average land prices were 10.465 EUR in 2009 (GVA 2011b). Despite the fall of rustic land prices, the land markets remained frozen. This could be explained by the lack of profitability of investments in rustic land and by the landowners' sustained hope that not selling their land is that best way to safeguard their most valuable assets in such times of crisis (El País 2012). Both of these factors deprive the access of young landless agro-entrepreneurs to the fields they would want to keep under cultivation.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter highlighted that the contemporary cultural and socio-economic context of the Huerta, in which the alternative economic space is embedded, is the result of an accumulation of historical agrarian landscapes. It has always reflected the needs of the society it served.

The fixed minifundio land structure of the Huerta has prevented its agriculturists from reaching economies of scale required by the modern-day globalized market environment. Many agriculturists joined cooperatives through which they could secure their market access. Others chose substitution strategies (e.g.: switched to simpler crop mixes, focused on citrus plantations instead of growing more time-consuming fresh produce) to keep their fields afloat, which led to the deprofessionalization of these fields. Many landowners ceased to look at their fields as their only source of income and to themselves as agriculturists. On the other hand, those who stayed on their fields soon became symbolic resistance against the new market trends.

The success of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives was constantly contrasted to those initiatives that were unable to adapt to the globalized market environment. The alternativeness of these initiatives was defined by their strategies through which they could recover and reinvent their traditional local markets. Meanwhile the alternativeness of the economic space that developed around them was based on its ability to reshape the material and the dialectical representation both of the Huerta's agrarian landscape.

The initiatives recreated the romanticized open landscapes of the 19th century Huerta, with the produce structure that used to characterize the fields in the proximity of the region's urban cores: complex crop rotations focused around the production of fresh produce. They disproved the myth that he compromised socio-economic viability of these fields is irreversible.

They created a stronger, success oriented sense of place around the Huerta, by developing meaningful social ties around their operations. These initiatives were able to find alternative ways to capitalize their fields, mostly from non-agrarian resources, and secured the viability of their operations through creating a supportive consumer base (for more detail see Chapter 6). They could attract this consumer base by addressing concerns developed by the movement for the protection of these fields (for more detail see Chapter 5).

It must be acknowledged that the crisis that stalled the growth of the metropolitan area presented a window of opportunity. It hibernated the urbanizing expectations that had previously compromised the agriculturists' dedication to keep certain fields under cultivation. And the relatively low returns on cultivating these fields became an option to consider.

Chapter 5. Evolution of the contemporary representation of the Huerta

Chapters 4 and 5 provide an analysis on the cultural and socio-economic context where the alternative economic space is embedded. Chapter 4 introduced the evolution the agrarian landscape of the Huerta and the challenges its contemporary cultivation models face. Chapter 5 completes the analysis of this context by presenting those historical eras that contributed to the discursive foundation of the Huerta's contemporary representation. Two historical eras are introduced below. The first one, in section 5.1, was dominated by one discourse: the folkloric regionalism that romanticized and idealized the agrarian heritage of Valencia, however, ignored the tensions in its society. In the second era, presented in section 5.2, two different discourses clashed to dominate the representation of the Huerta in the metropolitan area's imaginary. The discourse of the 'expendable Huerta' was obsessed by modernization and urban expansion in order to transform Valencia into a future-oriented metropolis, whereas the discourse of the 'Huerta in need of protection' showed that due to the insufficient political commitment a civil movement started for the protection of the Huerta.

The discourses developed during these eras and the contemporary features and challenges of the Huerta together serve as a foundation of the ongoing social landscape negotiation processes about the Huerta's urban utility for the metropolitan area. This chapter explores the discursive background to the development of the era of 'alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism'.

The dynamics of social landscape creation in the Huerta

The Valencian regional identity is an outcome of continuously contested "cultural-historical and political-economic processes" of landscape creation (Prytherch 2006:210).

Each of the historical eras presented in this chapter were equally obsessed with the redefinition of Valencia's representation, and they assigned different roles to the Huerta in it. The symbolic importance of this landscape derived from a 19th century discourse that recognized the Huerta as "emblematic feature that defined the region" (Piqueras Infante 1996 in Prytherch 2003:222). However, since then the representation of these fields has gone through substantial changes. Since the 1960's, the sacrifice of the Huerta to facilitate the expansion of the urban cores of the metropolitan area became common practice. The lack of commitment on behalf of the local authorities to provide sufficient institutional protection for these fields sent a clear message that these fields became expandable as active agrarian land. These trends were continuously contested by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. For a long time this movement provided the most important venue where the citizens of Valencia could express their discontent about not just the disappearance of these fields but also the lack of transparency that characterized this process.

In the early 1990's there was a window of opportunity, where the potential in the Huerta for securing the metropolitan area's sustainability, providing it with a 'green image' was discussed. In her book Carmen Biot Gimenez highlighted that combining the classical Huerta cultivation model with organic cultivation methods could secure the future of these fields as a productive cultural landscape. This research started about ten years later, right after an intense wave of uncontrolled urbanization, which was followed by the greatest economic crisis since Spain became a member of the European Union. This latest wave of urbanization devoured a substantial area of the Huerta[5]. However, the crisis with its stalled construction sector and high unemployment rates opened up new ways of thinking about the Huerta and its urban utility.

[5] By 2004, over 62% of the Huerta's historical territory had disappeared (GVA 2008, with 1863 baseline data).

The following sections of this chapter provide an insight into the discourses developed under the eras with the greatest influence on the development of the contemporary representation of the Huerta. These historical discourses are relevant to the understanding of the alternative economic space that emerged recently in the Huerta because they are the foundation of those that are used to describe this alternative economic space.

5.1 Representation of the Huerta in an era of folkloric regionalism

The Renaixença movement of Valencia (1830-1910's) embraced the Huerta as a symbolic cornerstone of the city's urban imaginary. It adopted elements of an idealized agrarian folklore into the iconography of its consciously reconstructed regionalist popular culture. The movement wanted Valencia to be perceived as a prosperous city, and it was proud to differentiate itself based on its rich agrarian patrimony. Valencia was meant to be seen as "an illustrious and grandiose city set in the midst of a vast garden" (Llorente 1887: 435). To make sure that this would truly become everyone's idea of Valencia, the movement grounded its identity into "a folklorist re-creation or idealization of the countryside" (Burguera 2007:345). In order to promote the "Valencian cultural distinctiveness and prosperity" (Burguera 2007:345), an atmosphere of nostalgia was created around the Huerta, which recalled the medieval glories rooted in the agrarian iconography of the Huerta (Prytherch 2009). This was presented through 'invented traditions' like the *Fallas*[6] and the *Jocs Florals*[7]. The movement hoped to allow Valencia to "shake off its provincial complexion … [and] attain a higher degree of differentiation and independence from perceived deficiencies" by converting the agrarian symbols into something luxurious

[6] This celebration marks the arrival of spring, hold in honor of Saint Joseph and it involves processions, fireworks, and the burning of hundreds of large comical and often satirical papier-mâché puppets on the streets, built by creative neighbors of several districts.

7 The later, a literary competition, symbolized the movement's achievements in the 'intellectual sphere' by the establishment of a "new social prominence and respectability for cultural expression [in a local dialect]" (Burguera 2007:345).

(Burguera 2007:345). They recognized the Huerta's potential to be "the material and symbolic basis for an emerging, folkloric regionalism" (Burguera 2007:345), around which Valencia were meant to redefine itself. Many prominent buildings were built, like the Mercat Central, the Mercat Colon, the Northern Train Station and the City Hall (see Figure 5.1 below) that proudly promoted the "productive symbiosis between the city and its countryside" (Burguera 2007:345). These works of art gave the impression that Valencia acknowledged the Huerta as a remarkable foundation of its economy.

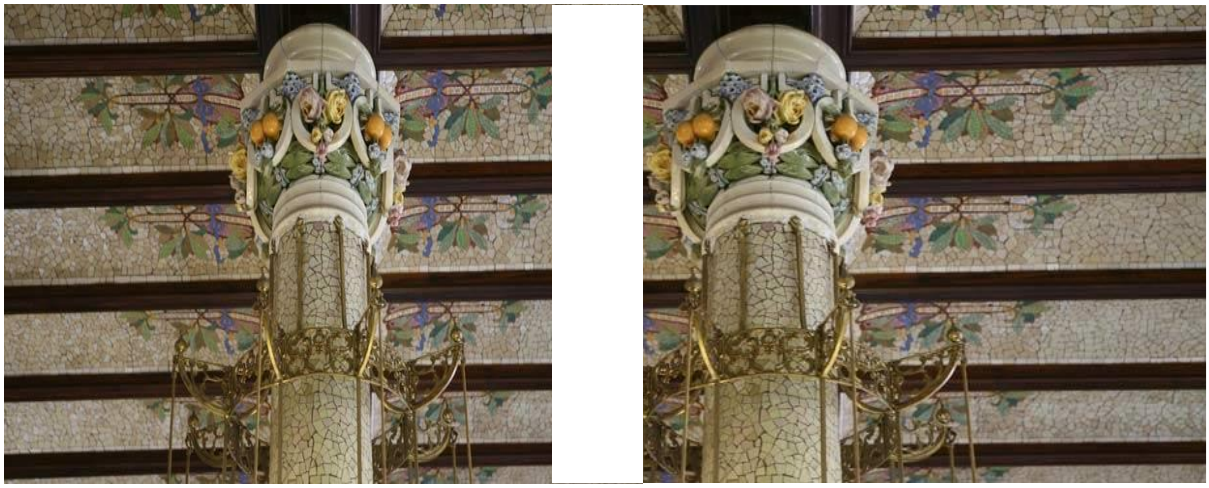

Fig.5.1. Decoration at the Central Train station of Valencia and Mercat Colon – modernist design referring to the Huerta (Source: Spainisculture.com and Stone Roberts, Flickr account)

The excessive use of this agrarian iconography produced an "illusion of a Valencian cultural and political homogeneity … [with a] harmonious and stable countryside … a timeless regional mode of being" (Burguera 2007:349). However, this was truly just an illusion, as the tension between the landowner bourgeois and their tenants became obvious by the end of the 19th century. The unequal distribution of the riches that derived from the Huerta and multiplied through successful commercialization resulted in a unilateral accumulation of capital in the city. These tensions remained unattended, which led to the so-called 'violence of the Huerta' in the late 1870's. The peasants protested against "being fixed into a social order created by and serving the region's elites … [which indeed was the]

authentic essence of an idealized Valencian mode of being" (Burguera 2007:346). They refused to pay rent to their landlords and boycotted the Valencian market. However, as the peasantry's resistance failed to organize around any nationalistic or regionalist calls, they were easily silenced.

The agrarian iconography promoted by the Renaixença movement was just a superficial effort to reconstruct the region's identity. The "Valencian nation's failure to materialize during the 19th century was due to Valencia's inability to create an alternative and specific project of modernization" (Burguera 2007:346), which could have addressed the tensions within the Valencian society. Having converted the Huerta into a folkloric asset without actually addressing these tensions prevented the movement from being able to develop deeper social and political features. They failed to do so as the movement itself was based on a "high degree of bourgeois exclusivism … [and promoted a] fashionable nostalgic cast of Romantic idealism" (Costa Carreras and Yates 2009:10). The Huerta became an essential but highly superficial and romanticized element of Valencia's disputed modern imaginary. The roots of the movement for the protection of the Huerta go way back to the frustrations of the less influential social groups about the lack of their ability to address the injustices of who and how could benefit from the riches of the Huerta. Unlike the romanticist narratives of the *Renaixença*, the writers of naturalist literary tradition of the 19th century, like Blasco Ibáñez, provided a much more faithful description of the tensions within the Valencian society, a less idealistic representation of the Huerta.

5.2 Representation of the Huerta in an era of entrepreneurial regionalism

In order for the reader to better understand the era of entrepreneurial regionalism in Valencia, this section begins with a short description of the so-called 'periurban condition'. It is the most typical environment where entrepreneurial regionalism could manifest.

The periurban condition

The fields of the Huerta de Valencia operate under a so-called periurban condition (see Figure 5.2 below), which implies a lot more than just a transitional area between urban and rural landscapes (Antrop and Van Eetvelde 2000).

Fig.5.2. The periurban condition of the Huerta (Source: PATH 2011 working document)

Such territory represents a complex functional heterogeneity within a predominantly urban metropolitan context (Antrop 2004 in Meeus and Gulinck 2008). Its complexity involves rural-urban interactions with both spatial and sectoral dimensions (Gulinck 2004 in Meeus and Gulinck 2008). The periurban is on the edge of the mainstream urban economy, characterized by large and rapid changes (Rohilla 2005). It is the most endangered landscape of an entrepreneurial city that sees tendencies of privatization at the expense of the public weal (Mayer 2007). The periurban can easily deteriorate into a dominated fringe (Friedberger 2000), an indication of planning inefficiencies. It is often seen as a land reserve, which makes way for 'visions of modernity' (Marshall et al. 2009) mostly at the expense of farmland (Munton 2009). Both the lack of regulation, and the presence of multiple but conflicting

regulations could enhance political power, creating uncertainty and ambiguities, "which in turn assist economic liberalization" (Roy 2004 in Marshall et al. 2009:6), and they channel uncontrolled global capital investments (Arabindoo 2005 in Marshall et al. 2009). Such "regulatory weakness is a means of transferring environmental [and social] costs, incurred by production and consumption patterns in the city, to the surrounding peri-urban areas" (Satterthwaite 2007 in Marshall et al. 2009:6).

Uncontrolled periurban planning could result in "building developments on ecologically sensitive land; changing agricultural patterns; diminished open space; increased pressure on natural resources such as water; … industrial effluence; air pollution; …accumulated solid waste", and the visible marginalization of the poor and gentrification (Marshall et al. 2009:7). The consequences of such 'fuzzy' periurban planning often harm the less privileged "who depend most on the natural resources in the periurban context" (Allen and Dávila 2002 in Marshall et al. 2009:7). Depending on what terms the local governments envision for the development of the metropolitan areas, the periurban areas could become an empowering 'place of opportunity' or a 'degenerated periphery' that disempowers the poor (Marshall et al. 2009).

The literature theorizing the periurban found neoliberal globalization to be the most recent and most pervasive political and structural process, which was mostly manifested in the form of 'new urbanism' (Marshall et al. 2009). Under the concept of 'new geographies of governmentality' (Appadurai 2002 in Marshall et al. 2009) cities replace states in the 'construction of social identities' (Smith 2002 in Marshall et al. 2009). When particular cities become closely integrated into the global economy they are 'de-linked from their national economies' (Sassen 2002) and from their local realities. There is a new competition scenario in these globally connected cities, where local and global interests clash. The periurban is typically the space where the monuments of this 'superinduced development' materialize. Its

fields are often sacrificed "in order to secure privatised and globalised partnership ventures" (Thong 1995 in Marshall et al. 2009:8). The periurban becomes a playground for uncontrolled liberalization, globalization and transnationalized investments (Arabindoo 2005, 2006 and Smith 2002 in Marshall et al. 2009). The sustainability of these periurban landscapes and their development remain marginal, while the interests of certain urban and global elites are prioritized (Allen 2003).

The structure and the socio-economic viability of the agrarian systems present in a given periurban area could determine the direction in which it could develop. Even though the "periurban agricultural areas are the result of the survival and continuation of historical agricultural activity that has generated a significant tangible and intangible cultural heritage (often an unavoidable part of the image and identity of cities) …[the fields on these transitional areas are] exposed to numerous additional pressures and tensions" (Shoard 2002 in Zasada 2011:640). "Farming is additionally constrained through the fragmentation of infrastructure, trespassing, widespread vandalism and theft" (Bickmore Associates 2003 in Zasada 2011:640).

The discourse of the 'expendable Huerta'

After the Civil War (1936-1939), the urban reconstruction plans, approved under Franco's dictatorship (1936-1975), brought along the original era of 'wild urbanization' (Bosque Maurel 2011). Valencia's General Plan of 1946 established a vision of transforming the region's capital into an expanding metropolitan area to enhance its regional significance and its ability to attract capital investments. When Valencia became the capital of its autonomous region in 1982, it marked the beginning of the "reorientation from provincial, agrarian city to a regional capital and Mediterranean metropolis … accelerated dramatically amidst European integration, [and] globalization" (Prytherch and Boira Maiques 2009:108).

Valencia was caught in the 'obsession of marketing the city'. Building the so called 'Valencian difference' required the dismissive rearrangement of its cultural and historical resources into new patterns (Harvey 1990). Under this 'new regionalism' the essence of Valencia's cultural landscape was reinvented, based on new territorial structures that redefined the metropolitan area's physical and landscape (Häkli 1998 and Paasi 2002 in Prytherch 2006). This economic and political 'reterritorialization' became the most characteristic feature of the regionalist politics of this era (Prytherch (2006a). The local landscapes were redefined under a "new entrepreneurial regionalism obsessed with political autonomy, entrepreneurial and interurban/regional competitiveness and cultural modernity" (Prytherch and Huntoon 2005 in Prytherch:206).

'Enter the urbanizing agent'

A law titled 'LRAU', made at times of expansive economies in 1994[8], provided a supportive institutional framework for urban development (Montiel Márquez 2010). This law allowed for the incorporation of third parties with no prior land ownership (other than the local municipalities and the original individual landowners) to develop public urbanization projects under 'purely entrepreneurial criteria' (Montiel Márquez 2010). By this legislation the local government created a new kind of entrepreneur: the so-called *agente urbanizador* (urbanizing agent). Besides benefitting from public projects, these private enterprises enjoyed an exceptional position in a wide range of public concessional projects. These urbanizing agents were invented to materialize the developmentalist vision of the metropolitan area. The legislation also invited the original landowners to participate in the urbanization projects by opting to invest some of the profit they gained from selling their land; doing so they secured their entitlement to a portion of the profit made by a given

[8] LRAU, Ley 6/1994 *Reguladora de la Actividad Urbanistica*

venture but also volunteered to share the risks and to become investors. They could decline to participate, but in that case they were paid a much lower rustic price for their lands (Lora-Tamayo Vallvé 2000 in Montiel Márquez 2010). Generally, owners found themselves forced into association with the urbanizing agents in charge of these urbanization projects.

Legal accommodation of 'urban hustles'

Beside the LRAU of 1994, the most controversial urban planning regulations of Valencia were the urban planning regulations of 2004 (Ley Suelo No Urbanizable[9], LSNU) and its reforms of 2006 (Ley Urbanística Valenciana[10], LUV). The LSNU managed to consolidate historically low protection levels[11] for the rustic land in the metropolitan area, which heavily compromised the territorial integrity of the Huerta. Even though the LUV loosely applied some convincing rhetoric of sustainability, it was mostly referred to as just another 'pretentious partial reform' that eventually allowed the LRAU's original neoliberal planning philosophy to continue (Montiel Márquez 2008 in Montiel Márquez 2010). It still had a "vocation towards the production of newly classified urbanizable lands… accelerating the process of abandonment of traditional agrarian spaces and activities, whose profitability could not even be compared with the prices offered by the real-estate intermediaries" (Montiel Márquez 2010). These new laws allowed the 'politics of reclassification' to become the cornerstone of the local government's neoliberal development politics (Montiel Márquez 2008).

[9] Ley 10/2004, de 9 de diciembre de Suelo No Urbanizable (LSNU) and the Ley 4/2004 de Ordenación del Territorio y Protección del Paisaje (LOTPP)
[10] Ley 16/2005 Ley Urbanística Valenciana
[11] Ley 4/1992

Fig.5.3. Poster against the LRAU (Source: webpage of Abusos Urbanisticos No)

In the last decades there was a revival of 'wild urbanization' and a return of the great 'urban hustles' (*pelotazos urbanísticos*[12]) (Naredo 2010). He described wild urbanization as a remainder of Francoism, smoothly adapted to the new democratic framework by those who were eager to re-accommodate and serve certain private interests through their political decisions (see poster calling for a demonstration against LRAU in Figure 5.3 above). He argued that the re-constructed legal framework allowed for a sudden territorial re-ordering through land classifications that only pretended to take seriously certain principles like responsible planning or public consultation.

False justification of further urbanization

Since the 1950's, the Metropolitan Area of Valencia accumulated a significant real-estate surplus. Between 1991 and 2000, the growth of the freshly developed areas exceeded

[12] an expression which stands for successful real-estate transactions mostly on the verge of illegality, aided by corruption, allowing landowners, intermediaries and constructors to make a fortune from one day to the other.

the forecasted but unrealized population growth rate by 25%. This forecast was used to justify the need for more housing projects. More than 70,000 new residences were constructed between 1990 and 2005 (Oliveira 2010 in Feria Toribio 2012). Meanwhile in 2001 "an estimated 65,000 residences sat vacant throughout the city" (Prytherch 2006:113), and in 2010 there was enough space to construct about 40.448 more residences just within the territory of the city of Valencia without having to expand onto the Huerta (El País). The movement for the protection of the Huerta (to be presented in the next section) heavily criticized the local government for neglecting the rehabilitation of the degraded inner zones of the city while being fixated with the urbanization of its fringes.

Spain became a magnet for global speculators (González Pérez 2010), as it absorbed the "flight of capital from the equity markets that occurred between 2000 and 2003" (Fernández 2009 in González Pérez 2010:1577). Even though the promoters of the sprawling urbanization projects claimed that their activities eventually would result in lower housing costs, none of these expectations was realized on the housing market. On the contrary, between 1997 and 2007 the housing prices in Valencia increased much more steeply than the national average (Montiel Márquez 2010). A spiral of false valuation and speculative investments led to real-estate bubbles (Naredo 2005 in Montiel Márquez 2010) deriving from the artificially high housing prices and supported by the loans granted by the banking sector. The banks were engaged in fierce competition for clients with previously inexistent demands for second homes and often dubious solvency. Carballo-Cruz (2011:313) emphasized that "there was no political interest in halting the excessive growth of construction activities and property development. The initial price increases derived from favorable market conditions for mortgages, followed by additional increases resulting from the contagion of positive

expectations about price evolution". In 2007, the burst of the real estate[13] bubble froze the demand and left many urbanization projects unfinished, and a significant set of housing got stuck on the market.

The discourse of the 'Huerta in need of protection'

This sub-section first discusses the insufficient political commitment for the protection of these fields. Then it analyzes four milestone cases of the civil movement for the protection of the Huerta under two themes.

The first one ("Anatomy of a non-conflict") discusses which circumstances call for a public outcry and which allow territorial aggressions go smoothly under the radar. This sub-section is based on the dissertation of Prytherch (2003), who compared people's reactions to two simultaneous attacks on the Huerta. When he created the theme of the 'Anatomy of non-conflict', the alternative economic space had not yet been developed. Therefore, no constructive alternative was provided for the people to engage in.

The second one ("Agriculturists as stakeholders") explores the importance of the difference between neglecting and involving the agriculturists in the movement. It explores how these agriculturists have become the protagonists not just of the alternative economic

[13] The real-estate crisis was recognized as the principal cause of the solvency issues of banks, the credit restrictions to households and businesses, and the disappointing growth rates in the economy (Domínguez 2009). The "construction and property development sectors in Spain had an essential role in the detonation and extension of the current economic crisis" as the construction sector had significant direct and indirect contribution to the country's GDP (Carballo-Cruz 2011:309). The strong ties between the real estate market and the financial sector contributed to the depth of the crisis. The lowest point of the crisis was during the first quarter of 2009, when the GDP fell by 6.3% and the "households reduced their savings rate to historically low levels and increased their fixed capital investment to maximum levels" (Carballo-Cruz 2011:311). Meanwhile, Carballo-Cruz (2011) argued that the most important problem of the Spanish economy became its private debt, which by the end of 2010 represented around 224% of the GDP (Carballo-Cruz 2011). Among the apparent effects of the economic crisis were the rising unemployment rates, and an increased social polarization (Murray 2010). The unemployment growth is a differentiating aspect of the crisis in Spain. Between 2007 and 2010, the unemployment rate in Spain rose from 8.3% to 20.1% (11.8 percentage points), whereas in the euro zone the increase was less accentuated merely from 7.5% to 10.1% (2.6 percentage points) (Carballo-Cruz 2011).

space that developed in the Huerta but how they gradually assumed a leading role in the movement for the protection of these fields.

Insufficient political commitment

Unfortunately, it is often found the "political commitment to periurban fringe issues is often regarded as marginal by the respective local authorities" (Simon 2008). Most of my respondents argued that in the case of the Huerta de Valencia the local government's commitment to create strategies to promote or facilitate initiatives to keep the Huerta alive was clearly missing. The local government was reluctant to establish potent frames for the protection of the Huerta's integrity, and allowed for the "feverish periods of land speculation and construction" that became to characterize the region (Prytherch 2009:73).

In 1978, the new Constitution delegated the competences and responsibilities of territorial planning to the autonomous communities, however, it failed to provide a legal framework to coordinate the development of the metropolitan areas and to regulate the sustainable use of the available pool of rustic lands. The *Consell Metropolita de l'Horta, CMH*[14] (Metropolitan Council of the Huerta) was established only in 1986. It was supposed to coordinate the metropolitan planning of the region, but the norms required by law[15] to support these efforts were drafted and approved only by 1993. These norms presented recommendations on the conservation of natural resources, offered categories to assess the aptitude of a given territory to be classified as urbanizable (but contained no concrete restrictions), acknowledged objects of cultural, architectural, urban, archaeological and ethnographical patrimony to be protected and respected by urban planning, and defined the infrastructural networks and equipment necessary for the area's growth. Nevertheless, these

[14] Drafted at the revision of the General Urbanization Plan of 1983, Ley 12/1986, de 31 diciembre
[15] Ley 5/1986, de 19 de noviembre, de la Generalitat for the creation of *Las Normas de Coordinación Metropolitana*, Norms for the Metropolitan Coordination of Valencia

norms were only a set of recommendations and there were no specific means provided to control or coordinate the trends of territorial planning that were rapidly reshaping the landscape of the metropolitan area. It could not pressure the municipalities to respect its recommendations when drafting their territorial plans (Buriel de Orueta 2009). The dysfunctionality of this institution and its norms proved that there were serious legislative insufficiencies to control and coordinate territorial planning in the metropolitan area (Martín Cubas and Montiel Márquez 2011). Until the Territorial Action Plan for the Protection of the Huerta (PATH) was drafted by 2008[16] and published in 2011, these norms had been the only legal reference to control territorial plans drafted by a given municipality in the metropolitan area (Buriel de Orueta 2009). This legislation called for a plan based on which the landscape of the Huerta could be properly integrated into the metropolitan area's territory, in compliance with the European Landscape Convention (ELC, 2000). It was meant to provide a legal framework for the identification, evaluation and preservation of the characteristic features of the metropolitan area's landscapes, like the Huerta de Valencia, and meant to serve as an informative study based on which the metropolitan area's urbanization plans could respect and preserve the characteristic features of its periurban landscape. However, Per l'Horta (a local watchdog NGO), claimed that the PATH was just a 'media exercise' to clean the image of the city council, as by that time the great urbanization pressure had already devoured most of the land it meant to protect. The activists of Per l'Horta claimed that the plan made no real commitments to prevent the further fragmentation of the Huerta and to safeguard the integrity of its fields. Many agro-entrepreneurs shared their frustrations about how symbolic and unstable their initiatives were without a committed institutional

[16] the PATH was legally called for by the Law 4/2004, of June 30 of the Generalitat Valenciana

background, that could provide agrarian programs with actual roadmaps, projects to apply for.

Emergence of a civil movement

On the other hand, since the 1960's, a civil movement for the protection of the Huerta was developed in response to the significant territorial changes of the Metropolitan Area of Valencia. The wide support of the movement showed that the concerned citizens were ready to get organized and voice their indignation (Romero Renau and Trudelle 2011). Apparently there were many Valencians who were upset by the disappearance of the fields they considered to be part of their identity, their patrimony, or simply their habitat they felt attached to. In the 1980's "in response to Franco-era repression and urbanization … [the] left-leaning Catalanism and environmentalism articulated a new Valencian regionalism, particularly around the enduring and characteristically late 20th century notion of … [a]… regional patrimony under threat" (Hobsbawn 1983 in Prytherch 2009:65). This tradition is still present in the movement that excelled in the dialectical reconstruction of the Huerta having reached back for romanticized elements from the era of folkloric regionalism mixed with reports about the state of degradation suffered by the same territory.

In Valencia, there were several temporary and some more established 'salvem groups' that focused on specific territorial aggressions against their neighborhoods. Such 'salvem style neighborhood activism' was recognized as an integral part of the Valencian identity. These groups were also ideologically characterized as "left-leaning, critical to capitalism and globalization with strong Valencian regionalist accent …. [They were] directed at the protection of either a historical district of the city or at the protection of the Huerta as an essential component of the Valencian experience. In addition to taking legal and administrative measures, they quite creatively presented their cases with highly symbolic

contents fighting the institutionalized discourses that threatened the areas they aimed to protect" (Santamarina Campos 2008). The Salvem platforms created space for alternative discourses eager to contest the developmentalist mentality, which dominated the urban imaginaries of the last few decades. In this way, these platforms actively participated in the social landscape creation of the Huerta and in the preparation of the embeddedness of the alternative economic space that was about to emerge.

Besides the organizations that mobilize the people of Valencia to fight specific territorial aggressions and the legal and political framework accommodating it, there were other organizations that aimed to attract international attention to the uncontrolled urbanization practices of the region. The most significant allegations were presented by the national association of *Abusos Urbanisticos NO* [NO to urbanization abuses], which triggered significant responses from the European Union, like the Fourtou report in 2005 and the Auken reports in 2009[17]. Also, the Kothari report of the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2006 highlighted that the real estate speculations endangered the access to adequate housing in the region. Furthermore, the Valencian ombudsman drafted several reports between 2004 and 2007 that summarized citizens' complaints about the uncontrolled urbanization dynamics present in the region. Moreover, Greenpeace dedicated a report in 2005 to denounce the developmentalist mentality that reshaped the natural landscape of the Mediterranean coast.

"Anatomy of a non-conflict"[18]

The two case-studies below[19] elaborate on how one regional project of modernity could gain public acceptance, while the other sparked widespread public discontent. The

[17] all relevant reports available at the www.abusos-no.org website in English and Castellano
[18] phrase used to describe the situation by Prytherch 2003

discourses that described these dynamics have provided a dialectical base for the development of the alternative economic space.

The case of the Túria riverbed

The story of the Túria riverbed started after the great flood of 1957, with the citizens' response to the most emblematic and grandiose rezoning project ever executed in Valencia under the Franco regime: the Southern Solution. It was designed to rechannel the Túria River from its original watercourse, which used to embrace the city from the North, into a wider artificial riverbed constructed to the South of the city. Ironically, one of Southern Solution's highlighted advantages, its ability to serve as a definitive barrier to protect the Southern Huerta from the future urban expansion of Valencia, never got realized. On the contrary, when it was implemented between 1965 and 1973, it required the destruction of a significant portion of the actively cultivated fields of the Southern Huerta and later led to the further development of that zone. The massive expropriations were accompanied by the evacuation of hundreds of families. Even though there were some protests and resistance against the project, there was no substantial mobilization to seriously contest it. This was not surprising given that the project was implemented under a dictatorial regime.

However, determining the fate of the recently emptied riverbed soon became the most openly debated urban planning theme around which soon a substantive civil movement was organized (Longares Pérez 2012).

[19] See Fig. Annex 2.2. and Fig. Annex 2.3 for the geographical location of the conflicts

Fig.5.4. *"El llit del Turia és nostre i el volem verd"*- photo taken circa 1960's (Source: photo stream of Números Sueltos, Flickr)

They had the vision that the area's conversion into a wide avenue should be prevented and that the area could be developed into a green public space. They used the slogan: "The riverbed of the Túria is ours, and we want it green" (*El llit del Turia és nostre i el volem verd).* By this slogan and other symbolic actions, they participated in creating a sense of place for the Túria riverbed. Their unusual success in forming sense of place in an empty riverbed with such widespread public support was probably one of the reasons why they were the first civil group whose urban planning preferences were eventually taken into account by the local authorities. They were perceived as the predecessors of the present day *Salvem* groups that contest development projects that compromise citizens' access to the city or endanger certain patrimonial values. The local media actively supported their claim. The citizens' strategy consisted of actively reclaiming the territory by repeatedly hosting sports events and other outdoor activities in the empty riverbed (see Figure 5.4 above). Eventually the Túria Park was

established after the first democratic elections of 1979. The newly elected left wing mayors were eager to revise the urbanization plans drafted under the previous regime. They aspired to correct the 'unsustainabilities' of the previous regime's urban development plans, such as the lack of sufficient green areas and the notorious endangerment of territories with great patrimonial values (Gaja Díaz and Boira Maiques 1994). The Túria Park project (1981) became a symbol of how the first democratically elected local government aimed to take into account the civil society's voice, and how it was being serious about public green areas. Nevertheless, the comments of Ricardo Bofill, the architect responsible for the project, already indicated that the new government already had plans about how to benefit from the multifunctionality of this new green area:

> "The regulation plan for the old riverbed of the Túria River is a passionate and very difficult project, which could change the international image of Valencia. .... At the moment there is a consensus about the use of the riverbed as a green zone. This will be the starting point. ... ...to make a garden, a park, in agreement with the popular demand reiterated throughout the last few years. It is not a conventional project, an idea of great modernity: how to respect history and at the same time change its use" (El País 1982 in Longares Pérez 2012).

The Park became a lengthy and wide multifunctional green zone. Meanwhile its Eastern side was gradually developed into an 'entertainment based cultural and architectural complex', the City of Arts and Sciences (CAS). The cultural and educational complex of the CAS was established "with the vocation of showcase of the reality of a living and innovative city and region, decidedly launched in the direction of the future" (Prytherch 2006, quoting from the proposal of the project director Antonio Ten, 1992).

Fig.5.5. "Urban recycling" - the Túria riverbed recycled as public park –growing on the remaining fields of the Huerta, with the construction area under preparation for the City of Arts and Sciences (Source: Jimena Gonzales-Sicilia, circa 1997)

However, as Figure 5.5 shows above, this futuristic landscape of modernity 'happened to be built' on the last remaining fields of the Huerta that survived at this edge of the old riverbed. These fields could have been seen as a valuable addition to the green zone of the Túria Park, with productive features safeguarding and exhibiting the agrarian patrimony of the region. Instead, the project boosted the value of the adjoining farmlands, and inevitably increased development pressure in the area as a 'magnet for future urbanization' (Prytherch 2003). Soon enough "high-rise expensive apartment buildings and a shopping mall [were constructed] where crops grew only a few years before", creating "new vistas and new landscapes" (Prytherch 2003, quoting a developer from 2001). The drastic advance of urbanity, the increased urbanizing expectations and the deepening difficulties of securing profitable market access for the characteristically smaller plantations of the Huerta changed the willingness of the landowners to invest in their fields. The gradual abandonment of these

fields implied the loss of many of those elements that essentially made the territory what it used to be.

Prytherch (2009) called the construction of the CAS an 'anatomy of a non-conflict', as it "did not produce the regionalist resistance one might expect". He found it curious that, in spite of having the greatest coordinated resistance only a few kilometers away in the Punta (to be discussed in the next section), the "question of displacing [these fields of the Huerta] was not a question at all". He argued that this 'apparent consensus' behind this project promoted by the local government "reflected the power of entrepreneurial regionalist rhetoric to narrate potential conflictive processes of restructuring, distract political discourse away from the problematic and perhaps 'indissoluble' questions of historical regionalism and towards the gleaming promise of a hyper-modern new regionalism, and forge a consensus project simultaneously and inextricably of entrepreneurialism and regionalism, all of which may serve to reposition European regions and regionalisms for a globally competitive world." Prytherch (2003) in his dissertation assessing the co-construction of regional landscapes and politics argued that the CAS project was promoted as a "regional project of modernity" with 'wide support across the political spectrum'. He found that even though the project had its controversies, it had nothing to do with the Huerta's destruction (Bono and García 2006 in Santamaría Campos 2008).

Later on, several grand scale real-estate projects were developed around mega-events held in Valencia, like the 'Monaco style' Formula One car racing circuit or the marina built for the America's Cup. The idea of 'Valencia, the mega-events city' was constructed and maintained by strong consensual authoritarianism, and it was heavily "criticized by citizens and urban-based movements on social and environmental grounds" (Romero Renau and Trudelle 2011:1). The projects were seen as "an excellent opportunity to induce profound urban change within a given area, to insert into the market new areas for urban

(re)development, and to increase land value. … Moreover, apart from their impacts on the urban structure, the organization of mega-events serves as a strategy to pacify citizens in that it imbues them with a consumerist ideology" (Romero Renau and Trudelle 2011:1). The "promotion of a leisure-oriented urban redevelopment, an emphasis on inter-urban competition and place marketing, a privileged role for the business community, rapid urban development on the urban fringe, and experiments with private development of public lands" (Prytherch and Boira Maiques 2009:113) became the most dominant features of the era of entrepreneurial regionalism in Valencia.

These were meant to be flagship projects to put Valencia on the map. Ironically, in the end it was the abundance of stalled and underutilized mega-events that put the region "on the map for corruption, for waste… bringing shame on Valencia" and the international media soon referred to Valencia as a "ghost city … a symbol of Spain's spending woes … the beacon of Spain's economic grandeur, gorging on cheap credit to embark on vastly extravagant projects" (The Telegraph 29 September 2012). The built symbols and the dysfunctional mega-projects of the expanding metropolitan area became the reminders of not just the economic crisis that followed the burst of the real estate bubble, but of the wasteful grand scale urbanization projects that characterized the Metropolitan Area's development strategies.

The case of the Punta

The fields of the *Punta* were situated to the North of the dunes of the Albufera Natural Park. The conflicts around these fields started in 1993, with the construction of a sewage treatment plant, an electricity conversion plant, and a highway that eventually separated the village from its fields. These infrastructural projects severely fragmented the area. As a response to these early territorial aggressions, the Association of the Neighbors of the Punta, *La Unificadora* was established early in 1993. They coordinated several protests and

presented legal allegations against these projects. In 1995, the Zone of Logistic Activities (ZAL - *Zona de Actividades Logísticas*) project was presented by the local authorities (approved between 2002 and 2003, executed by 2006). It meant to expand the logistical capacities of Valencia's commercial port, which required the expropriation of about 700.000 m^2 active agrarian fields of the Huerta de la Punta, and the evacuation of about 620 landowners of 200 families. The strengthening of its commercial port intended to symbolize Valencia's "reorientation from provincial, agrarian city to a regional capital and Mediterranean metropolis" (Prytherch and Boira Maiques 2009).

Soon after the project was presented, the *Salvem L'Horta De La Punta* group was created to contest it, with *La Unificadora* among its 47 supportive organizations. The actions of *Salvem L'Horta De La Punta* included social mobilization, several street demonstrations, and the presentation of over 15.000 civil allegations presented during the period of the expropriations. Many newspaper articles that summarized the events highlighted the emergence of a strange scene where people from seemingly different cultural backgrounds managed to unit their forces, the old agriculturists who never left their fields (see Figure 5.6 below) were supported by young people from the urban, highly anarchic groups (Diagonal 7 May 2006, El País 31 July 2000,).

Fig.5.6. Neighbors of the Punta protesting against the expropriation of their fields (Source: Cabrejas, M. Interview: Carmen González – la huerta de la Punta de Valencia, 1999)

The reports written during that period are still considered to be the most significant reference materials describing the nature of the aggressions towards the Huerta and what the Huerta stands for. The Values of the Punta (*Els Valors de la Punta: 18 Arguments en Defensa de L'Horta*, 1999) became the most often cited publication of that period. It aimed to document the struggle of the civil society, to map the narratives listing those historical values presented as supportive arguments for the conservation of these fields, and to present ideas for the protection of the Huerta. The joint resistance of all traditional 'pro-Huerta groups' manifested to defend the Punta is still perceived as the climax of the movement. As Navarro Matheu (2001) framed it: the locals fought for their "lifestyles inherited from their parent, grandparents, great-grandparents ... for feelings, for family roots, for memories". The legal reclassification of the fields was followed by a strong bureaucratic pressure, and the police

measures broke the resistance of the locals, the evictions were followed by the destruction of the farmsteads, accompanied by some arrests and general turmoil. The last days the locals and their supporters from the local civil society spent on the farmsteads that were marked out to be destroyed were documented in a documentary titled *Tornallom*.

The notion of *tornallom* stands for the traditional agrarian practice where neighbors help each other out doing certain tasks, mostly to improve their efficiency but also just to help each other out. The 'typical Valencian agriculturists' was mostly described to me as a highly autonomous agent who prefers to solve his issues alone. However, when the case of the Punta came up, most of my informants explained with great enthusiasm about the institution of *tornallom* and all of them could mention examples of how they helped each other out in the spirit of this old institution. Most references to *tornallom* came up when the forms of cooperation among members of a same agro-entrepreneurial initiative or various agro-entrepreneurial initiatives were described. However, standing up against projects perceived as such territorial aggressions also constitute a case of *tornallom.*

The utility of the port's new installations remained controversial even after a decade. In 2009, the Supreme Court annulled the urbanization plan that allowed for the execution of the project over a decade earlier. In 2013, the Superior Court of Justice of the Valencian Community also declared the project illegitimate, as the original plan failed to present the required mandatory environmental impact assessment reports (El País 7 July 2013). In 2013, about 150 of the expropriated neighbors created an association for the victims of ZAL (Afeczal, *Asociación de Afectados por al ZAL)* initiated a petition to reclaim their fields referring to a legislation that considers that if a given urbanization project does not start within 10 years, the original landowners have the right to reclaim their fields. They request the re-distribution of these fields so they could recreate their lost plots (Levante 17 January 2013, Levante 10 July, El País 8,9,23 July, El Mundo 8 July).

Changing role of agriculturists

The following two case studies portray how the nature of support and degree of involvement of the agriculturists vary in the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The agriculturists' degree of involvement in the movement depends on the extent to which they feel that a given initiative takes their interests into account. The newly assumed protagonism of the agro-entrepreneurs in charge of the alternative initiatives become a core element in the movement. Their ability to mobilize the social capital provided by the movement (meaning people with high awareness about the trends that contributed to the degradation of these fields) contributed to the strengthening of their initiatives and their dialectical presence in the contemporary representation of these fields.

The case of the citizens' initiative of Per l'Horta

In 2001, Per l'Horta, a non-profit organization that stands for contesting the legitimacy of urbanization plans that could damage the integrity of the remaining fields of the Huerta, organized the citizens' initiative. It proposed a legally enforceable moratorium[20] on new development projects on certain fields of the Huerta and the creation of a legally protected and centrally managed green belt around the city of Valencia to preserve its cultural and natural patrimony.

To some extent this initiative was inspired by the case of the Albufera Natural Park[21], where under the slogan *El Saler per al poble* [The Saler is for the People] over 15.000 signatures were collected against the urbanization of over 800 hectares of the coastal area of Albufera to create a tourist complex among its sand dunes and pine forests. It was the first

[20] Law on Regulating the Planning and Protection of the Huerta de Valencia as a Protected Natural Space
[21] See Fig. Annex 2.1.: locating the conflict

protected space in Valencia established in response to the pressure from the civil society[22]. Mateu and Domínguez (2011) argued that it was the moment when the protection of the environment started to emerge as a relevant societal issue, but it also reached far beyond being an environmentalist concern as it embraced sentiments about the domination of public spaces and allowed for an expression of sheltered criticism against the dictatorial regime.

The citizen's initiative presented by the Per l'Horta aimed to secure territorial protection for the Huerta after having recognized that the socio-economic viability of these fields could never compete with the grandiose urbanizing expectations. It proposed a legal recognition for the Huerta as a 'protected natural space', which could have meant a legally enforceable land preservation agreement for the sake of the 'patrimonization' of the area (Ferri 2004). However, patrimonization would have also implied certain loss of mandate, in other words certain deed restriction on the private land property. It would have infringed on the autonomy of the landowners to decide about the future of their own lands. It would have created a centrally coordinated management framework for the protection of these fields, which would have also placed certain restrictions on how these fields could be cultivated. There was a widespread critique about the initiative's ignorance of how the landowners felt about these restrictions and how this proposed frame would have changed the self-governance structure of the Huerta. This led to the rejection of the initiatives by most of the concerned landowners. Many feared that the new land use structure could have required a massive appropriation of agrarian fields, as the management of highly fragmented land-structure that characterized

[22] As a response the Spanish Royal Society of Natural History together with the University of Valencia published several reports in which they voiced their concerns about the damage this urbanization project would cause. In 1970, a report was aired on national television, which started a public debate in which many ecologists and journalists were opposing the project. *Las Provincias*, the only privately owned local newspaper, openly supported the movement and provided full coverage on the urbanization plans. Even though they were unable to prevent the construction of the first line of 40 towers, in 1982 a systematic plan was accepted by the local government for the regeneration of the dunes and the recovery of the disturbed landscape elements. Later, in 1986, the Natural Park of Albufera was established to safeguard the integrity of this exceptional landscape, which hosts the most important wetland area on that Mediterranean coast for migratory birds.

these fields would have been too difficult to coordinate. It would have required a managerial approach. The allocation of certain funds to secure the maintenance of these fields would have eased most of the challenges the agriculturists seemed unable to overcome alone. However, this centralized managerial approach would have compromised the central element of its cultural heritage, which was the agriculturists' autonomy on each and every micro-field.

Despite the lack of the landowners' endorsement in general, 117.842 signatures were collected to support the cause, which meant about 10% of the electoral roll of the metropolitan area. The initiative managed to convert the "localized neighborhood resistance [that emerged around the Punta]… into a city-wide movement" (Prytherch 2003b). However, the regional government still 'shelved the measure', which was perceived as a cynical and antidemocratic move and a "disrespect of the popular will" (Prytherch 2003b). The organizers claimed that the impressive number of supporters signing the initiative should have called the attention of the politicians to the fact that the "Valencian society doesn't want the [Huerta] to disappear" (Prytherch 2003b). It allowed to "demonstrate the depth of regional affection for traditional landscapes and their significance beyond regionalist party politics" (Prytherch 2003b). Nevertheless, the president of the Generalitat (the local government) "unilaterally decided not to forward the proposal to the regional parliament for debate… claiming that the initiative 'promotes certain instruments of protection totally inadequate to the social and economic reality of the [Huerta]'" (Prytherch 2003b).

The initiative showed that people could be mobilized through an organized network of civil society, and that they were willing to contest or support certain territorial planning decisions. In one of his opinion pieces, José Luis Miralles (2002) declared that the rejection of the initiative made it clear that it was indispensable for Valencia to have a proactive civil society to scrutinize, and critique the local government, as it failed to act in line of its

democratic responsibilities. This further eroded the credibility of those authorities that were supposed to look after public interests. It sent a message that they served private entrepreneurial interests with a clear lack of transparency (Montiel Márquez 2008; Montiel Márquez 2010).

The rejection of this initiative by the local government showed the existence of a strong institutional consensus with discourses that justified the sacrifice of the Huerta based on arguments that highlighted the apparent lack of its socio-economic viability, its anachronism, and inability to fit into the metropolitan area's predominant visions of modernity.

The case of Salvem L'Horta de Vera[23]

The *Salvem L'Horta de Vera* group was established by approximately 80 concerned landowners whose fields were marked out to be appropriated. The fields they set out to protect belonged to the *Horta de Vera* and were classified as non-urbanizable land under special protection. Despite their original classification, they were assigned to accommodate a commercial center "translocated" from the neighboring coastal housing project called *Port Saplaya* so it could further expand alongside the shore of the Mediterranean Sea (El País 30 November 2005). The project would require the expropriation of approximately 400.000 m^2 of these highly fertile, economically viable agrarian lands (El País 23 June 2006).

In 2005, this salvem group presented an appeal to request the suspension of the tender looking for a private partner for the development of the commercial center on these fields. They questioned the local municipality's right to use forced expropriation to obtain their fields for such a project, which would have clearly served solely private interests (Las Provincias 2005 August). The protesters argued that the fields in discussion enjoyed legal

[23] See Fig. Annex 2.4.locating the conflict

protection as non-urbanizable land under special protection when the discussions about the urbanization project started. They also emphasized that the Town Council should not have received advance payments from its development partners because it made the transparency of their urban planning decisions questionable (Las Provincias 25 January 2006). After lengthy legal proceedings, the development was suspended by a Valencian court for having solicited private urbanization partners for a project that included the expropriation of fields that were legally protected as non-urbanizable at the given time. Soon after the verdict, the town council partnered up with a public company to continue their briefly halted preparations.

The protests that followed the legal procedures earned substantial media coverage, especially after legal measures were taken against six protesters, who were accused of having disturbed the public order at a demonstration. The charges were dropped only after three years, which meant three years of insecurity whether the 'offenders' would have to pay the proposed 6000 EUR fine. Several activist blog entries claimed that these accusations symbolized the injustice and oppression present in the Huerta. The blogger of *Alerta Solidaria* claimed that the accusations served to stop these farmers from their "relentless struggle for the Huerta, for the land and its people". Another blog, Bloc L'Horta Nord quoted a supporter of the platform:

> "It is nonsense to trial five people for showing a banner defending the Huerta, as it is their right as farmers to be able to make a living on their fields, which is being violated on a daily basis".

A solidarity protest was organized at the final hearing supporting the activists. Another blog entry after the absolution of charges exclaimed:

> "Fair judgment. As you see, these farmers presented to the plenary willing to defend what was theirs. Their land. Their property. Their history."

The developer company argued that the Salvem group represented only about 20-30% of the concerned landowners (El País 23 June 2006) and that they reached an agreement with about 68% of the landowners to purchase their fields (Las Provincias 16 June 2006). Meanwhile the Salvem group claimed that they represented 80-85% of the landowner families and there were no negotiation between their members and the promoters of the urbanization project. They asked the local municipality to make public the name of those landowners who allegedly closed such deals, but their request was denied, adducing privacy rights (El País 23 June 2006). In collaboration with the public company, the municipality was confident to be able to start the project by 2010. However, the burst of the real-estate bubble disrupted their plans as the public development associate of the municipality had to go under insolvency proceedings (Las Provincias 2012). Nevertheless, the communication of the Alboraya municipality's governing party clearly stated that they still support the future development of such project on the exact same fields. An opinion article (Levante 27 December 2005) summarized the situation in the following manner.

> "This story repeats itself dramatically: the continued massacre of the Huerta de Valencia. Our Huerta, our livelihood, our identifying symbol, the agricultural, historical and cultural heritage of the Valencian people. They execute it, crush it with the cranes of the 'cement industry' and its voracious greed of fast money, allowed by the society's insensitivity, the severe irresponsibility of those who should be protecting it, the absence of a rational territorial regulation, the predatory 'developmentalism', the deceiving idea of progress, the implementation of a political economy followed by the whole country, the rule of "bread for today and hunger for tomorrow. They simply execute it, they execute the Huerta. Because the political and economic interests do not find it profitable. They forget that it could promote local agricultural products, a quality food system. They forget that they could foster research about the application of new methods of production, like organic agriculture, or recognize it to enhance its educative value… They forget that the Huerta could be the most extraordinary garden surrounding Valencia, an attractive space to show tourists around its living ethnological museum ... Last Wednesday, the farmers of the Huerta de Vera pronounced their will to continue cultivating these fields. One of them said: "I'm ready to continue taking the risk - not knowing if the harvest will pay for the planting crops, not knowing if they will expropriate my fields to make space for some shopping centers or sports facilities. I continue because being a farmer is the most worthy profession that I know. They shouldn't take away not even one more parcel of land anymore! Let's stop this

> menace!" They savagely attacked the Punta regardless of the presence of its inhabitants and cultivators. Now, they are after those who preserve these fields, they are killing the Huerta de Vera. They have neither awareness nor consciousness."

The *Salvem l'Horta de Vera* initiative showcased that the agriculturists cultivating the fields of the Huerta could also find the Salvem frame viable to protect their fields. The most well-known organic farmer of the area was among these protesters who operates an organic vegetable box scheme and is actively engaged in the protection of these fields. Some civil activists created an online platform ("Pren la Iniciativa, Per Alboraia!") to promote models to coordinate the organization of consumer cooperatives supporting the production of organic produces and other proposals for the improvement of the agrarian production's viability in the Huerta. This case represented a milestone of the movement where the plight of farmers was prioritized and they were recognized as being the protagonists who stood up to protect their own fields and organized to create supporting frameworks to improve the viability of their operations. Nevertheless, there are still no comprehensive agrarian programs ready to be implemented in the area provided by the local authorities.

Concluding thoughts

The evolution of the contemporary representation of the Huerta showed that the representation of the Huerta consists of accumulated layers, just like its agrarian landscape. Each of the historical eras presented in this chapter were equally obsessed with the redefinition of Valencia's representation, and they assigned different roles to the Huerta in it. Different groups had their different means and capabilities to develop their discourses and to participate in the social landscape creation processes.

The periurban condition of this territory made the Huerta into a venue where the metropolitan area could redefine itself facing the least resistance. Even though the skyline of Valencia is now dominated by the materialized vision of regional entrepreneurialism, the

movement for the protection of these fields contesting it gained wide public support. The discourses developed by the movement allowed a critical insight into the gradual destruction and conscious replacement of these fields. Alongside these discourses a strong social capital was generated in Valencia. This social capital served as the most important base for securing the socio-economic viability of the alternative economic space, which was developed to provide an alternative to keep these fields 'alive'.

We can no longer find discourses like those back in the 1990's that enthusiastically claimed that the Huerta could be the key to the metropolitan area's sustainability (or at least to creating an image of sustainability around it). However, the loosely coordinated initiatives, around which the alternative economic space developed, offer an alternative entrepreneurial model. This entrepreneurial model (to be presented in the next chapter) is contrasted to trends responsible for the degradation of the Huerta, as they proactively contested the myth that the compromised socio-economic viability of these fields was irreversible.

The discourses that characterize the evolution of the representation of the Huerta offer some key learning points for the new entrepreneurial model of the alternative economic space. First of all, it should avoid romanticizing the Huerta. Instead, it should focus on the challenges of its contemporary cultivation models and be open about how they set out to confront these challenges and address the tensions within. Also, it should not attempt to create an "illusion of a …. harmonious and stable countryside". It should not give any reason to be accused of elitism, a remainder of 'bourgeois exclusivism'. Many of the initiatives that emerged in the Huerta consciously set out to offer schemed through which the people of Valencia could gain access to the fields and to the produce of the Huerta.

The discourses of the 'expendable Huerta' and the 'Huerta in need of protection' were the discourses against which the alternative economic space gained its alternativeness. The lack of the socio-economic viability of the cultivation models present in the Huerta often

came up both as an argument to justify the sacrifice of these fields and as a call for the support of those facing these challenges. The wide support of the movement showed that the concerned citizens were ready to get organized and voice their indignation (Romero Renau and Trudelle 2011).

When the fields of the Huerta were suddenly abandoned even by the 'urbanizing agents', they were replaced by new protagonists, a group of dedicated agro-entrepreneurs and their supporters. They assumed the role of reshaping the representation of these fields after the era of entrepreneurial regional collapsed. They participated in the process of social landscape creation of the Huerta and the deepening of the embeddedness of the alternative economic space in which their initiatives developed. Their protagonism constitutes the latest method of resistance in the history of the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The alternative economic space respects the autonomy and protagonism of agriculturists. The role assigned to and assumed by them is a constantly evolving aspect of the methods of resistance present in the movement. These methods changed over time in other ways as well: they shifted from being a solely dialectical defensive narrative into providing a proactive framework, which allowed for the material reconstruction of the Huerta as well. In this process the initiatives, around which the alternative economic space developed, played a significant role.

The local governments' commitment to provide a supportive framework would be key, but was still missing at the time of closing this manuscript. Therefore, the policy implications of the obvious socio-economic viability of this alternative economic space remain open.

Chapter 6. The alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives of the Huerta

The alternativeness of this economic space is defined by the way its initiatives are capable of addressing the opportunities and challenges that derive from its embeddedness. Therefore, this chapter elaborates a comprehensive view on those distinctive features of these initiatives that constitute the alternativeness of the economic space.

The section titled 'Revival of the Huerta' provides a detailed analysis of how the features and achievements of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives were constantly contrasted to the trends and challenges described in these historical discourses.

The section titled 'Empowerment through the Huerta' investigates a few initiatives that invited a wide range of people to cultivate these fields in order to address certain social inequalities. Also, they allowed these people to develop a stronger sense of place of the Huerta and gained wider public support.

The section titled 'Recuperation of the Huerta' explores the case study of how a neighborhood association reclaimed some of the historical fields that were marked out to be urbanized decades ago but instead were left to be degraded. This section explores the power of a collectively shared sense of loss based on the historical discourses developed for the protection of the Huerta, and the power of collective action fighting this sense of loss. This case exemplifies a new method embraced by the movement for the protection of the Huerta.

The section titled 'Recreation of the Huerta' identifies that even urbanization projects can be envious of the strong sense of place that characterize the Huerta. They might even try to mimic it. This case serves as a valuable point of reflection about what constitutes the essence of the Huerta and whether artificial schemes like the concept of 'rururban' could safeguard it.

My focus on the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives of the Huerta in general

The contemporary accounts on the Huerta enthusiastically reported about the emergence of a diverse set of small-scale gardening projects, which broke the privilege of landowners and their professional tenants to cultivate these fields, and renewed the relationship between the agriculturists and their clientele. This resulted in the revision of the traditional agro-utility of the Huerta. The presence of these initiatives characterized an era of proactivity as they invited the people of Valencia to reconnect with the Huerta. The new models that required the active participation of a more committed clientele contributed to the development of a new scenario. These models were often referred to as an answer to the contemporary challenges of the 'huerta model' (see García Álvarez-Coque and López-García Usach 2011).

Before I present a wide range of alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives that seem to have found a way out of the decay that characterized the contemporary Huerta, I must note that their exceptional proactivity should be contrasted to the massive trends of abandonment. Not all landowners perceived themselves as victims of the developmentalist pressure when their fields were appropriated. 'Winning the lottery' was the most common expression used to describe the delight of those landowners whose fields were suddenly wanted for some urbanization project. Such deal meant the only chance for many to escape the growing insecurity that characterized the sector and to obtain enough money to solve their long term financial problems. Therefore, there were still serious urbanizing expectations among the landowners, even after the burst of the real-estate bubble in 2008. This study focused on adventurous entrepreneurs who did not daydream about urbanizing agents showing up at their gates, but viewed the cultivation of their fields as the core aspect of their lifestyle, eager to share their experience with others.

Criteria for the initiatives to be included

At very early staged of this research, when I was looking for a specific geographical location where I could map the social aspects of certain organic farming schemes, most people discouraged me from focusing on the Huerta de Valencia. Even though the Community of Valencia was among the most significant organic fresh produce producer regions of Spain, most of the initial informants, many of whom were in charge of organic certification agencies, believed that only regions with nicely planned, well executed alternative production schemes, preferably supported by the local authorities were worthy of academic attention. They argued that studying marginal micro-entrepreneurial initiatives, like the ones present in the Huerta, which kept on cultivating fields that were gradually disappearing, would be unworthy of such academic attention. However, their discouragement aroused my interest and I set out to study how local stakeholders perceived the situation in the Huerta, and soon I learnt about these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives. Eventually, I came to understand why my first informants had discouraged me from studying these fields, but I also saw what they overlooked. The discourses found on the field indicated the presence of a wide range of small-scale initiatives that were almost exclusively left to their own resources. Having recognized that they were dependent on the support of a conscious, concerned consumer base, they developed successful strategies through which they could capitalize on the discourses that established their inherent socio-spatial embeddedness (see chapter 5). The question was whether these initiatives themselves could contribute to the evolution of the representation of the fields of the Huerta they set out to cultivate. The initial discouragements proved that the social aspirations of these micro-scale organic agro-entrepreneurial initiatives had been overshadowed by a greater attention towards other concerns. The diverse set of alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives established successful strategies to escape the contemporary crisis faced by the people of the Huerta.

Most of these initiatives promoted organic production methods. They developed alternative distribution systems based on diverse cooperation models both among the producers and with their clientele from whom they expected certain commitments. All these initiatives aimed to develop independence from the conventional intermediaries and their success depended on their ability to establish committed and supportive consumer base.

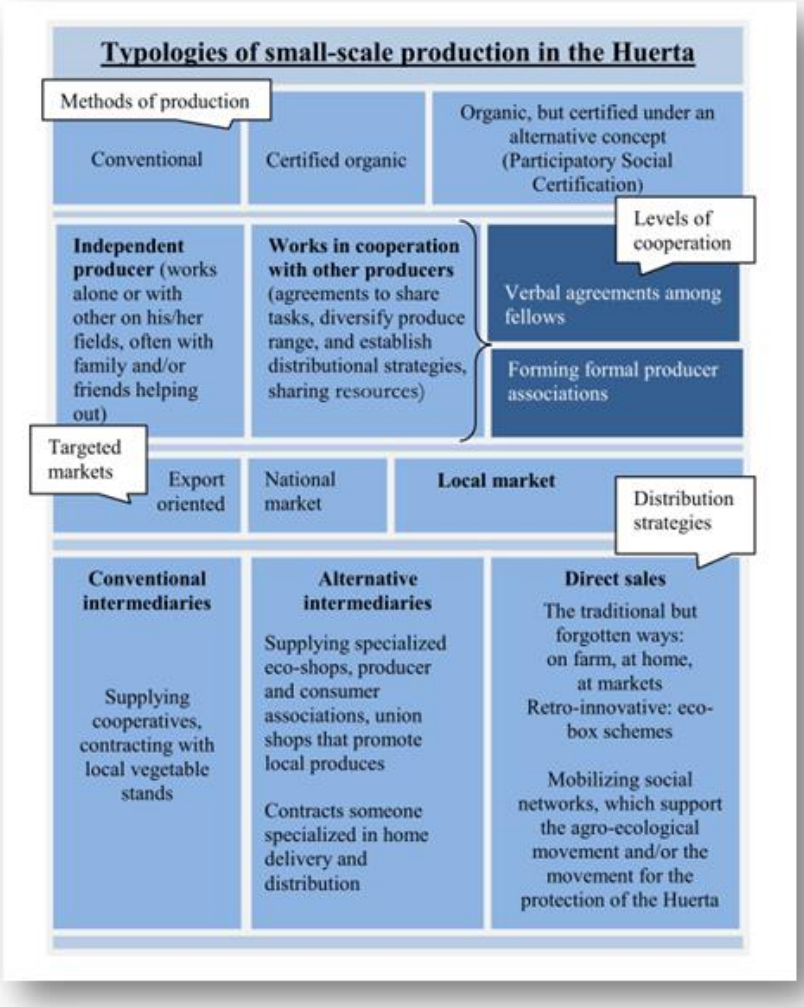

Fig.6.1. Typologies of small-scale organic producers in the territory of the Huerta de Valencia (Source: own elaboration)

Figure 6.1 above shows the categories of the agrarian models present in the Huerta. It categorizes the models based on their methods of production, the targeted markets, the developed distribution strategies, and the level of cooperation that characterized them. Most

of the initiatives presented in this case study were situated within the historical territory of the Huerta de Valencia. Almost all of them were irrigated by the millenary irrigation system that served as the backbone of this agrarian landscape and as the only constant element of the ever-changing landscape. However, some other initiatives that cultivated fields outside the historical territory of the Huerta were also included as they used the same or developed similar alternative distribution schemes, targeted the same consumer base, and in some ways contributed to the movement for the protection of the Huerta. Some of these geographically distant producers even mentioned that they originally wanted to cultivate fields of the Huerta, given its better fertility and proximity to the urban consumer base but they could not get access due to the unrealistically high land prices.

This study was interested in initiatives with an 'innovative edge' to the classical 'huerta cultivation model'. This innovative edge could be manifested through their efforts to reconnect the people of Valencia to these fields, to commercialize their goods locally, to establish cooperative production and sales strategies, as well as to develop a committed clientele and good working relationship among the fellow entrepreneurs. The most distinguishing feature of these initiatives was the presence of a cloud of social networks that supported them. Those small-scale farms that presented no signs of developing or participating in innovative production or distribution schemes were excluded from the focus of this study. Those plantations that were almost exclusively export-oriented were also excluded.

Besides these professional micro-plantations, there are still many small plots cultivated by pensioners on the edges of the Huerta. However, these were also excluded from this study as they hosted merely recreational activities. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged, the presence of "these pensioners symbolize the Valencian people's

reluctance to let go of their past and their plots" – quoting an older agro-historian, whose has many pensioner friends who diligently keep their fields under cultivation.

Weight and marginality of these initiatives

This study does not consider the assessment of the extent to which these alternative initiatives improved the economic viability of the Huerta. It fully acknowledges the marginality of this alternative economic space. However, these initiatives became an undeniable feature of the contemporary representation of the Huerta. They attracted substantial attention from the local media as well. This section aims to provide a background to the understanding of how the weight of these initiatives might be more substantial than what the surface they occupy might suggest.

The homepage of Per l'Horta (a leading NGO established for the protection of the Huerta's territory) provides a Google map, helping people anxious about the protection of the Huerta to find their own supplier from the Huerta. At the beginning of 2014, this online map indicated the presence of 26 separate organic producers and producer groups within the historical territory of the Huerta de Valencia. The map provided by the Valencian Platform for Food Sovereignty [*Plataforma per la Soberania Alimentária del País Valenciá*] also indicated the location and contact information of 15 stores run by producer and consumer associations, 12 research and educational centers, 8 urban and community gardens, as well as 12 other organizations that embrace the concept of food sovereignty (see Figure 6.2 on the next page). The homepage[24] helps the visitor find information about nearly 170 agro-entrepreneurial initiatives active within the Community of Valencia. The producer association of Ecollaures also presented an interactive map on their homepage, powered by

[24] www.experiencesobal.crowsmap.com.

Google maps, which helps the costumers to find the farm of each participant, with GPS coordinates, phone number and information about the type of produce that grower offers.

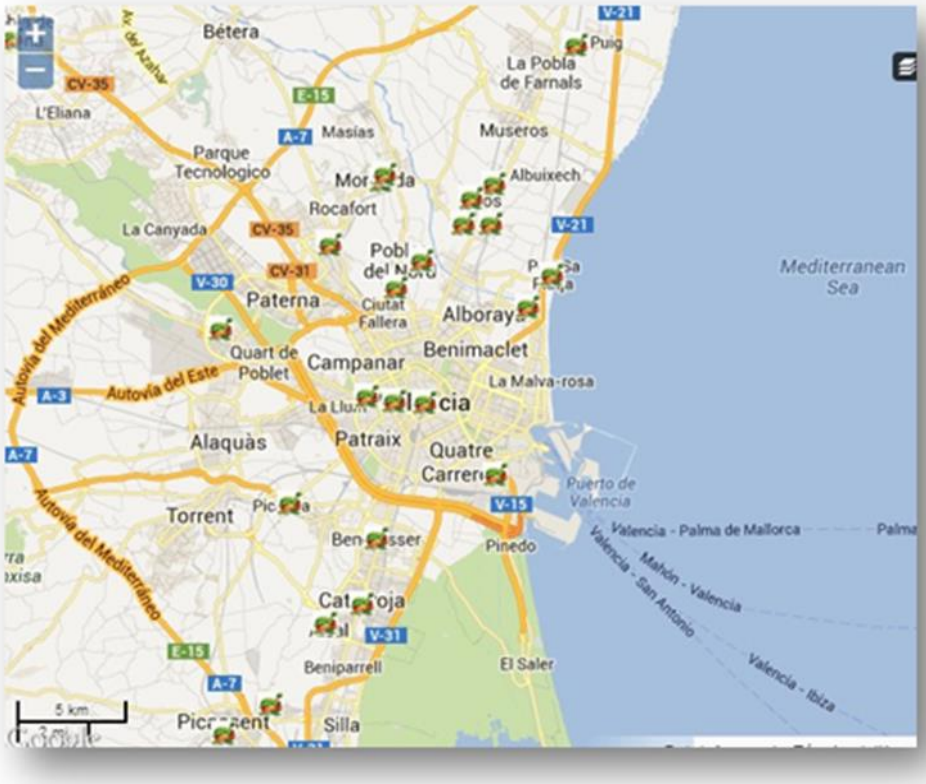

Fig.6.2. Small-scale organic producers in the territory of the Huerta de Valencia (Source: www.experiencesobal.crowsmap.com, last accessed: February 2014)

In 2011, the two most well-known organic vegetable box schemes of the Huerta (those of Vicent Marti and L'Ecocaixa of Silvestre) together assembled and sold over 250 vegetable boxes weekly. However, by 2014 there were already about 10 more similar but quite smaller schemes (see Annex I.). If all of those could manage to sell at least 50 boxes weekly, we could account for the capacity to serve 750 families. These organic vegetable box schemes were always referred to as great success stories with several eager new clients often on a waiting list when unable to meet the rapidly growing demand. Besides these, about two dozen members of the Ecollaures producer association cultivate actively the fields, and several independent growers distribute their produces on their own, mostly in their circles of

friends and neighbors. Even though the number of these alternative productive initiatives has been growing, they could serve only as means to diversify food choices for a small number of conscious citizens because so far it is implausible that there would be enough entrepreneurs to significantly increase the output of this type of initiatives. This would also require a more efficient distribution network, which might already compromise the original nature of these initiatives. Such a grand scale would require an operative program supported and coordinated by an institution.

I conducted a hypothetical exercise, a calculation based on the 2011 statistics provided by the owners of the major organic vegetable box schemes of the Huerta. If a farm operated on about 2.5 hectares and produced 150 vegetable boxes weekly, with an average of 10kg of vegetables - marketed to serve a four-member family, to cover the vegetable intake of all the citizens of the metropolitan area entirely with such organic vegetable box schemes, would require over 2.500 farms with the same productivity, assembling over 380.000 boxes weekly, offering the same diversity on the approximately 6500 available hectares of the Huerta. Nevertheless, this oversimplified calculation fails to account for those goods proceeding from other fields to complement the boxes of this given operation when needed. Based on an educated guess, accounting for an additional half hectare for each farm, would add up an additional 1.250 hectares. In total, it would mean the need to convert about 7750 hectares to run vegetable box schemes. As a comparison, in 2010 on over 2000 hectares of the L'Horta region was covered by vegetable production, it was only 6.5 % of the total 30.769 hectares under cultivation. In 2011, there were 11.393 hectares classified in the Huerta as non-urbanizable fields, supplied with the traditional irrigation system. About 68% of that would be needed to cover the vegetable supply of the metropolitan area with such a vegetable box scheme. It would require over 2500 highly productive and diverse organic farms.

This calculation above is just a pure demonstration of the marginality of the presently operating initiatives compared to a scheme that could secure the metropolitan area's supply. It also fails to address questions about the most likely limits of such intensification of this model. There would be three hypothetical questions to follow such an exercise: Would there be still enough territory left to be cultivated under such schemes to supply the metropolitan area? Would there be enough agro-entrepreneurs interested in such business plan? Would there be enough organic inputs available for such production intensity.

Without subsidies such a massive imaginary scheme could not work, as the price of the organic vegetable boxes would definitely drop, losing the exceptional market position still secured by the few dozen producers presently operating on these fields. However, the excessive coordination of these alternative schemes would deprive the initiatives from many of their most characteristic aspects, most of which I identified to constitute their ability to create an intimate sense of place. Another issue is the ecological footprint of these on-site pick up vegetable box schemes: the need to establish distributional points or a smart and responsible home-delivery system often came up. With a growing number of such schemes, the need to coordinate the logistics of their distribution would become a critical issue to be addressed in order to make sure that it would not compromise the already controversial zero kilometer claims[25] of these farms.

Could these initiatives ease the metropolitan area's dependence on the industrialized plantations of the globalized food system? This question was the core of those discourses that emphasized that these initiatives eventually contributed to the development of an alternative 'huerta model', which could secure some of the region's food sovereignty. Nevertheless, the

[25] Many of the farms that supply organic vegetable boxes claimed that the produce from their fields fits into a more environmentally friendly transportation scheme with less greenhouse emissions. However, other shared their worries about inviting way too much traffic into the Huerta.

marginality of these initiatives must be acknowledged, as they are operated by a few dozen agro-entrepreneurs on the severely reduced fields of the Huerta surrounding an excessively growing urban core with over 1.55 million inhabitants.

Even though these initiatives are marginal, they operate with high productivity and adequately serve the needs of the small circle of their consumers. Based on the media coverage and the descriptive accounts on these initiatives, I found that they were perceived to be significant enough to serve as symbolic constructive interventions contesting the precarious position of farming in the mainstream imaginary of the Huerta. The alternative economic space created and led by these agro-entrepreneurs is empowered by their supporters. It offers a method of resistance against the pressures of the modern economy for those agriculturists who wish to remain on the fields of the Huerta.

6.1 Revival of the Huerta

The previous chapter analyzed the development of the contemporary representation of the Huerta over the last centuries. First, this section explores the typology and characteristic features of the agro-entrepreneurial initiatives around which the alternative economic space developed in the Huerta. Then, it provides a detailed analysis of how the features and achievements of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives were constantly contrasted to the trends and challenges described in these historical discourses. It focuses on the profile of the agro-entrepreneur ready to challenge the notion that the socio-economic viability of these fields was irreversibly compromised. It maps which aspects of their produce range and distribution strategies help them to differentiate their initiatives, which also translates into their efforts to create a stronger sense of place around the Huerta.

At a first one might think that the alternativeness of this economic space was established through the alternative production and distribution models developed by these

agro-entrepreneurs, contrasted to the ever globalizing food system. However, a closer look (to be provided in this chapter) can reveal that these entrepreneurs have more subtle motivations that go far beyond securing the viability of their business, but allows them to act on their conviction that their contribution is needed to keep these fields and the Huerta alive.

The profile of an alternative agro-entrepreneur

The term 'entrepreneur' often had pejorative connotations in the Huerta, as mostly the urbanizing agents and the intermediaries of the agro-food system were identified by this term. Many interviewees argued that the appearance of a new kind of agro-entrepreneur, who opted for a 'traditional *huertano* lifestyle', and even managed to develop a high quality product line, truly attracted the Valencian people's attention and made them revisit their quite unbecoming views about this profession. Based on the collected interview material I argue that the alternative agro-entrepreneurs of the Huerta became the "key actors [who] begin to construct and sustain networks, retro-innovate and relate to the new emerging consumer markets" (Marsden 2006:210). They represent this 'new breed of entrepreneur', who is "able to mix alternative ecological strategies with new market-based developments" (Marsden 2006:210). The entrepreneur figure in a periurban rural setting was often characterized as an 'agent of change', capable to develop new economic activities (Jack and Anderson 2002; Korsgaard and Noe 2012). They actively participated in both the material and dialectical reconstruction of the Huerta.

The self-esteem and dignity of these agro-entrepreneurs were reoccurring themes during the interviews, as these models meant greater independence for these entrepreneurs, and improved the level of control they could exercise over their lives.

> "The lifestyle we have is important, too. It is also important that the people can see that it is possible to live in accordance with our values. Depending on how much we need to consume we calculate how much we need to work. We

> make little money, but we don't need a lot. Our idea is not to live to work, but to work so we could live. It is important for us so we could do other things and would let us improve ourselves as human beings" – explained a young agriculturist.

The young agriculturist quoted above emphasized the importance of freedom and flexibility that allows them to adjust their workload to their needs. This is what basically defines the relativity of the economic viability of these initiatives.

Mission statements

These agro-entrepreneurs shared a genuine desire to make their clientele understand and share their motivations. A locally distributed boutique lifestyle magazine, *Revista Eina* published a photo series with a few words about the most well-known or interesting personalities of the Huerta (see Figure 6.3 below). The editor of the magazine provided a virtual venue that could serve as the first step to get to know the agriculturists who cultivate the fields of the Huerta and provide the people of Valencia with quality food.

Another website that specialized in promoting the organic movement set out to share online their personal experiences with the initiatives that emerged in the Huerta. Its collaborators uploaded several interviews with members of the active alternative agro-entrepreneurial community.

Fig.6.3. Clippings introducing some of the organic farmers of the Huerta (Source: Revista Eina)

Most agriculturists who have been around for long enough managed to establish a reputation. Besides the direct sales structures they operate within, their outreach to engage others in the cultivation of these fields and their protests against the destruction of these fields were the two most important aspects of their operation that called the attention of the media. However, those agriculturists who appeared from time to time in the media argued that they found it difficult to handle such sudden boost of interest as it was rather difficult to adjust the production to such peaks in the demand. Most of the initiatives have their own websites and some of them felt the need to share their mission statements: (the marked emphases are my own):

> "… our project is driven by the conviction that there is another way to grow the food we eat. We believe that with respectful cultivation techniques and without any form of aggression, we can improve the fertility of the land, to gain more nutritious, healthy and fresh food. We would like to **create a local market** where **the vegetables our fields have to offer could reach directly our consumers, and establish trust-based relationships.** We **aim for interactions** between man and nature that **allows for the ecosystem's regeneration and maintenance**, through sustainable practices that respect biodiversity" (Source: www.lhortadirecta.com)

> "… **we commit, in a co-responsible way, to defend the territory and its resources against all the aggressions**, we demand measures against these aggressions within a framework of advanced social politics, to subordinate the economy to the people's real necessities, to leave behind the promotion of tourism and the construction as prioritized activities, rationalizing the industry and fix the situation of working on the fields. Our commitment includes **demanding effective ways of citizen participation** … in processes that **influence decisions about urbanization and infrastructural projects, and arrangements about our environment and territory arrangements.** ….. **a wide range social debate should be opened up** with the objective to establish the backbone of acceptable territorial, social, economic and energy models that corresponds with the real necessities of the people, rationalize the productive sectors, limit the urbanizing activities, prevent speculation, protect and effectively respect the natural environment and the cultural patrimony, while encouraging the rational use of natural and energy resources.
>
> **FOR A NEW TERRITORY BASED CULTURE, STOP THE DESTRUCTION AND THINK ABOUT THE COUNTRYSIDE WE WANT FOR OUR FUTURE, DEFEND THE TERRITORY!"** (Source: www.aiguaclara.org)

"The project developed slowly, but it truly **reflected the growing interest of the people** in the Huerta. We realized **that it was necessary to have a space that could accommodate all these people and the activities we wanted to offer**. … the project initially aimed to rehabilitate and refurbish an old abandoned farmstead. We started cultivating for auto-consumption and soon it has grown into a group of organic farmers conscious about their environment and food sovereignty. … We **aim to create and maintain relationships** … to **build a bridge between the rural world and the urbanites, to exchange their experience and create synergies**. … We are very close to you and we **believe in fair, local and quality trade**. The short supply chain allows us to adjust the prices to the actual cost of cultivation, avoiding intermediaries and facilitating a direct contact between the producers and the consumers. …We **deal directly with the producers and this way we are able to pay a fair price to them**. Meanwhile, the consumers could experience that **the organic product doesn't have to be expensive**." (Source: www.hortdecarmen.es)

"We are very close to you and **we believe in fair trade and quality production**. Selling through such short supply chain allows us to enjoy a **better quality-price relatio**n, where we can adjust the prices to the real costs of production, and **facilitate a direct contact** between the producer and the consumer" (Source: www.ecocaixa.es)

"…Our principles: **Defend organic agriculture as it is the only sustainable and feasible option** in line with the values of local consumption. **Strengthen the agro-economy of the region, with organic farming models, to defend the territory against the various threats it endures**, like the speculative urbanization and the loss of agrarian employment options. We aim to represent a new agro-ecological model, which means that besides contemplating on the principles of ecology on which we should base our agrarian practices, **we want to incorporate ideas that allow us to strengthen our agriculture by being environmentally and socially committed.** We aim to make people realize that **fair trade begins with small, everyday gestures.** Through the consumption of our products, our work through organic methods aiming to establish a sustainable local economy is being dignified. We want to achieve that **the people could have access to local, quality products, for an affordable price** by eliminating the intermediaries. We aim to bring all the food our consumers need." (Source: www.agrofever.jimdo.com)

"From the producer to the consumer, **without intermediaries**"

(Source: www.hortesostenible.jimdo.com)

" our main goal is to **promote the consumption and production of organic products and raise awareness of the people of Valencia about the contribution of the organic cultivation modes to the conservation of our natural environment**. …. Most importantly your orders need to be periodical and continuous to allow us, the agriculturist to plan our plant rotation and **secure the continuity of production. This way we give a chance for the Valencian Huerta**." (Source: www.hortaviva.org)

"Our core values are: organic production, healthy alimentation, seasonal products, **recognition of the agriculturists, viability and fair price both the producer and the consumer, recovery of the traditional varieties, caring for the fields, local production, and the recovery of the taste of the vegetables, fresh produce**" (Source: www.hortsdelperigall.com)

„AgroLIFE was **established to answer the demand of those people who care about sustainability, who want to live respecting the environment, knowing and reckoning from close the work of an agriculturist** … " (Source: www.agrolife.es)

Neorurals

The appearance of more and more young 'neorurals'[26] who decided to take over the abandoned fields of their families stopped being seen as an unusual phenomenon by the early 2010's. After the burst of the real-estate bubble the local media's coverage on the Huerta shifted from reporting on controversial development projects that brought along territorial aggressions to cover personal stories of young people who begin their own agro-entrepreneurial adventures. These articles often highlighted that these young people often opted for the agrarian profession to reinvent themselves as self-employed agro-entrepreneurs. The newcomer agro-entrepreneurs referred to their initiatives as a 'niche of revival' where they could adopt a new lifestyle, live in harmony with their own convictions, and experience what it means to be in charge.

Unlike older generations, these young people were not interested merely in subsistence farming. Their innovative ideas were mostly market-oriented and required the presence of supportive communities around their projects. Most of them established private community gardens on the fields they reclaimed from their families. The clientele of these community gardens was quite diverse, with the majority being people in their 20's and 30's.

[26] Neorural: people with no professional agrarian experience, usually still living in the city but cultivating the abandoned fields of their family.

Some argued that these young people who appeared on the fields in the times of crisis were just looking for ways to escape the mainstream economy they grew critical of as it just left them behind:

> "People are eager to find alternatives that allow them to escape the system in crisis … with its institutions and commercial systems … people have no more faith in these – some might think that buying directly from the producers they could contribute to the change they would like to see. Or at least distance themselves from the system they disappointed in... This is what the crisis does to the people. They have to open their eyes and see the things as they really are and not believe everything just because they were told so … they soon arrive to say: we want to change this! How can we change this? That is when they start organizing platforms and start looking for alternatives … even people who never thought about it … they look up local producers so they could buy directly from them … they collaborate within a structure they themselves started to build … it is like when the bear awakens … awakening our consciousness and awareness and realizing that it is easy" – said a young man who described himself as a self-made man, being an alternative intermediary for organic fresh produce sourced from the Huerta.

The produce

Diversity

The traditional but highly fragmented smallholder land structure remained an essential characteristic of the Huerta. Most of these initiatives grow a diverse range of plant varieties on the average 2.5 hectares they cultivated (see Figure 6.4 on the next page). Some agriculturists who cultivated fields with different microclimates often complemented each other's vegetable boxes to further diversify their produce range. This also allowed them to focus on cultivating plants and varieties best adapted to a certain climatic niche within the Huerta, and they did not have to worry about producing all the usual contents of a given vegetable box by themselves.

Fig.6.4. Diversity of varieties on an organic farm that prepared organic vegetable boxes (Source: own collection)

Autochthonous varieties

I encountered several stories about how these initiatives' clientele often remain loyal supporters of a given agriculturist as he serves them varieties they are emotionally attached to (e.g.: varieties that used to be planted in their grandparents' garden, varieties that are indispensable ingredients of some family recipe, etc.). Several agriculturists also participate in the coordinated conservation efforts of *Llavors D'Ací* (a local NGO dedicated to the promotion of agro-biodiversity through cooperating in the in-situ breeding of various autochthonous plant varieties). The goal of their seed conservation project was to keep these varieties active on the fields of the Huerta where they originally evolved. This was to secure their continuous adaptation to the climatic changes. Participation in this project helped many agriculturists to gain access to the seeds of traditional varieties.

Seasonality

The agriculturists often complained about how most people lost their awareness about the circles of nature, that they became impatient and ignorant about seasonality.

> "I understand that it is difficult to adapt (to the product range limited by seasonality), because we live in a society where we have everything what we want all year round, so at least these people (our clientele), these 30-40 families make an effort – what is important is to change habits. So people would understand. I can't control them. We offer them one thing and this is all what we can do, I can't convince them – if you can't

get used to it, it is okay… how to expect them to go back in time." – explained a young agriculturist.

Many of these agriculturists shared their frustrations about how their costumers failed to understand how their system operated (e.g.: kept complaining about how the content of their vegetable boxes changed throughout the seasons, or the oddly shaped vegetables, etc.). They argued that many of their costumers failed to see that their initiatives were far more than just providers of healthy food. An old agriculturist who was particularly proud of how there were all kind of small creatures among his lettuces argued that:

"…even the conscious customers are spoiled by the equal sized and perfect shaped goods offered by the supermarkets".

This impatience was also often quoted as a typical sign of their clients' dependence on the conventional food system. The modern day consumer was described being spoiled by the comfort secured by the greenhouses operating all year round. As many of these small-scale producers did not use greenhouses, their produce range truly reflected seasonality. One of my informants highlighted that one should allow the living landscape to follow its own rhythm, and that this could also allow the visitors learn about seasonality as well. They argued that experiencing seasonality was one of the most straightforward means to reconnect people with 'reality'. Their clientele learnt about seasonality through the changing produce range of the vegetable boxes they received, or how the tasks they were invited to participate in on the fields change as the months go by. Many agriculturists argued that these initiatives can reconnect the people of Valencia to the fields. "How that is possible - said a young agriculturist – that there are some people of my age, who grew up without ever having set a foot on these fields? No wonder that they can't grasp what I mean when I say that this is a living thing". The above efforts of the agriculturists to make people aware of the seasonality

and to reconnect them with the fields are efficient ways to create a sense of place and to enhance the embeddedness of the alternative economic space.

The sales

Direct sales and alternative distribution networks

Obviously there were still many signs of how the agriculturists of the Huerta fought to keep their share on the local markets of Valencia. Among these were the home stands in the doorways, reminders of how the fields surrounding the villages of the Huerta were meant to provide them with fresh produce. These home stands contributed not only to the sense of attachment but also to the sense of satisfaction and dependence by satisfying people's basic need for food. However, the shrinking number of home stands (see Figure 6.5 below) started to create a sense of nostalgia, overwhelming feelings of loss people experience when they talk about the gradual disappearance of what they once knew the Huerta to be.

Fig.6.5. Home stand in a village of the Huerta (Source: Markus Sperling 2010, published at Flickr)

Most conventional producers of the Huerta commercialize their produce through cooperatives that secure market for their bulk produce in exchange for lower retail prices but secured sales. Their other option is to have a direct supplier agreement with a local vegetable stand. Contrasted to this practice, the distribution strategies developed by the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives aimed to establish some form of direct interaction with their clientele (e.g.: on-farm sales, producer and consumer associations, etc.). Some opted for commercialization through more conventional intermediaries like organic food stores. The producers argued that at these places at least shopkeepers could provide more detailed information about the origin of their product range to their consumers. Most of the small-scale agro-entrepreneurs who produced organic fresh produce argued that the establishment of a stable local consumer base was their only chance for survival. They were aware of how their competitiveness against the highly efficient plantations was virtually non-existent. Most of these agriculturists developed some sort of organic vegetable box scheme.[27]

Most agriculturists proudly shared stories about their regular clients and positive feedback they received from them. This reinforced their belief in the importance of their presence in the Huerta. The same circle of producers argued that they are not really concerned about the massive import of organic fresh produce from the 'industrial plantations' of Almeria (Southern Spain). As one of my informants, a middle aged organic farmer said:

> "We have already won our core clientele's loyalty by cultivating the taste of their childhood, which is the very essence of the Huerta de Valencia'.

[27] These boxes contained a mix of vegetables, usually enough for a 4 person family, they were delivered or had to be picked up at the farm on a weekly basis. The price of these boxes was usually fixed, but the content varied as the seasons changed. In some cases the producer required at least a few months, or an annual commitment on behalf of their clients so he could plan ahead.

Fig.6.6. Customers picking up their organic vegetable boxes from their agriculturist (Source: own collection)

The depth of their clientele's commitment was a sensitive issue for most agro-entrepreneurs. The direct sales initiatives promote the reinstallation not just the presence of the agriculturists on these fields, but the personal relationships within the food network as well (See Figure 6.6 above). These schemes aimed to recover the trust within the food provision system. There were several pioneers in the Huerta, who were referred to as role models for the younger generations, with their small but quite innovative projects. Producers frequently face the dilemma of how to reach a wider set of consumers without having to sacrifice the 'personal touch' of their initiatives. There were also entrepreneurs who specialized in the coordination of distribution and home-delivery services for those producers who had no sufficient resources to do it by themselves. This allowed them to reach a wider range of clientele but compromised the establishment of a direct relationship with the producers. Some argued that adopting measures that would push these initiatives towards a structure that resembles the conventional market (e.g.: through home deliveries, commercializing through conventional groceries, etc.) was not an acceptable option, while

others were more willing to conventionalize. Nevertheless, some argued that these 'extremist values' with less flexibility could compromise the fragile economic viability of these initiatives:

> "Look, there are three norms you have to comply with for this to be viable … The price should be very similar to the conventional one, even though the production costs are higher, we could gain some moving space by avoiding the intermediaries. [You have to provide] a very easy access to the produce … see, if there is nothing else just the 'military models' (referring to the ones that require a range of commitments on behalf of their customers), the case is lost! … you have to go the this farmer's house with your car, on those paths … when you get there you can't even fit in… and then you find out that there is cabbage, turnips and four or three potatoes in your box … regardless whether you like this or not, this is what you get. This is not a very sustainable business model commercially speaking. Besides the hundred militants, who will continue buying from you? But I believe that this is not an era of militancy. What we need is to provide easy access and a price similar to the conventional assortments. We still need to take advantage of our opportunity to cut through the supply chain and we have the high quality of our produce demonstrated … This is where the initiatives should really start reassessing the feasibility of their business model."

Most of the interviewed alternative agro-entrepreneurs were aware of the changes induced by their initiatives, and they held them to be an equally important feature of their business as the quality of the produce they grow. Yet, they seemed to be more accustomed to talk about the significance of organic cultivation and what the safeguarding of autochthonous varieties means to their operation and to the Huerta in general, than about how their collaboration efforts in establishing alternative distribution infrastructures strengthen their presence in the Huerta.

The interviewees often complained about the individualistic character of the *huertanos* (agriculturists who cultivate these fields), but argued that the historical routine of *tornallom* (mutual aid among the neighboring agriculturists) was still present as the foundation of the present day cooperation schemes. Several small-scale growers decided to

collaborate and develop alternative distribution structures. Their infrastructures ranged from informal producer groups of 2-3 people, who were trying to supplement each other's assortment and improve each other's efficiency (*Ecollaures*[28]), to more formalized and extensive producer and consumer associations that established stores with volunteers and employees responsible for the coordination of their sales (e.g.: *Aigua Clara*[29], *La Llavoreta*[30]). Even the individual growers developed their own social network so they could supply larger producers, supplement their assortment, or establish distribution points at their friends' and supporters' stores with better accessibility.

Nevertheless, there are deeper, voluntary cooperative commitments among certain group of agriculturists, based either on verbal agreements or on the establishment of formal producer associations. These agreements aim to facilitate the everyday operation of these fields (sharing tasks and resources) and to improve their access to the local market by diversifying their produce range, and establishing alternative distribution strategies.

A young agriculturist on the cooperation among the alternative agro-entrepreneurs stated:

> "We could get together a bit more often but I believe that we get along well. There are no fights that would derive from competing with each other. We help out each other quite often – if I don't have some produce for my vegetable basket I can ask someone to help me out, or I can ask someone to plant something for me in advance .. Basically, we can always buy things from each other (to complement our assortment). We are a bit separated from the others, but those in the Northern Huerta have an everyday relationship, they see each other all the time. But we also have good relations with them, they always help if we need something, a tool or some specific information or exchange our experiences on how to do certain tasks. I believe that together we could reach greater goals. You know I don't like the way society is … I would like to have a parallel society based on help exchange … like a community with alternative social security … if one is sick and can't plant

[28] http://ecollaures.jimdo.com/
[29] http://www.aiguaclara.org/
[30] http://www.lallavoreta.com/

> what he needs that given moment others can help him out … or coordinate certain chores … but the people live too "well" to understand the need for these things, they are not prepared until they see this as an extra workload."

This quote well exemplifies that these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives managed to establish new networks of mostly young agriculturists who are ready to base their business models on various forms of cooperation. They comply with the ideal of 'keeping the Huerta alive' not just by keeping its fields under cultivation and inviting their clientele to visit their fields but by having established a community rooted in the common goal of cultivating these fields.

Besides the individual producers and small circles of agriculturists, bigger producer and consumer associations were established as well (like the Aigua Clara and La Llavoreta). Their stores served as direct interface with their members and their ad-hoc clientele. Meanwhile more recent associations of consumer groups emerged, like *Vland Solaris*[31], organized to promote responsible consumption habits, organic farming and the development of local economies while preserving the identity and cultural patrimony of what they call "their Huerta". Other producers managed to engage their clientele and together organized a cultural association, like *Terra i Salut*[32] with organic community gardens since 2008.

Many 'specialized eco-shops' offer a wider range of organic fresh produce assortment, but it is not always sourced from the Huerta. An increasing number of agro-entrepreneurs set up homepages to support a more coordinated distribution of the fresh produce cultivated in the Huerta, they listed a great number of distribution points, these specialized shops are often on their lists. They also offered the option of home-delivery.

[31] www.vlandsolaris.org
[32] www.terraisalut.com

In 2012, the *Unió de Llaurados i Ramaders*, a large Valencian agrarian union with over 20.000 associates, also opened their downtown store[33] to secure their share of the local organic market. The media referred to this move as the 'consolidation of the sales of organic product" (Levante 06 April 2012). However, this grand-scale enterprise with clearly sufficient financial background were argued to have caused serious trouble for the smaller historical associations, like *La Llavoreta* that closed the same year as the Unió store opened – a coincidence pointed out by a highly critical informant of mine. The new store managed to offer a price range similar to the conventional products, exceeding only up to 15% the conventional products' pricing. They highlighted that they commercialize many seasonal organic fresh products from the Huerta, but to secure a wider product range they also sell products originating from other regions of Spain. At the opening, they calculated having the potential to serve about 500 to 800 weekly orders submitted through their webpage.

The decorations on the walls of their downtown store openly communicated values that were just subconsciously present in the direct relations of the small-scale farmers selling their produce to their fix clientele (see Figure 6.7 on the next page). The messages read on the walls were the following: "store of the union of Valencian agriculturists, organic fruits and vegetables of high quality from our Huerta", "a healthy organic agrarian model committed to our culture", "recovering our autochthonous seeds", "wild fruits from our forests", "tigernut milk of Valencia", "organic orange of Valencia", "the best of our Huerta", "you will know what the agriculturist earns".

[33] www.puntdesabor.com

Fig. 6.7. Decorated wall of the store of Unió de Llaurados i Ramaders, Puntdesabor.com by Daniel Nebot (Source: www.experimenta.es)

Some of the interviewed agriculturists argued that this project of the *Unió* proved that a significant portion of the local organic schemes' clientele were too price sensitive and not sufficiently loyal to their original source of organic products. However, when asking organic producers who put together vegetable boxes, almost all of them argued that they have a sufficiently stable clientele, who value their commitment enough that some slight price difference (which could be easy to achieve by importing more efficiently produced goods from the Southern greenhouses) or some fancy marketing would not make them leave.

Besides these associations and this union based store, many alternative retailers appeared in Valencia who specialized in the coordination of supply, demand and delivery of the organic and alternative products, and they often tried to complement their product range with locally sourced organic fresh produce. However, the most significant innovation in the contemporary fresh produce market of Valencia was the appearance of the organic vegetable box schemes. The movement for the protection of the Huerta embraced these initiatives, while these initiatives themselves created a new venue where its discourses could further develop.

Trust based (organic) certification

When I told people that I studied alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives in the Huerta, most of them assumed that I study organic farms. When I asked them about how they made that assumption, they usually responded that it was the term 'alternative' that led them to believe it. Even though it is true that almost all of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial models applied organic production methods, they assigned different levels of importance to the 'organicness' of their initiatives. Almost all the people I interviewed emphasized that the priority of each agriculturist should be to 'keep the Huerta alive' regardless of the methods of cultivation or the distribution systems they choose to apply. Yet, there were still some people who argued that the only responsible way of cultivating the Huerta should be without chemicals and argued that continuing with a chemical based agro-production is an aggression towards the environment in general and towards the Huerta more specifically. They argued that the improved soil conditions, water quality and a vivid characteristic wildlife were equally essential elements needed to keep these fields alive.

Biot Gimeno (1998) argued that converting the Huerta into an exclusively organically cultivated territory could secure its economic viability and a decent living for its agriculturists. Those who decided to apply organic methods of cultivation had to choose a strategy through which they could prove their claims. Just like the export-oriented organic producers, most small-scale producers of the Huerta applied the official organic certification scheme (CEACV in Valencia). However, many joined the community supported self-certification scheme developed by *Ecollaures,* a circle of local agriculturists. Those in charge of this new scheme stated that they saw that there was a substantial need for such a trust based certification alternative like the ones they established. Besides these two options, many small-scale organic farmers still believe that the 'ultimate guarantee' they could offer is their

word. These producers challenged the need to go under official organic certification processes. They considered it to be an unnecessary waste of resources (especially if they have a low production rate and fields too small to apply for any form of subsidies for producing organic). They argued that they would not mind the control, as they have nothing to hide, but they were against the high costs of certification, not proportional to the small size of their operations, as it would severely affect their prices. Some also mentioned that they heard that supportive municipalities in neighboring communities took over these certification costs. The appearance of self-certification schemes responded to the need to provide a well-structured alternative to the official organic certification, which goes beyond trust in an individual producer. A young agriculturist shared her opinion about the need of guarantees:

> "We were approached by a consumer association who asked whether our produce is certified. We told them that it was not. They asked us what kind of guarantees we could offer them. I told them that we were the guarantee. They could come to visit our farm... They could try our produce. The guarantee is my lifestyle, my work methods. It is all I can give. We usually invite our consumers to share a meal."

The need to develop a collaborative self-certification scheme derived from the challenge faced by many agriculturist operating organic vegetable box schemes collectively to prove their consumers that indeed all their partners shared the same commitment as the one who eventually sold the collectively prepared boxes on their farm. The on-farm direct sales strategies were perceived as an 'incubator retail space', with no pressures or expectations of some official certification. This developed a completely new venue for those accustomed to comply with the requirements of those intermediaries who facilitated the exportation of their produce.

The agro-ecological movement, whose ideals these initiatives followed, could be characterized by the following:

> "[A]common interest to construct social spaces in characteristic ways … [putting great emphasis on keeping them] participative, horizontal, ecological, non-market oriented … [aiming to] cover collectively the citizens' concrete everyday necessities like alimentation, employment, and health …[and] the management of common spaces, and the relation with the environment"… [The participants of these movements usually aim] to construct livable spaces for themselves and for those interested, in which the social relations and interactions were not mediated by the market or [guided by] profit, but where the value of the things were fixed by the community, and where the personal relations and the construction of the community were central elements, on which all projects were supposed to be built … spaces that put the economy to serve the people and not the other way around" (Badal Pijuán and López García 2006 in Simón Fernández et al. 2010:139).

A young agriculturist commented on the disproportionate pressure from their clientele to prove that their produce was indeed produced with organic methods:

> "I find it interesting that the people always ask you for guarantees and certificates, all concerned and eventually they just go and buy whatever they find … they don't think about where it comes from, who cultivated it and how.. But when it comes to organic produce they have to know everything … It might be about the higher price range … they might feel that if I am paying extra for quality so I need guarantees. "

While the views of a certification agency's officer were the following:

> "It (the organic produce) has to be properly labeled and controlled, because the fact that there is control behind, a guarantee … well this is what constitutes one of the great strengths of the sector. You can be sure that you are buying what you are paying for. Of course if you know the agriculturist you don't really need labels … but if you are buying in a supermarket you need a guarantee. The organic sectors advantage is that they inform the consumers and maintain proper control."

These discussions about the controversial need to apply for official certification schemes or not indicated that these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives were confident about their ability to developing a rather stable and highly supportive clientele characterized by high level of trust.

Need for a 'Produce of the Huerta' trademark?

Most of my informants agreed that even though there were organic farms in the Huerta since the late 1970's, no conscious efforts were made to emphasize that their produce originated from these specific fields. The 2000's marked the beginning of a period when highlighting that a given project indeed assumed the task of cultivating the fields of the Huerta became an essential feature of the alternative economic space. Branding of the Huerta meant to raise awareness about the existence of agro-entrepreneurial initiatives that set out to cultivate the Huerta. The promoters of these initiatives argued that it would be essential to have more resources to raise awareness about the consequences of sourcing food from the Huerta (e.g.: support local agriculturists, locally sourced food, more chance to find autochthonous varieties, support the continuity of a cultural landscape, etc.). Many of them also felt the need to establish a trademark that would differentiate the 'produce of the Huerta' and somewhat institutionalize the market. They speculated that a scheme similar to the European Union's 'protected geographical indication' (PGI) could support the position of the fresh produce sourced from the Huerta on the Valencian market. When the Valencian tigernut (chufa de Valencia) acquired such PGI label, the social and cultural factors of its cultivation were recognized. The documentation of its specific label stated that "[t]igernut growing is traditional in this area and is of great socioeconomic importance, as it is the main means of subsistence for more than 500 farmers, who have extensive expertise in managing the crop" (European Commission 2012).

Such PGI schemes have an "important role to play in the regeneration of the countryside since they ensure that agro-foodstuffs are produced in a way that conserves local plant varieties, rewards local people, supports rural diversity and social cohesion, and promotes new job opportunities in production, processing and other related services"

(Fischler 2004:443). Even though the PGI scheme was usually used as a tool to advance the internationalization of certain products (Beletti et al. 2007), the promoters of the agro-entrepreneurial initiatives that aimed for the development of local market argued that such scheme could back up their discourses and promote the importance of sourcing food locally, from the endangered fields of the Huerta. The self-certification scheme of Ecollaures served similar purpose as it primarily meant to prove the organicness of their produce. All the entrepreneurs interviewed agreed that such coordinated scheme could allow them to raise awareness about the importance of purchasing food from these specific and endangered fields. But they highlighted that most of their consumer base is already aware of the fact that they operate within the Huerta. Most of them still found that it would be necessary to indicate the origins of their produce if sold in grocery stores. As one older agriculturist said, "one should hope that his products would not mix up with those tomatoes that come from those huge greenhouses of the South." Although he said that it was quite often the case, as many small neighborhood grocery shops fail to indicate the origin of their fresh produce assortment. Even the stores that specialize in organic and other non-conventional products and source their fresh produce locally, often do not find it important to indicate the origin of these products on their displays. A young agro-entrepreneur highlighted that if these agro-entrepreneurs would start emphasize that they indeed produce their fresh produce assortment by cultivating the historical fields of the Huerta, they could change what the people of Valencia have in their mind about these fields. The new representation of the Huerta would make people think of these fields as the most authentic source of their daily fresh vegetables.

Defensive localism and local fair trade

The difficulty of the decisions about a given agro-entrepreneurial initiative's pricing strategy and all the internal disputes around it became a characteristic feature of this alternative economic space.

Most of my informants found it important to discuss why they though these were (but should not be) conflicts about the way the relevance of price was expressed in their transaction. Their discourses on marketness concentrated around the concept of fair pricing and fair trade. They found that the discussions about fair pricing should go beyond the acknowledgement of the high production costs faced by these small-scale producers and the high quality of their produce. Instead it should allow and call for the appreciation of these agro-entrepreneurs dedication to the maintenance of these fields and how they should be compensated for it. The organizer of one of the consumer association's articulated it in the following way:

> "I don't think that the initiatives here have reached a level of fair-trade … their customers should be more conscious about the reasons behind their purchasing decisions … consciously taking into account that the price they ask really allows the producer to have a decent living…decent compensation for his work or not... but I believe that here they might know the producer a bit, but most of them are not really aware of his actual situation"

An older generation volunteer at a producer and consumer association argued straightforwardly that that these initiatives should be identified as local fair trade projects. Most of the entrepreneurs shared their hopes about how a wider range of their clientele would eventually acknowledge how their business models truly follow the concept of local fair trade, which "combines localism with the ethical principles of fair trade"(Clegg 2003:iv). The description most entrepreneurs provided about their initiatives would fit into the concept of local fair trade. In order to reach their full potential, these projects had to develop a truly

supportive clientele. The support of their clientele was typically manifested through specific forms of self-organization, such as a proactive group of neighbors looking up and contracting a few producers to supply them with fresh produce regularly, clients and other supporters of these initiatives volunteering in the development of a network of distribution points, proactively participation in awareness raising about the existence of these initiatives etc.). However, there were certain uncertainties about whether their clientele was truly 'on board' or not. The true dedication of these agro-entrepreneurs was best described in their narratives elaborating on their frustrations about the lack of commitment and awareness of their clientele and the people of Valencia in general towards the initiatives' potential to change the compromised representation of these fields.

Without the direct support of their clientele, and the elimination of the countless intermediaries that characterize the conventional value chain, the agriculturists in charge could not earn fair wages and they couldn't offer their produce at a more affordable price. Some entrepreneurs who were in charge of the coordination of well-established consumer associations argued that fair prices should be a basic requirement to secure the socio-economic viability of these initiatives. They often disappointedly reported that such fair prices would require more active support networks, characterized with higher levels of cooperation. Agriculturists often argued that the price they ask for their produce should be predictable, transparent, covering the production costs without overcharging.

> "Our philosophy is to make sure that the box is not expensive. All year long it is 10 Euros, this means that in the winter it might be a bit more expensive but in the summertime when everything starts to grow we put much more into – you also try to compensate the two circles of maximum and minimum production. We also avoid pricing the units, all are the same price. On the market usually at the beginning of the season the produce is more expensive and in high season it's cheaper, we try to avoid this by not fluctuating our prices."- said one of the organic agriculturist I interviewed

Many of them articulated their awareness of being accused of limiting the access to these fields to a clientele with higher purchasing power. However, they highlighted that their business models consciously addressed this issues as many of them opted for direct sales schemes with less or no intermediaries, offered food for volunteering, offered 'grow yourself' plots with assistance, and actively promoted and supported the establishment of producer and consumer associations through which lower prices could be secured. An old agriculturist mentioned that he allowed his neighbors in need to pick the onions and potatoes left on his fields after harvest. He emphasized that it used to be a common practice before, in exchange for helping with the harvest. Other growers remembered that they rented out their first plots to people in need long before the community gardens became popular. Besides the wide range of traditional and experimental means of allowing those with lower purchasing power to have access to these high quality products, heated discussions developed about the contemporary society's priorities about where quality food stand in their family budget. Some of them argued that locally produced organic food should be recognized as an 'affordable luxury'.

Many agriculturists, like this older generation volunteer who worked at a producer and consumer association, straightforwardly argued that most of these alternative initiatives that recently developed in the Huerta "should be identified as local fair trade projects". Her arguments were the following:

> "…[these projects] allow people to remain on the fields and earn more decent money. You see: When you buy fair-trade it isn't about your own health … it is about knowing that you contribute to improve someone else's life. It is a different concept."

Contrasted to this a newspaper that described the difficulties faced by those who kept on cultivating these fields, argued that the wages agriculturists earn meant an "insult and death sentence for agriculture", and that the consumer associations should promote a 'just

salary' for these agriculturists, secure some kind of a 'fair trade' system with equitable and supportive trade relationships that guarantee of the local origin of its supplies and non-speculative prices (2012 May, 20Minutos). Another article presented an example of a network of organic farmers in the south of the Community of Valencia (El País 2012 April) who emphasized that they created an open platform aiming to "incentivize the fair trade of organic, local and seasonal produces". However, their members highlighted that there was "still a great deal of awareness-raising needed among the local consumers" and that "teamwork and networking is the only way left" for local producers to meet the challenges of the agro-industry. They emphasized that they "need to join forces and generate supportive synergies to increase [their] capacity to supply the consumers and cultivate their loyalty". The alternative cultivation and distribution strategies developed by these initiatives also made them highly dependent on their supportive communities. Even though most of them were confident about the fidelity of their clientele, they were often disappointed about the level of their commitment and readiness to accept certain compromises (e.g.: seasonality, limited product range, less perfect looking produce etc.).

6.2 Empowerment through the Huerta

The initiatives analyzed in this section succeeded in providing access to the fields of the Huerta for a wide range of people (the disillusioned, the adventurous, the unemployed, the immigrant, the young). These people were given the chance to develop a stronger sense of place of the Huerta. They were empowered to participate in the social landscape creation processes through their active participation not only in the cultivation of these fields but also in forming a shared understanding of the Huerta and creating new understandings of the Huerta's urban utility.

Invite urbanites to cultivate the fields

An opinion piece in a local newspaper had a telling sub-title: "When the farmers who cultivated these fields all their lives and cursed about how little it profited them, comes an army of new gardeners looking for disconnection and a reencounter with nature". It went on exploring the background of this phenomenon:

> "If we mix the narrative of 'another world is possible' with the mysticism and love for nature and some Zen philosophy and we also add this strong will to recover our origins and reencounter with the roots of our identity, we might understand what is behind it" (2010 December, Levante).

A quote from one of these newcomer gardeners allowed the readers to get a clear picture about what such gardening projects mean to their participants:

> "The garden is a way to escape the daily routine and this consumerist society which has all of us clouded. For us it has been a blessing and it has made me have a new vision of the world. When I sit on my chair in front of the garden, it is a way to relax and to think of things I have never thought of. And with this I am already happy" (2010 December, Levante).

It was not just the people on charge of these initiatives who found something they couldn't find in the city. The journalist referred to the clientele of the periurban community gardens as 'victims of the technological 21st century' who found a getaway in these gardens. Another article described how hobby gardeners described being on their assigned plots like 'returning to the origins' and 'escaping the dark side of consumerism'.

Over the last decades many schemes were developed, under which the people of Valencia could participate in the cultivation of the Huerta. In the beginning some organic farmers decided to invite their clientele to volunteer doing certain tasks on a weekend to get the feeling of the Huerta. Others decided to assign rentable plots on their fields and offered professional assistance. Even though the agriculturist almost never failed to complain about the urbanites' severe disconnection from the fields, they had to acknowledge that there was a

growing interest to reconnect with these fields (See Figure 6.8 below). Their endeavors provided a venue for gaining shared experiences linked to the Huerta.

Most landowners gave almost full authority to their tenants to what they wanted to grow on the fields assigned to them. However, almost exclusively all these community gardens promoted organic cultivation methods and forbid the use of pesticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers.

Fig.6.8. Hobby gardeners cultivating the fields of the Huerta, at the hobby gardens of Nàquera (Source: public Facebook album of the initiative)

Besides the business models fully dedicated to community gardens, there were several production oriented farms that invited guests, customers and even tenants or volunteers to participate in the cultivation of their fields (See Figure 6.9 on the next page). They either assigned tasks on the fields primarily cultivated by them and their farmhands or they assigned plots exclusively for their new tenants. In the latter case, the landowners' single most important condition was to stipulate the use of organic cultivation methods, offering professional assistance.

Many small-scale organic farmers argued that they felt responsible for securing easier access to their high quality produces even for those who could not afford them. To answer

this problem, some farms offered volunteering positions where their participants could take home food in exchange of their work. They often argued that these part-time volunteering positions were at the same time an alternative form of employment and a setting for productive recreation. The agriculturists also mentioned that their volunteers could learn how to improve their self-subsistence and self-esteem, and they always mentioned that it is also a great way to meet new people and establish friendships.

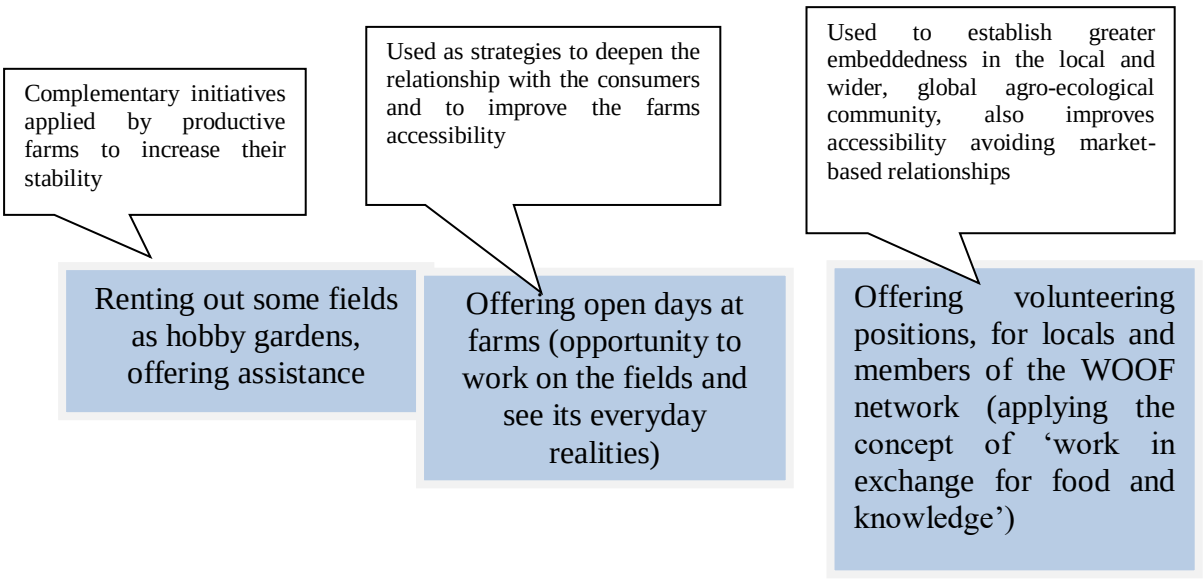

Fig.6.9.: Types of gardens inviting urbanites to cultivate the fields of the Huerta (Source: own elaboration)

Some of the organic farmers of the area also receive volunteers through the WWOOF movement[34]. These provided a learning opportunity for people interested in starting up their own farms, and granted access to high quality food for those who could not afford purchasing it. These activities (offering volunteering positions and setting aside some plots for rent, as

[34] WWOOF (http://www.wwoof.org/) is an international movement, which established and maintains a directory of volunteers and receiving organic, aiming to promote organic farming and an exchange of experience.

well as sharing their expertise with those interested) have been around as a well-established practice among the most prominent organic farmers since the very beginning of the organic movement's arrival to the Huerta. An older agriculturist explained that it used to be a common practice to help families in need. Indeed the first non-professional plots were offered to such families. However, some entrepreneurial-minded farmers discovered that renting out some of their fields could be means to diversify their portfolio. Table 6.1. below summarizes the statements used to characterize such initiatives.

Table 6.1 Discourse themes characterizing the initiatives that provide access to the cultivation of the Huerta

The following statements characterized the initiatives that invited urbanites to start cultivating their fields:

- stabilize the economic viability of their farms by offering a fix annual contribution to their budget.
- deepen connections with the neighborhood
- establish a space for knowledge transfer
- develop appreciation for traditional agrarian wisdom
- allow urbanites to escape their lives and the city
- allow urbanites to grow healthy food for themselves
- create communities (among the tenants and with the professional agriculturists)
- mend the damage of generational discontinuity
- establish vivid, contemporary visual memories of the Huerta
- improve accessibility of the entrepreneurs and extends market-based relationships
- create a feeling of pride, being able to grow vegetables

Most farmers initially were looking for ways to establish stronger bonds with their customers and their neighbors. Those producers who built their business around supportive consumer groups explained how it is essential for them to have their supporters feel more connected to their farms. Therefore, with certain regularity they organize open days on their farms and ask their clientele to volunteer in less demanding tasks. Some also argued that such schemes, besides deepening the producer-consumer relationships and building fidelity, could

contribute to the validation of their community supported self-certification scheme, especially if they do not apply for any official organic label.

The current crisis made several mostly young landowners and organic farmers aware of the business opportunity in formally establishing rentable plots on their fields and offering assistance to those interested in this form of productive recreation. The media coverage on these initiatives was mostly enthusiastic. Several articles contributed to the establishment of the figure of a young agro-entrepreneur: an adventurous hero who had to find an alternative to their compromised urban identities on their own, quite often through the support of his or her dedicated clientele. For instance, there was a story of a young stage light technician, who after having lost his job decided to take over the two hectares farm of his family and started his 'entrepreneurial adventure' as he established his organic farm, hoping to establish a direct clientele so he could escape the trap of having to supply intermediaries (2012 March, Las Provincias). The article quoted him arguing that he was ready to earn his living with something 'rejected by so many others' these days. The article emphasized that he knew that this initiative will not make him a millionaire, but he was confident about the viability of his initiative that would allow him to make a living and satisfy him by allowing him to be in touch with nature and in contact with people who share his philosophy. The article described how he managed to develop his clientele through his online presence and emphasized that he argued that it served as the foundation of his relationship with his clientele. He also admitted that the role of word of mouth is also a critical factor for such a project. He established several distribution points to make access to these produces more comfortable. Nevertheless, he found it necessary to complement his varying income from the organic vegetable box scheme he developed for the distribution of his produce. Therefore, he assigned some of his land and marked out some rentable plots. By this he managed to complement his income and

secure some fix minimal earnings. The article described him as a proactive and innovative young man.

Another young farmer did the same thing with an innovative twist. He positioned his rentable fields as an 'agrarian leisure center', which consisted of nothing else but the fields, a tool shed and a common area with basic facilities. He was quoted saying that the traditional market is very difficult and even though he knows this project will not make him rich, at least he can "obtain profitability from a field that fallen into disuse" (2011 October, Levante).

Empower the unemployed

In 2010, the Platform of Paterna's Unemployed (*Plataforma de Parados de Paterna*) presented their vision to establish a three-year educational project for the municipality's unemployed on the fields managed by the municipality. These fields were proximate to the Túria National Park[35]. The project planned to provide practical agrarian training in organic farming to its participants and eventually would have invited them to form a producer cooperative.

Even though the guidelines of most urban gardens explicitly state that the produce cultivated on their premises are not for sale, the organizing members of the platform explicitly broke this 'rule of auto-consumption'. Their representative expressed his hopes that one day their fields will produce for the market, and could acquire a label designed to

[35] Since 2007, the Western fields of the Huerta now enjoy the protection of the Túria Natural Park, which covers about 5000 hectares of the Huerta and 4600 hectares of forested area alongside the Túria riverbed. In 2008, a community garden project was established under the supervision of the Júlia Farm (*Centro de Educación Mediambiental Granja Júlia* – Júlia Environmental Educational Center). The project aimed to provide access to fields of their Huerta through community gardens that served as outdoor classrooms where the philosophical, scientific and technical principals of organic farming could be promoted. Besides the courses and workshops, the center also organized awareness raising discussions about the most relevant environmental, cultural, socio-economic and historical issues that characterize the Huerta. This farm became a preferred venue where the active citizens could gather to discuss how the environmental quality and economic viability of the Huerta could be improved. The website of the farm states that their members pledged to promote alternative agrarian projects to "keep this rural space of vital importance alive" even at the times of the crisis.

indicate that their produce originated from the endangered and protected fields of the Túria National Park. He also contemplated that their project could gain wider public support that recognizes the importance of their work contributing to the maintenance of the Huerta, which might be expressed through the emergence of a supportive consumer base. He envisioned the project as a tool to fight unemployment in the region. Nevertheless, after months of negotiation the local municipality offered to sign an agreement that would not cover the estimated costs of the project, offering only 13.500 EUR of the 30.000 EUR they applied for. After their decision was made public, their activists refused to leave the chambers of the town hall (See Figure 6.10 below) and spent several days to manifest their resentment (Levante 30 March 2010).

Fig.6.10. Activists of the Platform of the Unemployed of Paterna occupied the town hall of Paterna asking to grant them fields in order to create urban gardens for the unemployed (2010) (Source: http://napicolpcp.blogspot.hu/2010_03_01_archive.html)

Similar to this project, an unemployed platform of Montcada also organized community gardens as a part of their self-education and self-employment project in 2012.

The members of the platform were invited to cultivate some available fields, to produce organic vegetables. They work mostly with local varieties with the assistance of Sembra en Saó. On their homepage they described the project as a great proof of this community's self-organization skills, while promoting a 'decent occupation', which could allow these people to alleviate the effects the great economic crisis had on them.

These reclaimed fields represent a new dimension of the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The unemployed demanding access to the abandoned fields of the Huerta suggests that access carries the hope of self-sufficiency. The purpose of this initiative was to reclaim these fields as means to empower its participants. This coordinated project exemplifies the rediscovered relevance of cultivating the abandoned fields of the Huerta. Besides complementing their family's diet with affordable fresh vegetables and potentially providing an additional source of income, cultivating these fields could also allow the participants of such projects to regain their dignity. One of the members of the platform argued that such task could make them feel an important part of the society again. He talked about how people should appreciate their efforts in the cultivation and maintenance of these fields that constitute a significant part of their patrimony. However, when talking about the hypothetical plans about commercializing the produce cultivated on these fields, he admitted that most probably they would use a scheme that highlights the origin of the produce only as they had not really thought about promoting the social innovation behind their project. He argued that without such initiatives the Huerta would cease to be a living landscape, and therefore he expressed his hopes that the cultivation of these fields would soon be recognized as a dignifying occupation. The presence of these people on the fields took the movement to another level of establishing constructive interventions that directly engage in the maintenance of these fields through a coordinated management structure of publicly owned fields.

Empower the immigrant

The *Verdura Solidaria*[36] project offered practical training in organic agriculture to Sub-Saharan immigrants[37]. It was established by a group of agriculturists and students of the department of agronomy of a local university, in 2011. They aimed to enhance these people's chances on the labor market, and to promote cultural exchange and improve their daily lives. The food cultivated under this project is delivered to four immigrant shelters whose inhabitants participate in the program. The project also coordinated the sales of eco-solidarity boxes, sold for 30 EUR.

The project is presented as an opportunity to raise awareness among the university students about the realities of both the immigrants' situation and the difficulties faced by the traditional cultivation model on the degrading fields that is part of their own habitat. The organizers provided volunteering positions for young agro-professionals to gain practical experience. Besides the work they did on the fields, the promoters and volunteers of the project participated in many talks and events organized by local NGOs promoting organic agriculture, responsible consumption, social agriculture, food sovereignty, urban gardens, neighborhood associations and consumer groups.

> "As we are discovering, this project is not just a training course in organic farming. To say that would be significant simplification of the true extent of this shared learning experience, where in the end it turned out we all became teachers and students. .. this is an opportunity to stop and take a moment so we could continue towards a more just and humane future. " (Cerrada Serra 2012[38])

[36] http://verdurasolidaria.wordpress.com/

[37] participants of two larger scale projects, *Obrint camins nous* and *Tandem.*

[38] http://revistasoberaniaalimentaria.wordpress.com/2012/08/24/grecia-recupera-soberania-alimentaria-y-tambien-el-estado-espanol/

Fig.6.11. Immigrants participating in an organic agriculture course of the Verdura Solidaria project. (Source: http://verdurasolidaria.wordpress.com/)

In a micro documentary aired on TVE[39] the project managers explained that the main goal of their project is to ease the difficulties of these people integrating into the Spanish society. The project provides a venue where they can learn about each other's cultures and personal stories. They emphasized that the project teaches both the volunteers and the participants about the spirit of collaboration.

In the summer of 2014, the promoters of the project organized a summer school for children who participate within programs organized by social services. The immigrant alumni of their previous courses acted as volunteers helping out the organizers and passing over what they learnt to the next generation.

[39] http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/efecto-ciudadano/efecto-ciudadano-microaccion-verdura-solidaria/2103570/

Fig.6.12. Alumni of the Verdura Solidaria project teaching children who participate in their summer course. (Source: public Facebook album of Verdura Solidaria, accessed: 2014.08.06.)

Educate the new generation

The idea of organic school gardens started to proliferate in the Huerta since the 2000's. These school gardens target the next generation, hoping to establish the awareness of agrarian patrimony of the Huerta, and to plant the seeds of a certain sensibility towards the conflicts that the disappearance of these fields mean. It is no longer extraordinary to find a neatly cultivated garden on the premises of a primary school or a kindergarten at some municipalities of the Huerta. Enthusiastic teachers and some parents or relatives with sufficient experience in gardening started to plant gardens on the schoolyards a few years ago.

A young agriculturist, volunteering in one of these gardens, shared with me her views on these projects:

> "…for these kids experiencing that they are capable of growing food is amazing. When they see us on the street, they wave and tell us that today they ate the lettuce we planted… or another day they made a tortilla with the fresh garlic we grew together".

There were many activities related to these gardens. Besides the cultivation itself, these activities cover a wide range of environmental studies, art projects, food preparation, and even mathematics. A teacher responsible for the coordination of such activities in one of the gardens I visited argued that besides building a sense of self-empowerment in these kids, she found that its allows them to establish an early bond with the agriculturists. This can create an essential basis to teach kids to appreciate the work of those providing them with food. She explained to following:

> "It turned out to be quite an important outcome that the kids could feel being the protagonists of these projects… they are allowed to experiment. This region used to be surrounded by active fields, now the town is rather industrial but still the kids are used to go with their grandparents to pick some oranges on their fields. It is not something they have no idea about … what we want is that they participate in the process … they are really motivated. … Usually it is difficult to make them eat vegetables, but when we recollected the vegetables that they planted and made a salad in class, they ate all of it and they loved it."

The first thing the people responsible for these projects highlight is that these gardens teach kids about the importance of healthy eating and teaches them such basic skills as recognizing given vegetables and knowing their names. They also learn about the everyday tasks of agriculturists, and understand how the cultivation of their fields surrounding their homes is part of their heritage. It allows them to reconnect with their grandparents' generation, which had more personal experience related to the Huerta. Curiously, many teachers argued that after they had inserted garden related activities into the children's schedule, they seemed to focus more on the school work in general as well. Finally, most importantly the people responsible for these projects never failed to mention the pride the kids take in their ability to grow food. The interpretation of *Sembra en Saó* (a Valencian association created for the conservation of local varieties) on the importance of these school projects highlighted that:

> "In the atmosphere created by the continuous aggressions towards the Huerta de Valencia, the organic school gardens create an opportunity to first provide an alternative form of education, more participative and with direct contact with the environment, and secondly involve the younger generations in the fight for the defense of the Huerta through awareness raising and building consciousness" (Source: Sembra en Saó homepage).

6.3 Recuperation of the Huerta

This section presents how the neighborhood association of Benimaclet reclaimed some of the historical fields under the slogan: "*Volem vore l'horta i no la terra morta*!!" (We want to see fields, not dead land!). This case study explores the power of a collectively shared sense of loss based on the historical discourses developed for the protection of the Huerta, and the power of collective action fighting this sense of loss.

"Below a meter deep layer appeared again the blackish soil of the Huerta. The dream just came true. The Huerta is down there, just waiting for someone to rescue her" – words of a journalist who witnessed one of the most emotional stages of reclaiming the fields that used to be an intrinsic part of the cultural landscape of Benimaclet.

In 1971 the village of Benimaclet was attached to the city of Valencia. The local media commemorated the 10th anniversary of its integration by emphasizing how this district miraculously managed to safeguard its 'intense taste of the Huerta' that remained the core of its people's character, something they refused to give up. Even descriptions written the 1990's argued that the district managed to preserve its rural character with its active fields at the very edge of the urban periphery. However, the urbanization plan of 1994 radically redefined the edges of the district, expanding onto the fields that used to embrace the village from the East. The acceptance of the urbanization plan resulted in radical land preparations, destroying all the fields that had been kept under cultivation until then. Several of those fields

were converted into wasteland where construction material was deposited from other real estate projects. The natural surroundings of Benimaclet changed drastically. However, the approved urbanization project soon came to a standstill.

In February 2010, after their complaints had been ignored by the local authorities, the neighborhood association of Benimaclet[40] took action. The volunteers of the association started cleaning up the site in order to convert one part of the land into a parking lot with 200 trees. They summoned the costs and signed an agreement with the owner of the fields that the parking lot should remain non-profit oriented and used only by the neighbors.

A year later, in 2011 the neighborhood association started discussions about recovering some fields of the Huerta. They concentrated on those sections of the building area that were originally assigned to build public parks on, areas to be managed by the local municipality. The plan was to prepare a 4000m^2 territory for a community garden, divided into 60 mostly 50m^2 and some 80m^2 plots. Complications started when the local municipality approved their plans, but the present owner of the site, BBVA bank, refused to transfer them the land use rights.

The neighborhood association proposed BBVA a symbolical rent agreement, which went ignored by the banking group. In July 2011, despite the fact that their proposal was ignored by BBVA, they reached an agreement with the local branch of the irrigation community to gain access to water from the irrigation channels that used to supply the territory they set out to reclaim. Later in September 2011, they started the preparation of the plots.

[40] http://avvbenimaclet.wordpress.com/

Fig.6.13. The Benimaclet neighborhood association's demonstration in front of the BBVA headquarters [Recover the huerta of Benimaclet, BBVA= speculators] (Source: Melderomer, at Flickr)

BBVA continued to ignore the proposed rental contract the association sent to them. They sent security guards to keep the neighbors out of the territory, which they had already started recovering. The media coverage was supportive of the association's efforts:

> "We all saw what was written on the horizon of uncultivated lands with wastelands on the periphery of our villages and cities, where oranges and fertile gardens were cultivated before. These are the landscapes of capitalism, testimony of the speculative eagerness of the contractors and the banking entities promoting PAIs [urbanization plans] that are frozen now, accumulating garbage waiting for some uncertain economic recovery. However, the crises have always spurred the citizens' creativity, encouraging initiatives like the exciting urban garden project promoted by the Neighborhood Association of Benimaclet, responding to a collective desire to recover the bond with our beloved Huerta, which should have never been destroyed" (Levante 8 October 2011).

It highlighted that it is a legitimate right of a neighborhood to recover its roots, as being able to do so gives them hope.

> "… one could distinguish between when something is legal and what is legitimate, and when a group of neighbors want to recover a piece of land after more than fifteen years of abandonment, being a fruit of failed land speculation, this, I assure you, is the most legitimate thing. Preventing it could be legal, but not just, neither socially justifiable" (Levante 8 October 2011).

In October 2011, some of the volunteers continued the work, now manually. However, in January 2012 BBVA destroyed the fields prepared and denounced some of those neighbors who tried to stop them. As a response, the neighborhood association announced a general boycott against the banking services of BBVA (see Figure 6.13 on the previous page). In March 2012, BBVA finally announced its approval of the fields to be used as urban gardens. In June, the land preparation started again. In July, the annual Summer University of the Huerta was held on the recovered fields. In September 2012, the first plantations and the first traditional inundation of the fields were held (see Figure 6.14 below). By the end of the year, over 300 participants were registered cultivating the 60 plots of the initiative, with a substantial waiting list (Levante 21 October 2012). Therefore, the association started negotiations to be able to expand its territory with 2000 m^2 (Las Provincias 24 August 2013).

Fig.6.14. Members of the Benimaclet neighborhood association cultivating the fields of their urban garden (Source: Levante 21 October 2012)

The initiative described itself to aim for the defense of the "*huertan* lifestyle ". The most significant feature of this neighborhood association was its consistency, hard work and the amount of time and money their members invested in the hope of reclaiming fields that were already believed to be lost forever. The innovativeness and daring nature of this initiative aligned the neighborhood, the local municipality and the media on their side and made the owners of the abandoned fields back off and allow the establishment of these urban gardens. The methods of resistance in this case included protests and constructive interventions, such as the establishment of the actual plots on the destroyed fields. My informants often referred to this initiative when they tried to prove that the people of Valencia after all were still interested in the future of the Huerta and were ready to invest their financial and other resources to "keep the Huerta alive" and reconstruct its productive structure.

The initiative could be clearly classified as a part of the movement for the protection of the Huerta. It both mobilized and strengthened the social capital organized around the specific citizen group's concerns. While conducting interviews with the organic farmers operating within the Huerta, many of them referred to this project as a positive example where people were committed to support a cause even if it meant that they had to sacrifice some of their free time and provide financial support. The success of the boycott organized by the movement proved that the citizens of Valencia were willing to engage in consumer activism. The media and blog coverage on the project developed a dichotomy that questioned the legitimacy of the speculative urbanization project responsible for the destruction of these fertile and beloved fields. Moreover, the proactive community garden project managed to create value and provide hope by recovering these fields, unlike the stalled real-estate project whose economic recovery remained uncertain.

6.4 Recreation of the Huerta

This section presents the urban garden experiment of a grandiose urbanization project called Sociopolis. It should be considered as the most prominent example of an attempt to recreate the Huerta. The General Urbanization Plan of Valencia in 2010 established the concept of 'periurban parks of transition'. Urban gardens like the ones the Sociopolis project experimented would qualify as a 'green buffer zone', which were meant to offset the disturbance caused by such urbanization project built on the fields of the Huerta.

The Sociopolis project was presented in 2003. It was planned to cover 380.000 m^2, out of which 348.000 m^2 were freshly reclassified agrarian fields of the *Huerta de La Torre* in the Southern Huerta. It was designed to offer about 3000 homes for rent, some with the option to buy. Over 80% of these apartments were planned to be classified as social housing[41], and 500 of them were to be assigned as quarters available for the local universities.

The lead architect of the project, Vicente Guallart praised the project for its potential to fulfill "a much-needed social function, making housing available at a controlled price to a great number of people" (Guallart 2006). Just before the first signs of the developing real estate bubble became obvious, the idea to offer cheap but quality housing was considered something new on Valencia's real estate market. The local media liked to refer to Sociopolis as the most emblematic urbanization project of Valencia. However, Sociopolis was among the many urbanization projects that were stalled by the burst of the real estate bubble and the deepening economic crisis. As a result, by 2012 only four apartment towers had been built out of the eighteen originally planned building complexes. The media referred to the area as

[41] Model of social housing in Spain: The „subsidized owner-occupancy housing maintains the status of social housing for a set number of years, during which time it cannot be sold against market prices. After that period the status changes, and the housing concerned becomes part of the free housing market. However, the recent developments in the Spanish housing policy suggest that this model might change in the future. In some Spanish regions, subsidized owner-occupancy housing is now considered as a separate and permanent tenure category and not as a temporal subsidy arrangement" (Hoekstra et al. 2010).

the ‘desert of Sociopolis’ or the ‘ghost town of Sociopolis’ (Las Provincias 16 December 2013, 29 April 2013).

The developers emphasized that the community gardens surrounding the housing project were an integral part of their vision, as they aimed to mimic the historical land and irrigation structure of the Huerta. Ironically, the idea of mimicking the fields of the Huerta and the need to maintain the tradition of cultivating its fields was made desirable and necessary to alleviate the damage done by development projects like this one, occupying the original fields of the Huerta. Even though Sociopolis in the early 2010’s was marked as a stalled if not failed project, the local media phrased its half-prepared community gardens as its only functioning part that managed to animate the abandoned construction area (Levante 28 August 2012).

Originally, over 70,000 m^2 of the building site was marked out for the community gardens, which were planned to have 300 plots, each between 25 and 100 m^2. Besides the modern water recycling system they planned, the project included the restoration of over 8400 meters of the original irrigation channels to secure traditional gravity-based irrigation of the area.

In May 2012, 32 of the 300 originally planned urban gardens were handed over to the future tenants (Levante 28 July 2012). In 2014, the preparation of 200 more plots was announced (Las Provincias 9 January 2014), for which there was already a waiting list of over 50 applicants (Las Provincias 11 December 2013).

Fig.6.15. Aerial view of the fields of stalled Sociopolis project, surrounded by its community gardens
(Source: Las Provincias 2013)

The tenants would need to pay a 60 EUR annual fee for which they received the right to cultivate a designated plot and received professional assistance from experts assigned by the Valencian Agrarian Council. The garden regulations impeded the tenants from commercializing their produce. Besides recreational purposes, the idea was to promote self-sufficiency at times when obtaining quality food could pose significant financial burden on an average family. The mayor of La Torre, the town hosting Sociopolis, expressed his hopes that these fields could contribute to the awareness raising of the new generations (Las Provincias 24 June 2010).

The lead architect, Vicente Guallart (2006) presented Sociopolis as the first 'rururban' transformation project that incorporated the Huerta as a strategic element and therefore invited the metropolitan area to fulfill its potential by activating its interface. The rururban is an interface with a positional value that offers a 'natural' place for the city in its margins (Pellicer Corellano 1998 in Hoggart 2012). The 'rururban fringe' is a social space that offers

a window for the 'contemplative valuation of nature' in an area that promotes an increasingly urban lifestyle with rising population mobility (Zárate 1984 in Hoggart 2012). Guallart (2006) saw that the process of 'rurbanization' was contrasted to the conventional urbanism trends that used to characterize the urbanized peripheries of the Huerta. He defined rurbanization as an "interactive, non-linear urbanism capable of interacting with its environment on an appropriate scale" (Guallart 2006). He argued that having an open interface with its agricultural surroundings, Sociopolis and other development projects following its rururban model could become a potential differentiating factor in the global competition between the cities of the 21st century.

Could urban gardens within a real estate complex be acceptable substitutes for an ancient landscape? The common disapproval of the project was partially rooted in such overconfident assumptions that projects like Sociopolis could "recreate the agrarian past and present of the city" (Guallart 2006). In the allegations presented against the destruction of the Huerta de La Torre the fields allowing for the construction of the stalled Sociopolis, the NGO Per l'Horta labeled the project 'cynical' for claiming that it contributes to the protection of the Huerta. This reveals the problematic nature of the rururban concept, that it often seems to downplay the fact that the original structure to be conserved to some extent through its development projects are initially replaced by them. The project received mixed reception in the local media, while the international media almost exclusively praised the concept. The enthusiastic pro-development interpretations pictured how "an area of rundown farms and scrap yards … become Sociopolis, a revolutionary locality that mixes the high rise and hi-tech with traditional agriculture" (Guardian 12 June 2006). However, the local media's interpretation was more critical, as they highlighted that precisely such grandiose urbanization projects were responsible for the Huerta's accelerated disappearance (Las Provincias 17 September 2007).

An opinion article (Las Provincias 22 July 2007, by Miguel Del Rey) framed Sociopolis as an unfortunate project, unable to live up to the expectations that it could alleviate the damage caused by the city's uncontrolled expansion. The article emphasized that we must acknowledge the intensity of the historical era we live in, and how it changed the way we perceive the past and define the future of our landscapes. It also warned that the mentality that marked the Metropolitan Areas urbanization policies could convert Valencia into a powerful but still fundamentally replaceable city. It highlighted that when families stopped their agrarian activities, after having their farmhouses demolished and their lands occupied by some real-estate or infrastructural project, the genuine loss was not about the plots themselves but the loss of that fraction of the cultural landscape shaped by the collective efforts of the Valencian society over the last few centuries. The article argued that even though Sociopolis pretended to make a transition between the city and the Huerta, the real question was whether it was able to conserve the "character and culture stocked up during centuries of collective efforts" (Las Provincias 17 September 2007).

The materials promoting the project often contrasted it to the negligent urbanization projects responsible for the demolition of the Huerta. However, the media coverage was clear about how Sociopolis, with its freshly reclassified construction sites, was no different in triggering the gradual degradation of the remaining fields and farmsteads in its surroundings. The dwellers of these farmhouses who "observe how tall buildings are built just a few meters away from them, and how their old paths disappear" were described as "endangered species" about whom no one seems to care (Las Provincias 3 October 2011). Other articles contemplated over the lost "bucolic image of open gates and fields full of crops" replaced by a "neighborhood messed up by the growth of the city"… [where] "the few remaining neighbors who still consider the Huerta as their home, live with mobile phones in their hand, ready to report robberies and assaults" (Las Provincias 14 November 2011).

Could the fields of the Sociopolis be immune to the problems associated with degrading Huerta just because they exist within a 'sterile' protected place? The community gardens of the project had a centrally regulated structure, whereas the social construct of the Huerta is a result of centuries of negotiation. The defenders of the Huerta argued that Sociopolis could not recreate the Huerta as the community gardens were managed through regulations that limit the sovereignty of those cultivating these plots (no private land ownership, no option for selling the crops produced, rules established by the management etc.). One of my elder informants argued that it is "dangerous to believe that the Huerta, as a product of such collective efforts could be replaced by urban gardens drafted in an office." The lead architect of the project also expressed his hope that the urban gardens proposed by the project would encourage "civic participation in the conservation of the agrarian environment of the city" (Guallart 2006).

The most significant implication of the 'Sociopolis model' is its influence on the future territorial planning strategies concerning the remaining fields of the Huerta. The concept of 'periurban parks of transition' was proposed by the General Urbanization Plan of 2010. It requires the urbanizing agents to compensate the society for sacrificing some of their green fields by purchasing an additional area[42] that should be set aside 'for the preservation of the Huerta'. These areas will be categorized as 'periurban parks', which is a 'free spaces' category of Valencia's General Urbanization Plan of 2010[43]. The basic function of these parks is to serve as a transitional area between the city and the Huerta. The general media coverage on this new concept was quite skeptical. The following extract is from an opinion

[42] This additional area has to at least 1.5 times larger than the land they originally meant to urbanize
[43] Valencia's General Urbanization Plan of 2010 reclassified 481 hectares of the periurban agrarian fields of the metropolitan area, out of which 362 hectares were directly assigned for construction and an additional 119 hectares were set aside to create 'periurban parks of transition' (Ayuntamento de Valencia 2010).

article published in Las Provincias (13 September 2010, by Pablo Salazar) titled: “Protect the Huerta through continued constructions”. It provides further insight into the controversies around the recently presented concept of ‘periurban parks of transition’:

> ... “I can’t seem to be convinced by the arguments on how permitting to build on protected zones of the Huerta could be allowed in exchange of the promoter’s compromise to buy and protect further agrarian fields from the city that will eventually preserve the landscape. Hmmm, I don’t know, there is something I don’t like. Protecting the Huerta by constructing on it? Could you please explain it to me again? Let’s see. Some romantic lovers of historical cities like Valencia and medieval cities like Valencia, and of cities with such privileged natural surroundings like Valencia, we believe that it is important to do whatever possible to conserve the size, and the surroundings, which consists in our case of natural parks (la Albufera, El Saler), beaches, an old riverbed, and a unique huerta, which is still – even though only partially –is under cultivation. I understand the difficulties of legally protecting an activity which is becoming more and more abandoned by agriculturists fed up by the slight profitability and the almost nonexistent perspectives they have… and I assume there are necessities for a new infrastructure ... both public and private facilities. However, I invite you for a walk in the Huerta to get to know this exceptional unique live museum, which is increasingly degrading. I believe that the real estate crisis offers us – as unbelievable as it sounds – the last train to avoid the dangerous urbanization, which in fact has already brought many problems and few advantages to Valencia and to its metropolitan area. … Speaking of the protection of the Huerta when what it really means is allowing to reclassify its still agrarian fields, seems almost comical to me. Although it is true that, after Sociopolis, such a nonsense way of urbanization seems to be there to remain." (Las Provincias 13 September 2010)

The entrepreneurial vision of Sociopolis reflected the need to change the prevailing urbanization model and to be more responsible towards the territory hosting it. Its centralized vision of recreating the Huerta failed as it ignored the fact that it is impossible to recreate the essence of a cultural landscape, which is the result of centuries of social landscape creation processes. The question is whether a proposed conservation structure could preserve all the vital elements that constitute the Huerta’s imaginary. Is it enough to mimic its infrastructural

backbone? Could the original sovereignty of the landowners of the Huerta be replaced by a centralized managerial system without taking away the very essence of the Huerta?

The project aimed to prove that entrepreneurial regionalism reached a level of "interactive, non-linear urbanism capable of interacting with its environment on an appropriate scale" (Guallart 2006). Something the promoters of this project dreamed to become the next potential differentiating factor establishing the 'Valencian difference' in the global competition among the cities of the 21st century.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter provided a comprehensive view on the embeddedness of the alternative economic space by analyzing those features of the agro-entrepreneurial initiatives that constitute their alternativeness. The most characteristic feature of these initiatives was their awareness of the opportunities provided by their original embeddedness. Their original social and spatial embeddedness were based on the shared concerns raised by the historical discourses. These historical discourses had developed the contemporary representation of these fields that the initiatives challenge. Meanwhile, their natural embeddedness was secured by their dedication to address concerns raised by the agro-ecological movement (e.g.: by applying organic or other sustainable cultivation methods, promote markets of close proximity, safeguard and promote autochthonous varieties and polyculture). Most of them were aware that their dedication to 'keeping these fields alive' with responsible cultivation methods attracted the support of people who were aware of the Huerta's situation.

Without the supportive social capital sensitive to the historical discourses the impact of these initiatives could not have been on such a scale. Their marginality, the relative importance of these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives, was greatly enhanced by their efforts to strengthen the sense of place around the fields they intend to 'keep alive'.

The movement for the protection of the Huerta developed a rich discursive framework to these fields' importance for the Valencian society. The Valencian people's general idea about the Huerta had been formed by a combination of its bucolic representation from the 19th century, the discourses that had been developed by the movement for its protection over the last 50 years, and their own memories. Contrasted to this, most alternative agro-entrepreneurs invited the people of Valencia to enrich their sense of the Huerta through the personal experiences they gained by participating in their initiatives. These initiatives exceled in developing institutionalized frameworks through which their clientele could develop a stronger sense of place around the Huerta. They also awakened place satisfaction in the participants by highlighting the utilitarian value of these fields (e.g. source of fresh food, place of recreation). Besides providing an institutionalized framework through which they could learn how to grow their own food, the participants enjoyed the benefits of being able to develop a new hobby or occupation. They even gained a deeper understanding the dynamics of the Huerta, which allowed them to be more engaged, or in the case of the immigrants more integrated, in the Valencian society. These initiatives also highlighted showed Valencia's place dependence as they proved that these periurban gardens could start discussions about the Huerta future urban utility.

Chapter 7. The era of alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism

This chapter analyzes those features of the alternative economic space that allowed it to become a driving force in reshaping the contemporary representation of the Huerta. In order to be truly capable of making a difference, the initiatives that emerged in the Huerta should be able to address both the opportunities and the responsibilities deriving from their original embeddedness. Their ability to do so constitutes their true alternativeness. Through the alternative economic space, the Huerta became the 'ultimate venue' where a new constructive method of resistance could develop. This method was eventually endorsed by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. These processes mark the appearance of an era of alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism characterized by this alternative economic space.

7.1 The alternativeness of the economic space that emerged in the Huerta

There were two discourse themes that invited the alternative economic space to challenge what everyone's idea of the Huerta was: the one that referred back to the historical discourses responsible for the development of the contemporary representation of the Huerta and constituted the original embeddedness of this alternative economic space (discussed in more detail in chapter 5), and the other one that described the efforts of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives that emerged in this alternative economic space as they recognized the opportunities provided by their original embeddedness and about how the deepen such embeddedness and addressed the responsibilities it entailed (discussed in more detail in chapter 6).

The alternativeness of this economic space was established through two sets of politicized discourses: the ones about its oppositional activism (Allen et al. 2003) through

which they addressed several concerns phrased by the global agro-ecological movement (e.g.: when they opted for organic cultivation methods, emphasized the importance 'zero kilometer' solutions, etc.), and the ones about its degree of commitments towards addressing the concerns developed by the movement for the protection of the Huerta (e.g.: cultivating the fields of the Huerta, safeguarding autochthonous varieties, etc.). The consciousness behind the way they addressed these concerns is what made their efforts be recognized as a political action.

The alternativeness of these initiatives converted the newly revived economic space of the Huerta into an 'emancipatory forum for urbanism' (Brenner 2009). As these initiatives set out to challenge the discourses that dominated the representation of these fields, they entered into the dynamics of social landscape creation. They converted the Huerta into a specific 'location of resistance' (Soja 1996), a venue for "the redistribution of control over how space is produced" (Massey 2000 in Holloway et al. 2007:6). They were perceived as 'new breeds of entrepreneurs' who were able to address a range of concerns through their innovative strategies (Marsden 2006, Jack and Anderson 2002; Korsgaard and Noe 2012). They actively participated in both the material and dialectical reconstruction of the Huerta. These initiatives were mostly perceived as a proactive response given to the seemingly unstoppable degradation of the Huerta. The alternative economic space developed around these initiatives allowed the participants of these initiatives to act upon their shared concerns about both the disappearance of these fields and the controversies of the globalized food system. It allowed them to finally proactively "engage in the continual creation, negotiation, and re-creation" (DeLind 2011:279) of the Huerta.

The establishment of the alternative economic space, as a venue for contestation, had various phases. First of all, these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives embraced the

nostalgic ‘sense of loss’ in their dialectical self-definition. This ‘sense of loss’ was an essential feature of the contemporary representation of the Huerta. They successfully contrasted their proactive initiatives to the trends of abandonment that were responsible for the emergence of this ‘sense of loss.’ The transformation of the Huerta from being a historical landscape into a living landscape was only possible through the activation of its available social capital that originally developed around the movement for the protection of the Huerta. These initiatives were aware of their dependence on these supportive social networks, but they were also knew that they needed to invent practices through which they could convert these well informed and concerned people into committed clientele, so they could strengthen their embeddedness (see section titled ‘The revival of the Huerta’ in the previous chapter).

These promoters of the initiatives showed different levels of interest in developing strategies through which they could benefit from the opportunities provided by their original embeddedness (e.g.: emphasizing that by cultivating these fields they directly contribute to ‘keeping these fields alive’, reflecting on the narratives developed by the movement for the protection of the Huerta, participating at events and demonstrations organized by the movement). The extent to which their actual strategies reflected their awareness of this opportunity also varied. Most agro-entrepreneurs are aware of how the people sensitive to the discourses developed by the movement for the protection of the Huerta (and of those of the globally present agro-ecological movement) are easier to engage in their initiatives. Almost all the alternative agro-entrepreneurs agreed that the challenging context in which they emerged served as a great source of opportunities for their initiatives, as they felt that they were ready to provide an alternative contesting the trends responsible for those challenges. They could provide a venue where their supporters could express their dissatisfaction not just through words but by supporting the existence of these initiatives.

The promoters of these initiatives were soon recognized as proactive actors in charge of reshaping the representation of the Huerta, capable of contesting the myth about the Huerta's irreversible loss of socio-economic viability. Most of the agriculturists argued that it was important for them to be able to prove the Huerta's viability through the success of their initiatives. An older agriculturist highlighted that he wished that there were more initiatives like his own, so that they would be "taken seriously as self-governing entities that are capable of keeping these fields alive". He also highlighted that they did not need "any imposed frame that would just take away even that little autonomy we were left with in this life anyway". A lot younger girl, who was in charge of a small organic box scheme and who described her clientele being '*militante*', contrasted her initiative to the challenging realities of the Huerta, when I asked her about of her success:

> "[In the Huerta] there is no potent social network, there is no real economy to move enough families, it is broken up, and it is in a perfect state to disappear... it is not valuated… by the time we get old… *(listing the names of some young and dedicated agriculturists*) this whole thing will be gone. We will see the Huerta disappear…"

She argued that 'ironically' that was the reason why it was not difficult for her to find a small but deeply engaged clientele. She described them as a group of conscious citizens who were aware of the fact that by purchasing her vegetable boxes they allow her to remain on these fields so she could 'keep these fields alive' (an expression I ran into over and over). She believed that their clientele's need to support her developed as a response to the discourses that were originally established by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. She argued that indirectly the sum of these discourses allowed her to remain on these fields with the support of a circle with the same convictions, so she could proactively protect these fields.

Her views corresponded to those of another young agriculturist, who ran a similar but bit larger initiative with his fiancée:

> "I believe that apart from a collective awareness-raising … it is crucial to make people stand up in defense of the Huerta, so the politicians might back them up … but for me the most important thing would be to demonstrate the viability of the Huerta … so there would be something agriculturists could stand up for, so they could believe in it … mostly the 'neo-rurals' and the 'bio-rurals' do this… they are willing to defend their livelihood, because they see it to be viable, because it is their own livelihood … because they like what they do … so they could stand up and say: indirectly I provide you with a landscape … I provide you with culture, I provide you with history … but mostly because this is how I make my living and don't you dare remove me from my fields … you won't! That's why I say that it would be very important to support this collective ... make them believe that they could indeed make a living on these fields, so they could live with dignity – and yes, besides this any additional things matter … a workshop for awareness-raising … or any project where the people see that there is fresh produce coming from the Huerta, and moreover it is organic and you can come and see how it is produced … you can see the donkey ploughing the fields. Without making it (the cultivation of these fields) viable the people will abandon these fields … if you don't believe in it, you will let them (the urbanizing agents) pay you and take your land … of course it (the land grabbing) has stopped due to the crisis … but it only means that there is a window of opportunity … it is time to try and see if it works or not".

Many agro-entrepreneurs complained that some of their clientele failed to see the real nature of their initiatives. By this they usually meant that they didn't recognize that the promoters of these initiatives perceived their own efforts as a political act. However, they also claimed that other clients showed great sensitivity towards the values their initiatives stood up for (both those promoted by the agro-ecological movement and by the movement for the protection of the Huerta).

The interviews conducted with agriculturists in charge of many alternative agro-entrepreneurial projects indicated that most of them did not find it important to talk about the complex responsibility they assumed by cultivating the fields of the Huerta. The interviewed entrepreneurs said that such issues were rarely discussed directly with their clientele. Even though their conversations rather centered on the food they provided, there was still a sense

of unspoken understanding of the commitments attached to their market-based interactions. They often argued that many of their regulars understood perfectly their commitment to the maintenance of the Huerta. They argued that it was unnecessary to discuss it. Still, they shared many disappointments and frustrations about those clients who were unaware, or, even worse, unappreciative of their efforts, and saw them solely as providers of healthy, affordable, high-quality organic fresh produce. Their frustrations proved that many of them still would have expected the society to recognize their contribution they made through their initiatives.

The manifesto of Ecollaures (the producer association that established the first social certification scheme in the Huerta) presented a mission statement on their homepage, which was an example where some of these agro-entrepreneurs indeed felt the need to be clear about their own commitments (see Table 7.1. below).

Table 7.1. The manifesto of Ecollaures (Source: www.ecollaures.jimdo.com)

Manifesto of the Ecollaures producer association

What do we want?

- Defend organic agriculture as the only sustainable and possible option in line with the values of local consumption
- Empower the agrarian economy based on organic produce in order to defend the territory against the threats surrounding it by urbanization, speculation and the loss of employment in the agrarian territories.
- Reach an organic agrarian model, use the principles of ecology in our ways of agrarian production, incorporate ideas of an agriculture more focused on the environment and more socially sensitive
- Improve the consciousness of people, everyday small acts and gestures, consume of organic products, dignify the work of the organic agriculturist and contribute to make the local agro-economy sustainable
- Provide people easy access to quality and local food with accessible prices, eliminate the intermediaries and bring closer the producers and the consumers
- Spread local markets and promote the creation of consumer associations and/or the direct on farm sale of out produces
- Recover local varieties, which empowers us against the monopoly of great multinationals, who are controlling the GMO seeds they commercialize exclusively
- Defense of the villages' autonomy in the recovery and defense of their traditional knowledge and agrarian territory

How do we want to achieve it?

- Working the fields making our principles reality, in which the compromise of the consumers is crucial. Doing so to be able to incorporate this critical and responsible way of consumption as an everyday aspect of our lives.
- Launching and assisting different trainings that we find interesting. Sharing and transmitting knowledge, also including those initiatives that already work somewhere else.
- Energizing and consolidating this network, inviting other producers to collaborate in the project.
- Contributing to awareness raising campaigns around our agrarian realities and the denouncing global politics that endanger these initiatives.

Many of these alternative agro-entrepreneurs actively participated in talks and awareness-raising events that were organized around concepts like organic farming and community-supported agriculture. However, there were several complaints about how almost always the same, well-informed circle of people attended their talks and that they rarely saw new faces. A younger agro-entrepreneur criticizing a consumer association that has been around for a while by now, and its strategies:

> "… if someone is not in these circles of organic agriculture, someone who is not in their little world, well that person will never learn about their existence. How is that possible that (besides those people) no one knows about this association? They are there over 20 years by now and they still do the same thing … their seminars, their forums, their little get together … well, this doesn't work this way. The people need to know that they are there.. You need to create online platform… because it is there for everybody, the information might be easier accessible online. .. If only their circles know about where to go to pick up these eco-boxes … well than we are talking about another source of exclusivity."

Another agriculturist reflection goes in a similar direction:

> "They invite me to a talk, I go … I give them the talk, but it is almost the same circle of people attending all the time and they already know what I am going to say, they know my arguments and they agree with me. … It would be better to reach a wider range of people somehow."

Some shared their anxieties about the major producer associations' unwillingness to widen their consumer network. At the same time, the shallow level of engagement of their already established clientele made the otherwise dedicated entrepreneurs bitter:

> "The initiatives in the Huerta still present a weaker form of commitment on behalf of their clientele. You cultivate the fields and you have a circle of

> people around you who says that 'I will help you to maintain your professional dignity, help you and the Huerta' … buying from you directly is important … it is important to have relations of proximity … but we must acknowledge that this is the weakest form of commitment. You are the one (the agriculturist) who cultivate, and you are the one who assumes all the risks." – said one younger agriculturist.

If we accept the statement that food is "a product and mirror of the organization of society" (Counihan 1999 in Ramsey 2010:2), what would the contemporary changes in the Huerta's representation tell us? What would we conclude about the attention and support this handful of alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives got for assuming the role of keeping these fields alive? One would conclude that there is a new form of critical political activism born in in the Huerta. A new method of resistance that should be (and indeed is) recognized by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The strategies and even the everyday actions of these entrepreneurs and their supporters became politicized (Bryant and Goodman 2004), allowing them to 'make a difference'. The term of 'making a difference' was the most frequent expression used to describe the motivation behind the establishment or the support of these initiatives. It usually meant any form of action that eventually would improve the socio-economic viability of these fields and indirectly contest the arguments presented for the justification of the Huerta's destruction.

The case of the reclaimed fields of Benimaclet (see in the section titled "Reclaiming the Huerta" in the previous chapter) showed that there was a great anxiety hidden within many local communities about the loss of their fields that they considered to be part of their collective cultural identity. It proved that indeed there were collectives that were ready to act upon those anxieties (if they were offered a framework to do so). The ability of these initiatives to raise awareness about their capabilities to address these anxieties was key in mobilizing the social support that could derive from their embeddedness. The activation of their original embeddedness meant engaging those with similar concerns to support their

initiatives. Most of the alternative agro-entrepreneurs like them argued that such initiatives' measure of success is not just based on the size of their clientele, but the depth of their supporters' commitment. Several entrepreneurs expressed their disappointment in finding that many of their consumers failed to acknowledge that there was more to their projects than providing healthy food for available prices as it prevented them from reaching their real potential.

7.2 Contesting marginality

Any effort to contest the marginality of this alternative economic space might seem as an act of romanticizing these initiatives, however, many of my informants warned me of its perils. Their precaution derived from their experience of how romanticizing had historically been used as a tool to divert attention from the social inequalities present in the Valencian society and from the real challenges that should have been addressed (for a more in-depth description of the era of folkloric regionalism see chapter 5). They argued that romanticizing the alternative economic space that developed in the Huerta could have the risk of failing to understand its nature and its weight in the contemporary social landscape creation processes.

Whether these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives with their minimal financial returns would qualify as successful was highly subjective. However, the support these initiatives received from their clientele and the media attention were a lot more objectively substantial. Many of the agro-entrepreneurs argued that they sensed how people's perceptions about the future of these fields became more optimistic as the existence and apparent success of these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives gained more media coverage. They argued that their ability to develop viable business models even in such a challenging context established certain reputation for these alternative agro-entrepreneurs.

Regardless of being marginal at a material scale (only a few dozen small-scale agro-entrepreneurs were present on the Huerta's over 30.000 hectares of cultivated fields, see in more detail in the previous chapter), these initiatives earned a rich dialectical presence in the contemporary discourses that described the Huerta. They became recognized as the latest building blocks of these fields' contemporary representation. Is everybody's idea of Valencia is a city surrounded by fields full of thriving agro-entrepreneurial initiatives? No, but the appearance of these initiatives on the fields of the Huerta managed to challenge the hegemony of the 'landscapes of global modernity' promoted under the era of entrepreneurial regionalism. The discourses originally presented by the movement for the protection of the Huerta used to focus on and react to specific territorial aggressions. Their discourses developed certain 'sense of loss', which seemed to have engraved itself into the Valencian cultural identity, and served as the source of these initiatives original embeddedness. The discourses that developed within this alternative economic space broke the domination of the defensive, conservation-oriented discourses promoted by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The new alternative economic space called for the development of more proactive, place-making discourses. It urged both the promoters and the supporters of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives to voice their dissatisfaction about the trends that compromised the very existence of these fields and strengthen those features of these initiatives through which they could make certain changes (e.g.: establish and participate in a community garden project that reclaimed the misused fields surrounding a given neighborhood, become members of producer and consumer associations, participate in the actual cultivating the Huerta, etc.)

Despite their marginality, these agro-entrepreneurs and their supportive clientele became recognized as a new force in the social landscape creation processes. In this sense

they were constantly contrasted to the entrepreneurialism of the urbanizing agents. Both were seen to have the ability to reshape the skyline of the Metropolitan Area of Valencia. The case of the Sociopolis urbanization project and its community gardens (see the section titled 'Recreation of the Huerta' in the previous chapter), where its lead architect claimed or endeavored (depends on one's subjective interpretation) to conserve the Huerta's heritage by integrating it into its grandiose real-estate project served as a unique example of how these two entrepreneurial spheres somehow overlapped. In spite of often being contrasted to the agents of regional entrepreneurialism, most agro-entrepreneurs disliked the term entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, their initiatives presented strong entrepreneurial features. They assumed the responsibility of the "construction of a social and spatial milieu… [they had] individual and collective capabilities to establish viable problem-solving responses" (Marsden and Smith 2005:440). They mixed "alternative ecological strategies with new market-based developments", which allowed them to become a 'new breed of entrepreneur' (Marsden 2006). They also consciously linked their initiatives to the broader political setting they operated within. When contrasted to the urbanizing agents and their model of entrepreneurial regionalism, it became more visible how these new entrepreneurs redefined the concept of entrepreneurialism within the context of the Huerta.

The emergence of a new kind of entrepreneurialism started out as a response to the pressures on the Huerta deriving from the construction of the 'modern Valencian' difference but ended up being the most viable feature of the Huerta's contemporary agrarian iconography. The alternative economic space presented by these initiatives aimed to redefine the urban utility of these fields. It contested the notion that being able to host agrarian models that could compete on the globalized food market is the ultimate measurement of a certain fields' socio-economic viability.

This diverse set of agro-entrepreneurial initiatives provided several venues that allowed the people of Valencia to reconnect with the Huerta and to develop a shared sense of place based on their shared experiences (Tuan 1974). They were fueled by the desire to safeguard the agrarian patrimony of these fields and to challenge their compromised socio-economic viability. The busy infrastructure that developed around these initiatives disproved the myth that these fields' socio-economic viability was irreversibly compromised. These venues encouraged their supporters to share their efforts towards reshaping the contemporary representation of these fields.

The proactive presence of these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives resulted in the development of an alternative economic space within the Huerta. The discourses that used to establish this alternative economic space resonated both with romanticizing discourses from the 19th century and defensive discourses from the late 20th. The way these initiatives used these historical discourse themes, especially their willingness to address a wide range of concerns described within, appealed to a wide range of citizens. Many of them were already committed to the movement for the protection of the Huerta. Through their conscious, often rather genuine self-positioning these initiatives managed to mobilize and strengthen a wide range of social networks sensitive to the discourse themes recycled by these initiatives. Their ability to do so determined the degree of their embeddedness, which in turn could secure their stability and socio-economic viability.

Besides recycling discourse themes from other historical eras, the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives also actively participated in the „continual creation, negotiation, and re-creation of identity, memory and meaning" attached to the fields they operated within (DeLind 2011: 279). The alternative economic space developed by these initiatives provided a frame for the promoters and supporters of these initiatives, which allowed them to

participate in the social landscape creation processes, the material revival and the dialectical contestation of the Huerta's contemporary representation.

Even though these initiatives still cultivate only a small portion of these fields, the attention they attracted already counterbalanced their marginality, as they became the hottest topic of the contemporary dialectical representation of the Huerta. They achieved that the contemporary narratives describing the Huerta now include optimistic accounts on innovation, cooperation and community development, where the entrepreneurial-minded agriculturists became proactive protagonists shaping the representation of the Huerta. The true weight of the initiatives could be understood by studying narratives that describe their ability to build a supportive network around them through the mobilization of the available social capital that derived from their embeddedness.

Their role in redefining the Huerta contributed to the establishment of these initiatives' wider societal importance and recognition, acting upon their perceived social identities. Most of the interviewed agro-entrepreneurs argued that the success of their initiative was partially due to the emergence of an era of 'intense social reflectivity' that secured a pool of conscious citizens.

7.3 Being embraced by the movement

The embeddedness of these initiatives provided them with supportive social networks with a range of well-established discourses that emphasized the importance of saving the Huerta as a living cultural landscape. The discourses were originally constructed by the movement for the protection of the Huerta, which were primarily manifested as defensive narratives against certain territorial aggressions. As these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives adopted many of these narratives, they were able to achieve the support of the social networks originally developed around the movement for the protection of the Huerta.

On the other hand, the movement for the protection of these fields not just endorsed these initiatives but also applied certain aspects of their business models to actively engage their supporters and improve the visibility of their projects (e.g.: establishing urban gardens on reclaimed fields). These tendencies proved that the movement recognized these initiatives' potential to reshape the representation of these fields through engaging and empowering the promoters, participants and supporters of their schemes.

The extent to which the movement for the protection of the Huerta embraced these initiatives indicated the degree of embeddedness these initiatives achieved. The calendar campaign of Per L'Horta[44] (see Figure 7.1 below) aimed to raise awareness about how buying from the Huerta could contribute to its maintenance as a living cultural landscape. On their one page calendar poster they shared the contact information of those small-scale organic producers and distributors who operated within Huerta.

Fig.7.1. "It is possible from the Huerta. Buy organic vegetables cultivated close to home" – heading of the calendar published by Per L'Horta organization (Source: scanned material)

[44] NGO for the protection of the Huerta de Valencia

The project was complemented with an interactive Google map on the homepage of the NGO, where more detailed information was provided about these initiatives. This project indicated that the movement for the protection of the Huerta recognized the need to embrace these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives. This reinforced their recognition as significant actors who had a lot to offer to the movement.

The self-positioning of these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives as the latest method of resistance towards the degradation of the Huerta was not that outspoken in all cases. There were still many agriculturists who found it too risky to position themselves as representatives of the agro-ecological movement as they found that it could entail negative connotations, and they would be seen as "lazy hippies" or "non-conformist militants". They were afraid that this could damage their general reputation and might scare away those less involved in the movement (both the agro-ecological and the one for the protection of the Huerta). The promoters of these alternative agro-entrepreneurial projects believed that the alternative economic space developed around their initiatives should be perceived as the most recent proactive method of resistance and even challenge the role assigned to the Huerta's in Valencia's metropolitan imaginary; but only with a deeper degree of commitment on behalf of their clientele.

Nevertheless, there were many producers who highlighted that some of their consumers regard the recollection of their vegetable boxes as the 'political act of the week', being aware of their contribution to the fight keeping the Huerta alive'. Most of my respondents argued that their clientele was aware of how their support secured the viability of these initiatives, through which they indirectly participate in the conservation of the Huerta (see section 7.1 titled 'The alternativeness of the economic space that emerged in the Huerta').

Instead of the original defensive approach, the movement gradually embraced the constructivist approach created by these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives. This changed the requirements towards the supporters of the movement and the clientele of these initiatives. The agro-entrepreneurs in charge hoped for their clients' more in-depth commitments. Supportive consumption became a proactive method of resistance. The cultivation and most importantly the distribution strategies of these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives were often developed in a way that it could be boosted by their clientele's deeper engagement.

The following quote from a representative of a local NGO described well the tensions between the interests of the landowner agro-entrepreneurs and those of the urban based civil society:

> "Well besides the clearly urbanite perceptions about how to protect the Huerta … the agriculturists perception is different. Sometimes I have the impression that some agriculturists see the presence of the civil society as some sort of an invasion … because while they want to defend the landscape they forget about the agriculturists and they feel that the influence they have is not in line with what they would want. They would say: I am an agriculturist, let me do what I do and then appreciate what I do and buy what I have to offer you. But don't come here telling me that we have to protect the Huerta, don't bring along tourists and convert the Huerta into a landscape to look at, I want the Huerta to be alive. So basically the Huerta should be protected as a living system, focusing on its economic viability, its social equity … protecting the Huerta as a landscape that people could visit or as a pleasant surrounding would mean to convert it into a rather static display, when it has the potential to be a living system? The agriculturists would prefer to work in a real functioning agro-economy not in a spectacle. It is clear that if there were no committed organic farmers the civil society couldn't have a chance to save these fields. But these agriculturists without this strong social movement in defense of the values presented by the Huerta would remain a minority with no viability. There is mutual dependence … they need to learn to cooperate, respect each other and learn about each other's preferences. They have to understand that the Huerta is not just a splendid landscape but primarily a lifestyle of a community that allowed the Huerta to become and remain what it is. We need to support these agriculturists and they have to understand that we can't put gates onto their fields to keep out the people … it is a good thing if we have people getting to know the Huerta and learn about the traditional and organic ways of

> cultivating it, because this is what will make them value their work … this is what will allow the commercialization of their produce."

These initiatives represent the most recent milestone in the evolution of the movement for the protection of the Huerta. I identified them as constructive interventions (see Figure 7.2 on the next page), with significant contribution to the processes of social landscape creation.

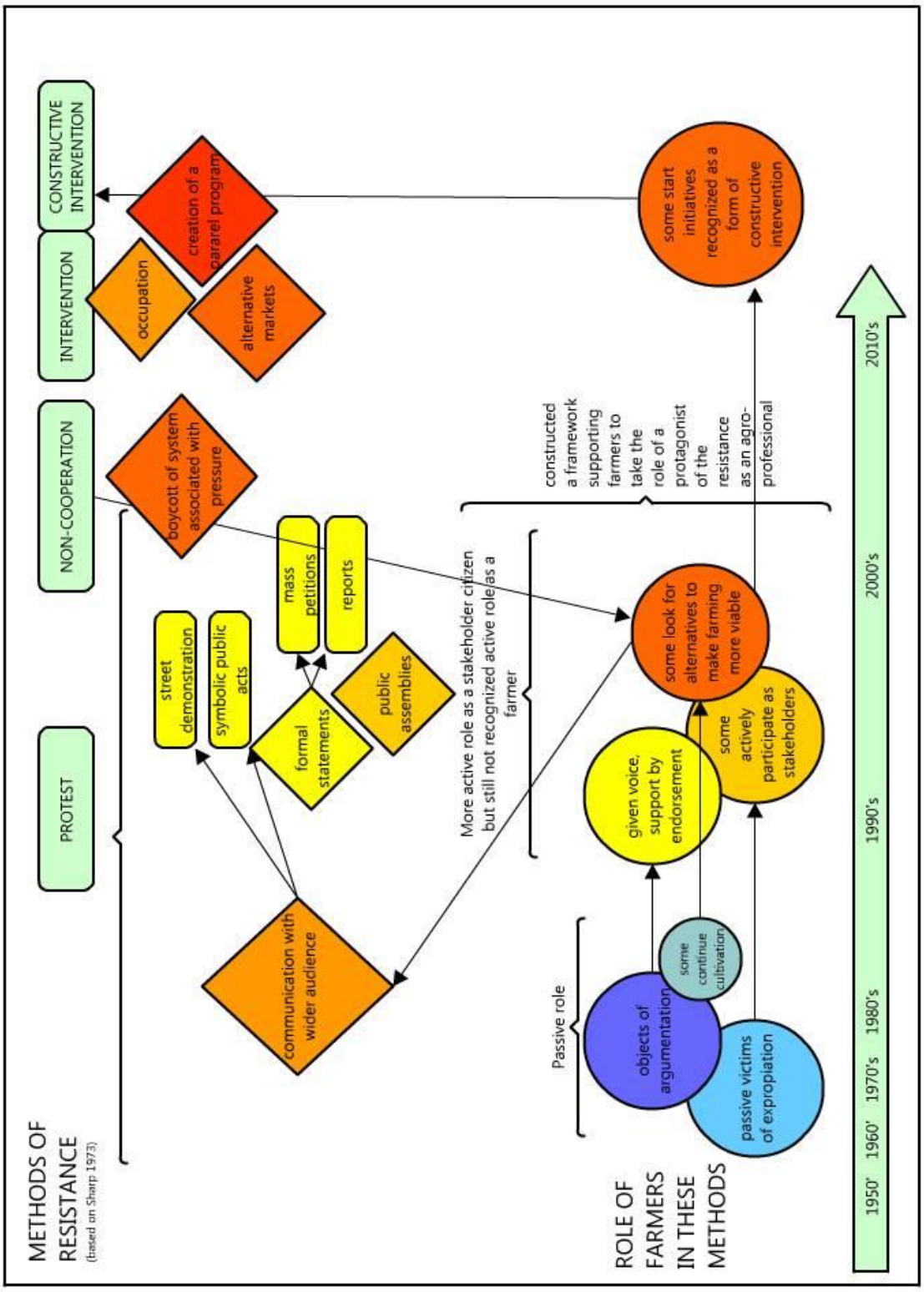

Fig.7.2. The milestones of resistance: shifting role of agriculturists (Source: own elaboration, based on interview data and archival research)

These initiatives created a new social identity for these fields, just through their presence. The perception of these fields soon included images of plots cultivated by young agro-entrepreneurs, enthusiastic volunteers, and hobby gardeners started to visit these fields even more often than the remaining pensioners did. The alternative food distribution networks invited their clientele to the Huerta (with their on-farm sales, open-days and offering volunteer positions. By this they enriched their clientele's sense of the Huerta. As these people entered the fields, their perspective also changed, as instead of seeing the Huerta from the highways and the metro cars, they got to walk on these fields. Through these experiences they gained a less historical and a lot more vivid sense of place. It got complemented with the smell and texture of its fields, the taste of its produce, the sound of the irrigation channels and the connection they made those in charge of these fields. An older agriculturist argued that he saw many of his clients experience certain resurrection of memories. Through these they were more likely to (re)discover their latent attachment to these fields and soon embrace its protection as their own cause.

7.4 Engage in the social landscape creation dynamics

These initiatives recognized that whoever controls space could influence the way it was represented (Zukin 1998 in Degen 2008). Even though the production outputs and the income generation of these initiatives were marginal, the active public support they received allowed them to reshape the contemporary representation of the Huerta. They attracted the support of these communities as they had the ability to respond to their anxieties awakened and informed by the discourses developed by the agro-ecological movement and the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The alternative economic space created by these initiatives served as a 'venue' around which their supporters could organize themselves. This venue provided grounds for a proactive maintenance of the Huerta and the regeneration of its

fading patrimonial symbols. During the era of 'wild urbanization', shifting the symbols of Valencia at the expense of the agrarian fields was easy because the forerunners of the agro-entrepreneurial initiatives could not attract sufficient attention or most importantly did not invite the people of Valencia to these fields. Since the 1990's, the growth of the metropolitan area was promoted as the only way to secure the region's competitiveness, and grandiose development projects that occupied the most fertile fields of the Huerta (e.g.: the ZAL, the CAS, the UPV campus) became symbols of its dedication to progress and modernity. However, the collapse of regional entrepreneurialism and the deepening of the crisis that hit Spain established a new context. The late 2000's and early 2010's were recognized by a widening gap in the Spanish society. The shrinking middle-class made the inequalities present in the Valencian society more obvious and highlighted how the neoliberal system restricted the access to various resources (for more details see section 'The discourse of the 'expendable Huerta' in Chapter 5).

The alternative economic space that emerged in the Huerta was contrasted to these trends. It set out to provide access to the Huerta. This was contrasted to the built symbols of the era of entrepreneurial regionalism, for example the Zone of Logistic Activities and the urbanization project of Sociopolis. These built symbols had not only devoured a great portion of these fields but had also irreversibly compromised the Valencian people's access to what was considered part of their patrimony. This process was heavily criticized by those engaged in the movement for the protection of the Huerta but was overlooked by the Valencian society in general.

Until recently, most studies on the Huerta focused on the documentation and contestation of its demolition and replacement with ideological landscapes of modernity through the decades of wild urbanization under the discursive framework of 'regional

entrepreneurialism'. Prytherch (2009:58) argued that the Huerta "has been politically reconstructed from material way-of-life into folkloric regional symbol and later nationalist rallying cry". He found that since the mid-19th century the material and discursive construction of the Valencian difference allowed the agrarian iconography to "permeate [the] regionalist and regional nationalist politics and [even] the built landscape" (Prytherch 2009:55). While he argued that the transformation of these regionalist landscapes was material, I argue that despite the material marginality of these agro-entrepreneurial initiatives the dialectical presence of the alternative economic space that developed around it attracted noteworthy attention in the Valencian society. The significance of these initiatives was established through their discursive presence, through which they successfully counterbalanced their marginality at a material scale. They were recognized as the latest building blocks of the Huerta's contemporary representation. The way these trust-based initiatives built their reputation invites us to revise the dynamics of social landscape creation and contemplate on the role these initiatives could play in the regeneration of the Huerta's strategic role in the areas metropolitan imaginary. In his paper about the trends of reterritorialization in the 20th century regional politics of Spain, Prytherch, argued that the Huerta was "doubly problematic … since it both materially stands in the way of growth and symbolically represents agrarian social relations with little relevance to a globally-oriented, entrepreneurial regionalism" (2006:231). He argued that the regional government's strategy to avoid the ideological confrontation, which should have followed its extensive destruction, was "to ignore it, passively allowing it to disappear, while actively fostering other regionalist landscapes" (Prytherch 2006: 231). Nevertheless, he also emphasized, there were some "new dialectics waiting to emerge, in and through new regional places and imaginaries" to challenge the "dialectical construction of regionalist discourses and landscapes" (Prytherch 2009:75). The political mobilization of symbolic landscapes of regional identity fueled a

resistance that questioned the legitimacy of those in charge of these new oppressive, unquestionable landscapes (Prytherch and Boira Maiques 2009). If a landscape can be considered as a 'materialized discourse' (Schein 1997 in Johnson, Schein, and Winders 2013), the gradual disappearance of the Huerta is a good indicator on how power relations are manifested in the process of landscape creation.

The alternative economic space of the Huerta developed within this context, a setting where "political leaders [used to] attempt to strike a balance between entrepreneurialism and regionalism in an ideology of entrepreneurial regionalism, which … [was manifested] in both political discourses and new landscapes of economic development meant to materialize them. In the process, the cultural politics of scale remake local places and the global political economy simultaneously" (Prytherch 2009). I argue that the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives managed to turn our attention back to this 'material way-of-life' through their activities based on the cultivation of the fields guided by their rich saturated values contesting those global trends that by their nature destroy such local milieus. To reach a critical level of empowerment, which would allow them to engage in the social landscape creation processes, would require them to mobilize more efficiently their supportive social network. The era of regional entrepreneurialism, responsible for the establishment of the modern regionalist Valencia, was ready to sacrifice these traditional, cultural landscapes. Its grand scale monuments of modernity were the materialized features of its imaginaries. They became constant visual reminders of this era. Contrasted to this, the alternative economic space proactively invited their supporters to participate in keeping these fields alive.

> "The societal importance of the agrarian sector diminished over the last 30 years. … When you talk with the people in the sector you will find pessimistic narratives. It is mainly because they have no successors. They don't have successors because those are aware how most of the production models present in the Huerta are not viable anymore... Who will remain on these fields to cultivate it? The truth is … these movements qualitatively are

> gaining real significance but practically, quantitatively they still remain insignificant. … We are talking about 30-40 people in the Huerta with this discourse – mostly in the North… people who do organic agriculture and think that the Huerta has a future… plus there is maybe about 50 more of those who still do conventional agriculture but share their vision ... but I must insist that even this might seem quantitatively quite irrelevant, but qualitatively these people have certain capacity to develop discourses and influence the collective imaginary – still it is a small force." – explained an older agriculturist.

If the value of keeping these lands under cultivation had to be proven, one must explore the 'quality turn' (Goodman 2002) that characterized this alternative economic space. The challenge for these initiatives was to prove that there is more to them than their obviously better performing production and distribution strategies. They have difficulty to explain their role they assumed in the recreation of the contemporary representation of the Huerta. Their contribution consists primarily of their pure existence, and the existence of their efforts towards mobilizing their potentially available social capital deriving from their embeddedness.

Prytherch (2003) argued that the Huerta's cultural landscape was the result of 'complex discursive politics' that evolved over the centuries (see the relevant discourses presented in chapter 5). He found that the Huerta "is more than just an urban space or production system constituted at a specific and much localized scale. It is a set of social practices, oriented not merely to economic production, but also to cultural tradition and regional identity" (Prytherch 2003:424). This meant that the discursive frames that developed around these the alternative economic space developed by these agro-entrepreneurial initiatives were also expected to address a wide range of contemporary concerns about these fields (preferably after having escaped the predominant archaic discourses). This would provide new resources for the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The idealized resistance that kept referring back to some idealized, archaic agrarian landscape was no longer a viable option for the conservation of these fields. Many

interviewed agro-entrepreneurs highlighted that they never aimed to revive the 'traditional huerta cultivation model'. Instead they set out to experiment with new models adapted to the contemporary environment.

Could these initiatives reach sufficient support from their locally based clientele to reach their goals? Civil activists often attacked the 'neoliberal conformism' of the Valencian people. Montiel Márquez (2010) argued that certain corrosion of the Valencian people's character reflected in the continuous re-election of the governing party (Partido Popular) as they ignored their solid ties with the 'new entrepreneurial classes'. He questioned whether the Valencian society is able to produce a "political articulation with sufficient energy to change the model, in which the general interests and the willingness to serve real social demands would rule over the desire for private benefits and speculative practices, and in which the sustainability would go beyond being merely an empty promise and serve to effectively stop the actual of waste of resources" (Montiel Márquez 2010). The sacrifice of the Huerta was seen as such wasted resource. He argued that such harsh processes "deprived the citizens of their basic rights to a healthy environment … [and] affordable living conditions". They also renounced the "rational use of natural resources, to conserve their patrimony, or simply protect it from speculation" (Montiel Márquez 2010).

The agro-entrepreneurial initiatives in charge of the development of alternative economic space of the Huerta offered several features that strengthened the multifunctionality of the Huerta (Zasada 2011). Some actors, previously seen as agents of disorder, gradually gain new reputation as 'micro-entrepreneurs' with 'inventive creativity' (Ferguson 2007). They powered a 'new kind of development strategy' (Elyachar 2005) with new democratic interfaces that served as "conduits for negotiation, information and exchange" (Cornwall and Coelho 2007:42). The people of the Huerta had limited resources and access in asserting their visions in the imaginary of the metropolitan area (Marshall et al. 2009). The alternative

economic space created by them reshaped the contemporary representation of these fields. It included the material reconstruction of the Huerta (e.g.: landscape management, reclaiming and cultivating the actual fields of the Huerta, application of more sustainable cultivation methods, providing visual amenities, increasing agro-biodiversity), and its dialectical revision (e.g.: social farming, educational activities, community farming, recreational activities; disproving the myth that the Huerta's socio-economic viability was irreversibly compromised, through developing alternative business models with deeper social relations).

7.5 Challenging the urban utility of the Huerta

Each historical era had its own idea about the Huerta's potential urban utility. Under the era or regional entrepreneurialism (since mid-20th century) the Huerta's urban utility was dominated by its 'increasing structural significance' (Brenner 1999 in Prytherch 2006). It meant that its fields became an indispensable asset to the local government's urban development plans. The implementation of these mega-projects erased the agrarian iconography from Valencia's metropolitan imaginary. The Huerta was converted into a venue where the local governments could "consolidate their own territory and legitimacy" (Prytherch 2003:223) by building on them. This consolidation process ignored that urban planning, which was supposed to be "intimately connected with … identity, status and visibility", should not exclusively serve the interests and imaginaries of the "middle class, elite and state anxieties" (Marshall, Waldman, and MacGregor 2009:39).

The multifunctionality of the recently emerged alternative economic space within the Huerta called for the redefinition of these fields' urban utility. Most alternative agro-entrepreneurs argued that the alternative economic space developed around their initiatives could establish a new era where the Huerta could recover its role in the establishment of the 'Valencian difference'.

> "…there were times when Valencia was famous for the rich fields surrounding it. I think it was Teodoro Llorente back in the 19th century who said that when the people think of Valencia they think of all this green surrounding it. Obviously those were times when the Huerta was used as a symbol of Valencia. Lately of course people just speak of the degradation of the Huerta. And I do not really believe that it is their interest to have people on these fields, it makes it more difficult for them to get the fields. You know? More protests. You know the case of the Punta and that other one here when they wanted to build a shopping center on these fields, right? … Well, the media covered those protests well. I see that the people are generally aware of how these projects are devouring these fields. But they couldn't really do anything about it. Yes, there were many who participated in those protests - like we did. I don't know but I would like to believe that what we do here is against those tendencies.. some people know that if they want to do something about it they should come and support us. Although there many of them are interested only in buying healthy food at a better price, and there is nothing wrong with that. … You asked me how I like to think of our project (an organic vegetable box scheme). Well I would like to think that we try to make a difference. You know? I hope that one day when you will ask people what is their idea of the Huerta they would say something like, I don't know, something like that it has many small projects with these young people, that you can find all kind of fresh vegetables there, you can go there to relax or learn something about nature. I think there is a limitless potential here, but only a few of us are ready to see it. And yes, it is hard work. And people don't like to work hard anymore. I do (he laughs). But that is my problem, I can't help it."

The success of the alternative economic space was always contrasted to discourses that used to diminish the Huerta's role in the establishment of the 'Valencian difference'. The next session presents how the Huerta's urban utility was perceived by the Territorial Action Plan for the Protection of the Huerta (PATH), and to what extent it recognized the multifunctionality features of the alternative economic space developed by the alternative agro-entrepreneurs and their supporters.

The PATH recognized the Huerta as a 'living cultural landscape'. It acknowledged that the abandonment of agrarian activities on the fields of the Huerta would result in the disappearance of the base of its cultural character and identity. They highlighted that the urbanization of the productive fields (regardless their profitability at that point) would destroy the greater economic potential hidden in the region. This was in line with the sustainability

discourses of the early 1990's that highlighted the Huerta's potential to improve the metropolitan area's sustainability.

The movement emphasized that the uncontrolled urbanization pressures would result in a weaker economy in the long run, as the urbanizing expectations would lead to the complete ignorance of the potential in cultivating these fields and allow the substitution of this characteristic agrarian landscape (Miralles i Garcia 1993). It recognized the agro-utility of the Huerta as a key aspect necessary to secure the region's sustainability. However, earlier the decision-makers unleashed the urbanizing agents onto these fields, they chose to ignore this search for sustainable identity.

The PATH report (2011) highlighted that the intensification of the infrastructural network of the metropolitan area is still among the most critical issues that threaten the Huerta. The rapid degradation of the Huerta's visual landscape manifested in its fragmentation and the rapid deterioration of the border zones between the cultivated fields and the urban areas they embrace. The report identified three major conditions that contributed to the decay of the Huerta. Firstly, the intrinsic agrarian structure of the Huerta made the currently proposed protection measures inefficient. It highlighted that it would require the local government's commitment to establish frameworks for the management of these fields and to provide financial support to motivate the agriculturists to remain on these fields. Secondly, the report stated that the crisis of the 'huerta cultivation model' implied that the development of socio-economically viable agrarian models would require external support. Lastly, it stated that the lack of attractiveness and profitability of cultivating these fields constituted a serious difficulty in the maintenance of these fields without generational and cultural continuity. Nevertheless, the report stated that despite the compromised viability of the fields, there are still some agriculturists who are likely to continue working on the maintenance of the fields. It argued that "the viability of the Huerta could be improved

through agrarian and market mechanisms but to reach adequate levels of profitability complementary activities are needed" (PATH 2011). The report presented five themes, which could result in the development of a competent protection plan for the Huerta if targeted by applicable strategies. The goal of the proposed strategies is to promote (a) the creation of a green infrastructure to protect and connect the most valuable landscapes, (b) the development of sustainable formulas for the management and financing of agrarian activities of the Huerta, (c) to integrate the infrastructural routes and the rural-urban margins into the landscape, (d) to protect and valuate the cultural, visual and environmental patrimony of the Huerta, within a model of public recreational, cultural and touristic use.

Fig.7.3. Bicycle route crossing the Huerta – allowing urbanites to get to know the Huerta and also use it as an open space for recreational activities like walking, biking, skating or running (Source: own portfolio, taken in 2011, L'Horta Nord, Valencia)

The agrarian program proposed within the PATH recognized agriculturists as the 'authentic protagonist' responsible for maintaining the Huerta's landscape. The documentation about the drafting processes of the PATH emphasized the importance given to these agriculturists as stakeholders cooperating in the public consultations that aimed to identify the key strategic frames. Nevertheless, my informants found this public consultation insufficient. It identified that the low profitability of its fields under cultivation; the lack of

expectations for its future; and the inability to engage future generations were the most significant dangers the Huerta faced in the last few decades. Meanwhile the aging of the agriculturist community also became a critical issue. These symptoms together could signal the risk of collapse of agrarian activities in the Huerta.

The document put forward the need for long-term guarantees, but failed to make any promises about taking the lead or participating in the establishment of them. These guarantees should create stability through controlling territorial planning and by creating indirect and direct measures to recover the economic viability of agrarian production. Among the indirect measures, the agrarian program recognized the potential in the establishment of short supply chains, quality brands with geographical indication, organic labels, and the marketing of traditional varieties of the Huerta. The program highlighted the need for more cooperation among and a 'pan-Huerta coordination' of its agriculturists, potentially through coordinated producer networks. It also acknowledged the need to establish farmers markets and recover local markets to help the commercialization of the produce deriving from the Huerta locally. It recognized the need to provide programs that offer specific means for agriculturists to engage in such systems. Among the indirect means of support, the program introduced the idea of providing monetary aid to contribute to the viability of the farms as a reward for agriculturists dedicated to the maintenance of the Huerta. The PATH proposed the use of FEADER funds to finance such public services within the Rural Development Program of the Community of Valencia referring to the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Agriculture in peri-urban areas' (2005/C 74/12). Nevertheless, these proposed guidelines for a future agrarian program appeared only as an annex complementing the PATH. Despite being promoted as an action plan, the PATH served mostly as a reference document for territorial classification. When promoting the 'primarily productive character' for the Huerta, the PATH emphasized that the agriculturists should advance the

multifunctionality of their fields and should develop complementary services directed towards the urbanites. These recommendations show that the Action plan clearly prioritized the urban utility of these fields, emphasizing the recreational potential of the area.

The General Urbanization Plan of 2010[45] called for the establishment of green buffer zones around the new urbanization projects under the concept of periurban parks of transition[46] to secure 'the preservation of the Huerta'. The question whether the establishment of community gardens within these zones, like the one within the Sociopolis project, could truly conserve the 'essence of the Huerta' (a term that often mentioned when Sociopolis came up during my interviews with agro-entrepreneurs). It received a great amount of criticism. Their opponents argued that such artificial settings would compromise the most characteristic feature of the Huerta's classical cultivation model: the landowner agriculturists' self-determination.

The alternative economic space that resulted in the reshaping of the contemporary representation of the Huerta provided a venue for a wide range of citizens "to construct political action within the market where unsatisfied demands on the political system can be expressed" (Gendron et al. 2008:73). It served as an 'emancipatory forum for urbanism' (Brenner 2009) as it provided access to the social landscape creation dynamics of Valencia. Most of the respondents argued that even though such externally coordinated schemes could invite some new people to cultivate the fields of the Huerta but without the autonomous figure of the entrepreneurial minded agriculturists the Huerta would definitely cease to be what it is today.

[45] Valencia's General Urbanization Plan of 2010 reclassified 481 hectares of the periurban agrarian fields of the metropolitan area, out of which 362 hectares were directly assigned for construction and an additional 119 hectares were set aside to create 'periurban parks of transition' (Ayuntamento de Valencia 2010).

[46] This additional area has to at least 1.5 times larger than the land they originally meant to urbanize

Concluding thoughts

The era of alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism is characterized by a deeply embedded alternative economic space that set out to challenge the contemporary representation of the Huerta. This era made the alternative economic space into the new symbol of the 'Valencian difference'.

The alternativeness of this economic space was defined by its efforts to address the concerns that the movement for the protection of the Huerta had developed. It converted the Huerta into a specific 'location of resistance' (Soja 1996). The era of alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism is about the Huerta's material reconstruction and its dialectical revision. It recognizes the protagonism of the alternative agro-entrepreneurs and their supporters in reshaping the contemporary representation of the Huerta.

The transformation of the Huerta from being a historical landscape into a living landscape was only possible through the mobilization of the social capital originally developed by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. These initiatives were aware of their dependence on the depth of their supporters' commitment and of how the absence it could prevent them from reaching their real potential.

Regardless of being marginal at a material scale, these initiatives developed a rich dialectical presence in the contemporary discourses that described the Huerta. They became recognized as the latest building blocks of these fields' contemporary representation, which counterbalanced their marginality.

The discourses that developed within this alternative economic space broke the domination of the defensive, conservation-oriented discourses promoted by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The movement recognized these initiatives' potential to reshape the representation of these fields and embraced them as a method of resistance. The contemporary narratives describing the Huerta now include optimistic accounts on

innovation, cooperation and community development. The alternative economic space created a supportive environment where the agriculturists and their supporters could finally proactively engage in the social landscape creation processes responsible for shaping the Huerta's representation.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This dissertation analyzes how a few dozen small-scale agro-entrepreneurial initiatives managed to revive the periurban fields of the Metropolitan Area of Valencia. Through their alternative production and distribution systems, they challenged the myth that the loss of these fields' socio-economic viability was irreversible. Through the lenses of critical urban theory, it investigates how the alternative economic space that developed around these initiatives reshaped the contemporary representation of the Huerta.

The narrative

The alternative economic space that developed around these initiatives established a venue that allowed a diverse group of stakeholders to gain access to these processes of social landscape creation. Most of these stakeholders had previously been restricted from the social landscape creation processes. A wide range of 'unconscious social desires' (Bloomfield 2006) were manifested in these initiatives.

The alternativeness of these initiatives was defined by two features. First, their awareness of the challenges and opportunities provided to them by their original embeddedness (based on the discourses responsible for the contemporary representation of the Huerta). Second, their ability to mobilize the social capital secured by this embeddedness so they could strengthen the viability of their initiatives, and their ability to deepen their embeddedness by strengthening their clientele's and the Valencian society's sense of place about the Huerta. The entrepreneurial models created by these initiatives supported them in achieving these goals.

Eventually the alternative economic space that developed around these initiatives became the primary reference point in reshaping the Huerta's representation as it provided a

venue where efforts could be coordinated to 'keep these fields alive'. This means collective efforts to keep these fields cultivated, apply sustainable cultivation methods (e.g. organic, complex crop mixes and crop rotations, authentic varieties), respect the autonomy of the agriculturists, engage a supportive clientele, promote self-organization, etc.

These initiatives contributed to the material reconstruction of the Huerta. Their efforts were complemented by their strong dialectical presence, which counterbalanced their marginality. Soon the movement for the protection of the Huerta embraced these initiatives for having developed a new method of resistance. It recognized that the Huerta could be strengthened by a more intense sense of place provided by these initiatives.

8.1 The context – Challenges and opportunities

Periurban condition

The fields of the Huerta de Valencia operate under a so-called periurban condition. The periurban is the most endangered landscape of an entrepreneurial city as it could be treated as a land reserve for certain 'visions of modernity' (Marshall et al. 2009). The built symbols of modernity and the promises they hold could easily make people accept the irrevocable territorial changes they require. In Valencia the local authorities systematically ignored the norms that were supposed to regulate territorial planning and protect the region's natural and cultural patrimony (Naredo and Montiel Márquez 2010). This resulted in the massive loss of the agrarian lands with special economic, environmental and landscape interest.

The minifundio land structure provided a difficult environment to improve the production efficiency and to cut the production costs. The physical fragmentation of the fields and their atomized ownership disabled the establishment of satisfactory economies of scale that could secure their competitiveness on rapidly globalizing food market. Furthermore, the

agrarian sector was characterized by its indebtedness due to the mismatch of the high production costs and recessed wholesale prices producers could achieve in the market controlled by intermediaries.

Historical discourses

The Valencian regional identity is an outcome of an ongoing "cultural-historical and political-economic processes" of social landscape creation (Prytherch 2006:210). Each historical era was obsessed with the redefinition of the 'Valencian difference'. Therefore, they also had to revisit the Huerta's role in it. The agrarian landscape of the Huerta always reflects the dominant socio-political constructs that characterize the city of Valencia in a given historical era. The contemporary representation of the Huerta consists of multiple accumulated layers, just like its agrarian landscape.

Under the era of folkloric regionalism, the Huerta was "politically reconstructed from material way-of-life into folkloric regional symbol and later nationalist rallying cry" (Prytherch 2009:58). The process was characterized by 'bourgeois exclusivism' as it created the illusion that failed to address the tensions present in the Valencian society.

Later, under the era of entrepreneurial regionalism the Huerta was degraded into a venue where the local governments could "consolidate their own territory and legitimacy" (Prytherch 2003:223). This era marked these fields as an expendable *transitional* territory.

Even though the grandiose built symbols of entrepreneurial regionalism dominated the skyline of Valencia, the dialectical presence of the movement for the protection of the Huerta that contested it also grew stronger. The alternative economic space that emerged in this context finally provided a venue where the concerns formulated by the movement could manifest. This brought along the era of alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism, which consisted of the material reconstruction and its dialectical revision of the Huerta.

In different eras different groups had their different means and capabilities to participate in the social landscape creation processes. The movement for the protection of the Huerta developed a rich discursive framework to these fields' importance for the Valencian society. The era of alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism recognized the importance of these alternative agro-entrepreneurs' protagonism as an essential force to reshape the contemporary representation of the Huerta.

8.2 The alternativeness of these initiatives

What defines the alternativeness of these initiatives?

At first one might assume that it was their alternative cultivation and distribution strategies that defined these initiatives' alternativeness (e.g. developing an organic vegetable box scheme). However, the need to keep these fields under cultivation was recognized as the number one priority even by those who could easily differentiate themselves exclusively based on their organicness. This invites us to learn more about what constitutes the alternativeness of these initiatives.

Firstly, the alternativeness of these agro-entrepreneurial initiatives is defined by their awareness of their original embeddedness and their ability to mobilize the social capital that derives from it to support their initiatives. Their original social and spatial embeddedness is based on their ability to address those shared concerns that were raised by the movement for the protection of the Huerta and the globally present agro-ecological movement. These concerns concentrated around the compromised socio-economic viability of the Huerta and the implication of its degradation for the Valencian society (e.g. loss of a feature of their regional identity, loss patrimony, loss of a venue for self-subsistence, loss of a sense of place etc.)

Secondly, their alternativeness is defined by their ability to deepen their embeddedness and by strengthening the sense of place around the fields of the Huerta. This implies that their alternativeness is rooted in these initiatives' ability to provide means for their participants to express their concerns about the tendencies responsible for the Huerta's gradual degradation.

What characterizes these initiatives?

These initiatives are characterized by a shared understandings about the change they wanted to see and solid community bonds (Lyson 2004) they created to achieve them. Their community-supported initiatives were perceived to be an incubator space with less pressure and different requirements. The 2000's marked the beginning of a period when sourcing fresh produce from the Huerta became a trend. The agriculturists felt that many of their clients were aware of the sacrifices they made to keep these fields under cultivation and understood what their presence on these fields implied. These models provided greater independence for these entrepreneurs, an improved level of control over their lives and a newly found protagonism in the movement for the protection of these fields.

These initiatives found innovative ways to adapt to the challenging features that characterized the Huerta. Nevertheless, they were committed to safeguard the remaining cornerstones of the 'classical Huerta experience': the minifundio land structure, the romanticized open landscaped of the 19th century Huerta, some autochthonous plant varieties, and the place-specific agrarian practices complemented with some innovative edges.

They offered an alternative entrepreneurial model contrasted to the ones unable to adapt to the trends responsible for the degradation of the Huerta. They disproved the myth that the compromised socio-economic viability of these fields is irreversible. Meanwhile, they addressed concerns developed by the movement for the protection of these fields. Some

initiatives experimented with allowing access to a wide range of people to the Huerta and coordinated their attendance. They became welcoming gatekeepers of the Huerta. They exceled in developing and managing institutionalized frameworks through which their clientele could develop a stronger sense of place around the Huerta (e.g. on-farm pick up, open-days, volunteering positions, rentable plots, full community gardens even to empower the unemployed or the immigrants, etc.). It complemented their place attachment, originally based on historical discourses of the era of folkloric regionalism and the era of entrepreneurial regionalism, with shared personal experiences. They also recovered the Valencian people's place satisfaction by highlighting the utilitarian value of these fields (e.g. source of fresh food of proximity, place for active recreation, etc.). Furthermore, they were able to mobilize the social capital that derived from their original social and spatial embeddedness (e.g. engage those who were concerned about the degradation of these fields). This allowed them to improve the viability of their operations.

8.3 Becoming a primary reference point that reshaped the Huerta's representation

The active presence of these alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives and the apparent socio-economic viability of their operations redefined the contemporary representation of the Huerta. They became the primary reference point of this process as the success of their efforts to 'keep the Huerta alive' was recognized.

Keeping the Huerta alive

The transformation of the Huerta from being a historical landscape into a living landscape was only possible through the mobilization of the social capital originally developed by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. These initiatives were aware of

their dependence on the depth of their supporters' commitment and of how the lack of their commitment would prevent them from reaching their real potential.

Counterbalanced marginality

The strong dialectical presence of these initiatives counterbalanced to some extent their marginality. Besides recycling discourse themes from other historical eras, these initiatives also actively participated in the „continual creation, negotiation, and re-creation of identity, memory and meaning" attached to the Huerta (DeLind 2011: 279).

Embraced by the movement

The discourses that developed within this alternative economic space broke the domination of the defensive, conservation-oriented discourses promoted by the movement for the protection of the Huerta. The movement recognized these initiatives' potential to reshape the representation of these fields and embraced them as a method of resistance. The contemporary narratives describing the Huerta now include optimistic accounts on innovation, cooperation and community development. The alternative economic space created a supportive environment where the agriculturists and their supporters could finally proactively engage in the social landscape creation processes responsible for shaping the Huerta's representation.

8.4 The future and some policy implications

It is possible that the era of alternative agro-entrepreneurial regionalism will be a short era in the history of the Huerta. It must be acknowledged that this alternative economic space gained more importance when the crisis that stalled the growth of the metropolitan area presented a window of opportunity. The crisis hibernated the urbanizing expectations that had previously compromised the agriculturists' dedication to keep certain fields under cultivation. The relatively low returns on cultivating these fields became an option to consider.

It is unpredictable to what extent these urbanizing expectations will be awakened when the crisis eases and whether the local government will return to promote urbanization based development for its metropolitan area. The legal environment still promotes a neoliberal planning philosophy with a "vocation towards the production of newly classified urbanizable lands… accelerating the process of abandonment of traditional agrarian spaces and activities, whose profitability could not even be compared with the prices offered by the real-estate intermediaries" (Montiel Márquez 2010).

This study provides an analysis of the dynamics developed by the supportive environment in which this alternative economic space emerged. It acknowledges that the maintenance of this alternative economic space and the endeavors to expand it might require different strategies.

Looking at the history of the movement for the protection of the Huerta, we see that these independent, loosely coordinated initiatives, supported by a dedicated clientele are perceived to be the key in safeguarding the Huerta. The movement recognized that keeping people of the fields means 'keeping the Huerta alive'.

However, there were always expectations towards the establishment of a larger framework, which could contribute to the protection of these fields under more centralized management structures. Among these were the citizen's initiative of Per l'Horta (2001) to provide a legislative framework that would have converted the Huerta into a natural park; the critical reception of PATH (2011) for not having delivered frameworks through which the agriculturists could be organized and supported; the wide range of community gardens that set out to reclaim certain fields of the Huerta to provide coordinated access to them; the concept of 'periurban parks of transition' proposed by the General Urbanization Plan of 2010.

Such framework should be drafted in a way that it respects those elements that constitute the essence of these fields and considers those that seemed to have secured the success of the alternative agro-entrepreneurial initiatives.

The agriculturists of the Huerta are independent agents, but also members of the irrigation community. They often cooperate on their own initiative. The ones engaged in the alternative economic space often form or join producer and consumer organizations, as well as community certification schemes. They provide food to proximate markets, participate in safeguarding local varieties, and respect seasonality. They address the concerns of the agro-ecological movement by applying environmentally respectable cultivation models. They embrace and vigorously promote the concept of local fair trade and show great interest in discussing the 'relativity of price'. However, the strategic decisions about the level of marketness and instrumentalism seem to be the most obvious source of internal conflict and frustrations among the promoters of these initiatives. They also seem to be fond of developing their own version of the 'produce of the Huerta' 'trademark'. They are sensitive to the accusations of making their products unavailable for those with lower purchasing power. Many of them aim to find ways to fight social inequalities, providing a more inclusive access to these fields.

One should acknowledge that the conservation of the Huerta *per se* is impossible because the Huerta is a changing agrarian landscape. However, the abandonment of its fields equals to the loss of those features that constitute the essence of these fields. Schemes that fail to recognize and respect these features will end up keeping these fields under cultivation but might fail to keep the 'Huerta alive'.

The PATH report (2011) could be a good starting point, as it has developed a comprehensive record that identified and evaluated the characteristic features of the Huerta.

Nevertheless, I argue that instead of a centralized managerial framework, the Huerta needs projects that are equipped to support independent agro-entrepreneurial initiatives. These projects should promote cooperation (e.g. disseminate good practice and provide trainings), allow for and promote alternative community based certification schemes, address the challenges of developing a denomination of origin scheme for the Huerta, support the establishment of more public and private community gardens to secure access of the people of Valencia to these fields, hire agriculturists to share their experience so they could complement their income, secure schemes of public procurement projects developed hand-in-hand with organized agriculturists so demand and supply could be developed gradually.

Any scheme that respects the essence of the Huerta should allow its agriculturists to remain in charge and develop conditions for a truly fair local fair trade.

Annex I.

Interview guide

Tentative questions	Aim of the question – to be kept in mind when asking cross-questions to urge respondent to further elaborate his/her answer
Q1: How have you become involved in organic agriculture/ in this scheme?	get to know the personal/professional background/history of the informant elements of the local organic movement could come up – roles, discourse elements.. some personal reasons to opt for organic production (might be values, might be other things…) could present some organic values
Q2: How would you describe your role in it?	get to know roles that are present in the organic agrarian system of the Huerta – how those roles are perceived by the given actor to know where to place the informant's perspective (diff players might have diverse perspectives – some pattern might come up)
Q3: How would you describe organic agriculture? What are the most important values in organic agriculture?	get them define organic get to know values linked to organic agriculture (with no bias) sense priorities (what is mentioned first) in what context values are mentioned does the informant believe that the promoted values on organic are relevant, real? (some responds might not be confirming but questioning in nature)
Q4: What could organic agriculture offer to the society/to the people? Who can benefit from organic agriculture? and how? B. Could other forms of agriculture offer the same of something similar?	map the perception on the social aspects of organic agriculture who is society? who are the people? benefitting groups(how diff groups mentioned or not mentioned) how these groups benefit? (forms of social aspects could be listed) what kind of added values (social in this case) the respondent recognizes? sub-question B aims to find out whether organic agriculture has a preferential status in the local discourse – what does that mean?
Q5:	- this question supplement the previous one, with a

How can organic agriculture contribute to life in the Huerta?	more concrete focus on rural development. But does not mention the word development ..just life.. this way I can map if life itself includes elements of development or not.. if not, what does it include? what other values? - can organic agriculture offer more? why? why not?
Q6: Does anything like "local fair trade" exists here?	find out if there is anything similar in the local discourse find out how farmers would define it is that connected to organic? if so, how? is that connected to local? if so, how? any elements found to call for the articulation of an added-value?
Q7: A: What do you think about the conservation of the Huerta? B: Could organic agriculture contribute to the conservation of the Huerta of Valencia? Do its capacities differ from those of other production forms?	how people perceive the issue of the conservation of the Huerta what is the Huerta for them is agriculture an important part of the Huerta? What is the role agriculture in the Huerta play in its conservation? Is it important what kind of agriculture we are talking about? Does organic agriculture have anyway better potential in the conservation? How about active agrarian presence?
Q8: How the situation of the *Huerta de Valencia* could be improved? Any goals?	- chance to mention problems the sector faces and opportunities.. this was the question asked before the SWOT questions were to be introduced - define a desired objective!

List of statements used at respondent validation

List of statements presented to selected informants:

• It doesn't matter whether to have conventional or organic production, what matters is to keep the Huerta alive.

• Buying products from the Huerta is a way to contribute to the agriculturist's work to maintain the Huerta, in order to allow them to earn their living with dignity.

• Maintaining supportive social networks and cooperation among the farmers are important, but it is still not happening.

• The work of civic movements for the protection of the Huerta and the work of organic producers mutually contribute to each other's aspirations.

• Small scale organic agriculture is an economically viable alternative for the Huerta.

Annex II.

Geographical locations of the conflicts discussed in the dissertation

Fig. Annex 2.1.: The territory of El Saler (Source: Google maps, accessed: 2014 February)

Fig. Annex 2.2.: The remaining fields of the Punta, and the ones occupied by the ZAL (Zona de Actividades Logísticas, Zone of Logistic Activities) Source: Google Maps, accessed 2014, February)

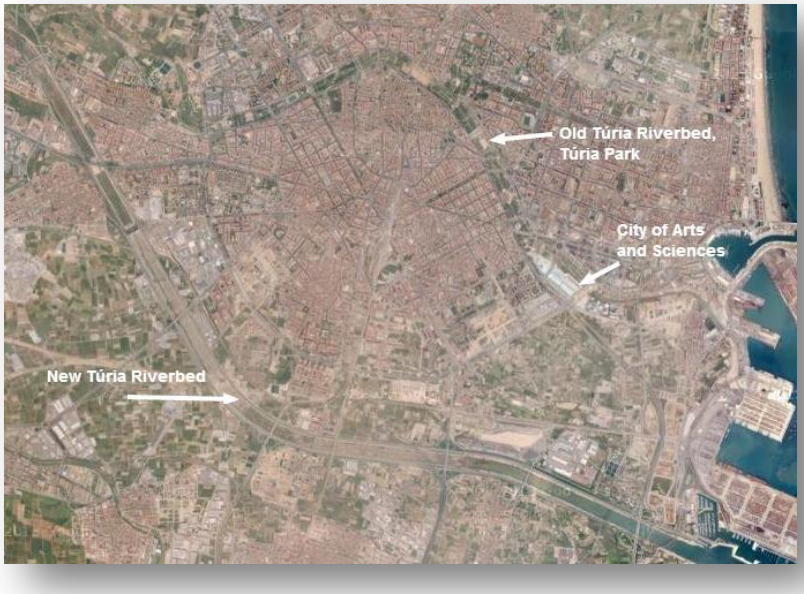

Fig. Annex 2.3. The old and the new riverbeds of the Túria river, embracing the city center of Valencia from the North and the South (Source: Google Maps, accessed 2014, February)

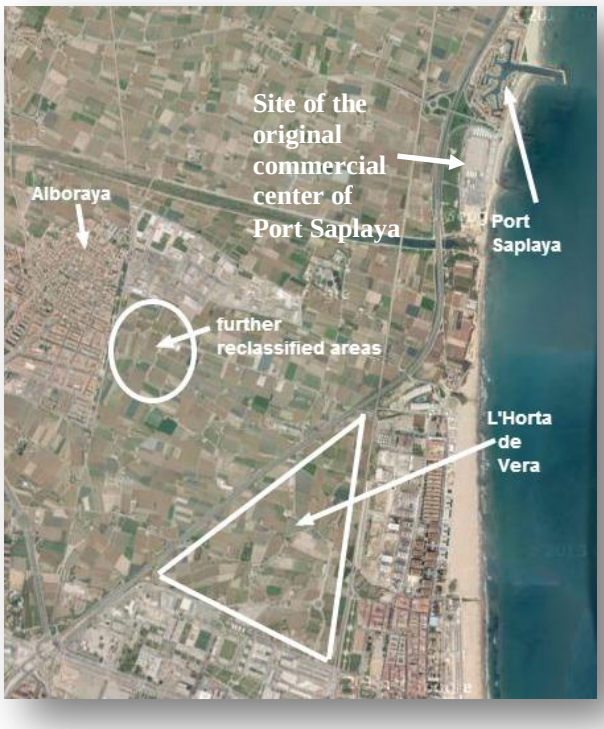

Fig. Annex 2.4 The area defended by the Salvem L'Horta de Vera de Alboraia group (Source: Google Maps accessed 2014, February)

Fig. Annex 2.5.: The reclaimed fields at Benimaclet. (Source: Google Maps, accessed 2014, February)

Fig. Annex 2.6.: Areal view of the stalled Sociopolis project and its urban gardens (Source: Google Maps, accessed 2014, February)

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