

# Well-being in Alternative Economies: The Role of Shared Commitments in the Context of a Spatially-Extended Alternative Food Network

Journal of Macromarketing  
2017, Vol. 37(2) 206-216  
© The Author(s) 2016  
Reprints and permission:  
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0276146716680702  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jmk



Forrest Watson<sup>1</sup> and Ahmet Ekici<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Alternative economies are built on shared commitments to improve subjects' well-being. Traditional commercial markets, premised upon growth driven by separate actors pursuing personal material gain, lead to exploitation of some actors and to negligible well-being gains for the rest. Through resocializing economic relations and expanding the recognition of interdependence among the actors in a marketing system, economic domination and exploitation can be mitigated. We define shared commitments as a choice of a course of action in common with others. We empirically demonstrate the existence of shared commitments through an in-depth study of a spatially extended alternative food network in Turkey. Finally, we offer an inductive model of how shared commitments can be developed between local and non-local actors to bring new economies into being and improve the well-being of consumers and producers, localities, markets, and society.

## Keywords

marketing and quality of life, community, consumer well-being, food marketing, developing countries, macromarketing, QOL, commitment

## Introduction

Shared commitments between actors are the basis of alternative economies. "Alternative economies rest on shared commitments to minimize economic domination and exploitation and thereby alleviate the subordinated position of local subjects" (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2014). Whereas the traditional commercial market tends to be associated with self-interested separate actors undertaking exchanges for material gain, alternative economic movements aim to resocialize economic relations and provide opportunities "where ethical economic decisions can be made around recognized forms of interdependence" (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 81). Interdependence is consistent with macromarketing's systems tradition. Rather than the assumption of atomistic individualism in micromarketing, macromarketing is premised on the interdependence of elements in the marketing system (Kilbourne 2004; Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006).

While shared commitments are at the foundation of alternative economies, the concept is underdeveloped. In this paper, we aim to define *shared commitments*, empirically demonstrate their *existence*, and show *how* they form between actors in alternative economies. Understanding shared commitments and how they can be developed is critical to the conceptualization and development of alternative economies that can reduce exploitation and subordination.

A second underdeveloped area in the literature on alternative economies is place and space, and particularly the relationship between local and non-local. We are interested in how *non-local* "movement actors work towards localized development" (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2014) to improve well-being for local subjects. We examine how shared commitments can develop in geographically dispersed and spatially extended networks (Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000; Wellman 1999). Our research context, which is both grounded in a local community and ignites the motivation of non-local actors, provides a context for learning how distant people can be drawn into shared commitments and improve well-being outcomes locally and non-locally.

This paper begins with a conceptualization and definition of shared commitment that builds from a review of the literature on commitment. We then explain our qualitative study, conducted in the context of a large spatially extended alternative food network in Turkey. Based on our data analysis, we provide detailed findings of the existence of shared commitments

---

<sup>1</sup>Bilkent University, Bilkent, Ankara, Turkey

## Corresponding Author:

Forrest Watson, Bilkent University, Bilkent, Ankara 06800, Turkey.  
Email: forrest@bilkent.edu.tr

and how they form. We offer an inductive model of how shared commitments can form among actors and discuss the implications for alternative economies and the minimization of subordination in local communities.

## Shared Commitments Defined

*Shared commitments* has previously been presented only as a notion in the domain of alternative economies rather than as a specific concept (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2014). We believe our definition will help in identifying when these commitments are present and aid in assessing how they are developed.

Commitment, in general use, has been defined as “an absolute moral choice of a course of action” (Oxford English 1948). From across the diverse academic literature on commitment, Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer (1995) identified three components: a behavioral component of some form of investment, an attitudinal component described as affective commitment or psychological attachment, and a temporal dimension indicating that the relationship exists over time.

There is a vast stream of literature on organizational commitment that explores a person’s attitude and behavior toward his or her employing organization. Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) assert that organizational commitment is characterized by a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. Organizational commitment has also been extended to the relationship between customers and an organization (Garbarino and Johnson 1999). A more recent consideration is organizational identification, where through different paths employees and customers alike come to feel congruence between personal and organizational attributes (Press and Arnould 2011). Commitment has also been applied in relationship marketing, where the emphasis is on commitment to the exchange partner. Morgan and Hunt (1994) define relationship commitment as “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it” (p. 23). The literature has typically discussed commitment or identification being *to* the organization or the exchange partner.

Although shared commitment draws on the general definition of commitment, it is different than organizational or relationship commitment in what is “shared.” *Shared* can mean “to have in common” (Merriam-Webster 2003). Adapting the main themes of commitment in the literature (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995), we theorize that shared commitment is characterized by a) collective action (behavioral), b) congruent values and goals (attitudinal), and c) concern for the future welfare of other actors (temporal). All of these are part of commitment *to* a particular goal or course of action, rather than *to* the organization or to an exchange partner. In shared commitment, distinct from organizational commitment, the actors are committed to a common course of action, where the goals

and values are above even the organization. Shared commitment is also distinct from relationship commitment because the commitment is not to the relationship first and foremost, but rather to a higher social goal.

Taken together, we define shared commitment as *a choice of a course of action in common with others*. Incorporating the three dimensions of collective action, congruent values and goals, and concern for the future welfare of other actors, shared commitment is when actors take collective action toward a common goal for the long-term welfare of all. We turn now to address what the “course of action in common” is specifically within alternative economies.

## Shared Commitments in Alternative Economies

In traditional commercial markets there are typically no shared commitments to social goals and very little social concern for other actors. As Foucault explained, “The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our day is not to try to liberate the individual from the economy . . . but to liberate us both from the economy and from the type of individualization that is linked to the economy” (Foucault 1983, p. 216 in Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xxxv). In the starkest view of traditional commercial markets, business owners and investors want profit, employees care about their wage, and customers are concerned with the value of the product or service they consume. Commitment can exist in all types of markets, but is typically pursued for its impact on measures like retention and performance (e.g. Gustafsson, Johnson, and Roos 2005; Meyer and Allen 1991), rather than the well-being of other actors.

Quite different than the above individualized picture of traditional commercial markets, alternative economies rest on shared commitments to the well-being of others. “A politics of collective action involves conscious and combined efforts to build a new kind of economic reality” (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xxxvi). Day (2005) advocates working from affinity, “non-universalizing, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based on mutual aid and shared ethical commitments” (p. 9) in the pursuit of emancipation. Day (2005) further explains that our relationships can be guided by “interlocking ethico-political commitments of *groundless solidarity*” (p. 18), where actors see their own privilege and oppression as interlinked. How then do these interlocking shared ethical commitments develop?

We aim to fill a gap in the literature of shared commitments by exploring *how* different actors come to share the commitment to minimize economic domination. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) address how consumption communities become ideologically aligned. We focus on the “instantiations” (Figure 1, Press and Arnould 2011) of how owners, employees, and customers come to see their own privilege and oppression as interlinked with others and develop the shared commitments foundational in alternative economies. Accordingly, our study aims to answer the following two broad

research questions: How do shared commitments develop in an alternative economy? What are the implications of shared commitments for the well-being of local subjects in an alternative economy? In answering these questions in a spatially extended alternative economy, we consider in particular how non-local consumers can be drawn into shared commitments with distant producers.

## Methodology

### *Context of Alternative Food Networks*

Alternative food networks (AFNs) or short food supply chains are broad-based terms that cover emerging networks of producers, consumers, and other actors that embody alternatives to the more standardized industrial mode of food supply (Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000; Watts, Ilbery, and Maye 2005). AFNs have a commitment to the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of food production, distribution, and consumption (Jarosz 2008). Marsden, Banks, and Bristow (2000) point out that AFNs can vary from “face-to-face” to “spatial proximity” to “spatially extended” (pp. 425-426). Because AFNs are enabling more connectivity between food producers and consumers (Alexander and Nicholls 2006; Montiel et al. 2010), this subject is theoretically rich for studying the shared commitments between actors.

Alternative trade organizations (ATOs) like fair trade and community supported agriculture (CSA) are examples of AFNs. Fair trade initiatives seek to transform trade relations between producers and consumers by guaranteeing small-scale farmers in the fair trade network a fair price and an additional premium that they are able to invest back into their community (Hudson and Hudson 2003; Raynolds 2002). CSA farms are part of a countervailing market response to the corporate co-optation of organic (Sharp, Imerman, and Peters 2002; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2006). When consumption takes place in the same community as the production there is a natural feedback loop in place that forces people to live with the social and environmental consequences of their production and consumption decisions (Nozick 1992 in Hudson and Hudson 2003).

The literature shows that fair trade and CSA offer certain strengths in improving well-being of consumers and producers, but each has limitations. There is debate about how much fair trade actually raises the well-being of producing communities (Arnould, Plastina, and Ball 2009; Geiger-Oneto and Arnould 2011; Nelson and Pound 2009), and the impact on consumers' well-being is not convincing enough to prompt high demand. A limit of CSA is that it can only be considered complementary to other food channels because they tend to prosper only in greenbelts of large cities and because of the seasonal dependency due to restrictions of the local growing season (Stagl 2002). This paper describes another form of AFN that combines aspects of fair trade and CSA and holds promise for improving well-being of all network actors and having a wider scope.

### *Miss Silk's Farm as a Research Site*

The primary research site is Miss Silk's Farm (MSF), one of the most successful AFNs to recently emerge in Turkey against a backdrop of urbanization and the decline of local farming (Aydin 2010; Balaban 2012). We choose to study one predominant case in depth in order to observe the existence of shared commitments and generate learning about how they develop.

Pinar Kaftancioglu established a small farm in Ocakli, a village in western Turkey, to live a more rural life and grow healthy food for her daughter (after whom she named the farm). The farm grew out of Pinar's commitment to provide jobs for the local people when they were thrown out of work by the holding company that purchased her water plant and violated the agreement to retain the employees. Pinar saw an opportunity to provide employment for the villagers by sending food to friends and others referred by her friends in Turkey's large cities. MSF has expanded to supply a wide variety of products (over 400) to customers who are accepted based on referrals. A weekly email is sent out to over 40,000 people, with Pinar's commentary about the farm and Turkey's food sector, and includes a large spreadsheet with prices and descriptions of the products, from which customers can select their items. Clients place orders online, and then MSF fills boxes and ships them to customers' doorsteps using a commercial cargo company. Approximately 2,000 large boxes are sent out weekly. MSF is not considered “local” for most of her customers, as most of the boxes are shipped several hundred kilometers to Istanbul and Ankara. The “spatially extended” nature where food is shipped outside of the region makes it an interesting site to study local/non-local dynamics (Marsden, Banks, and Bristow 2000, pp. 425-26). MSF employs about 100 people year-round, most of them women from the surrounding villages, with additional seasonal hires. The farm maintains approximately 50 hectares for crops and vegetables, 13,000 olive trees, 75 cows, and 500 chickens. Pinar outspokenly disavows organic certification, but sells food that she maintains is natural, grown and processed in traditional ways.

One of the purposes of the work on alternative economies is to problematize the hegemonic view of capitalism, and see instead the multiplicity of economic forms (Gibson-Graham 1996). MSF is an example of the multiplicity of economic forms: technically a for-profit company, but one that does not maximize profits or exploit its workers (Gibson-Graham 1996). One may argue that MSF be considered an example of social entrepreneurship because creating social value is valued over wealth creation (Dees 1998), but the paradigm of alternative economies better captures the collective action of all networked actors: It does not try to continually increase capacity or efficiency and regularly turns away customers. MSF does no advertising and only accepts customers by referrals from existing customers. MSF is disruptive to the status quo in openly challenging organic certification and providing employees fair wages and health insurance benefits, contrary to industry norms. Pinar considers herself a rebel and a revolutionary who is against the existing agriculture system.

Although enacted in a context influenced by capitalist norms and conventions, MSF is a space where alternative economic constructions and practices are evident (Lee 2000). We maintain that MSF is an alternative economy because it is not underpinned by profit motivations, but is founded on shared commitments to minimize economic domination and exploitation, exists in a local community to create localized development, and aims to alleviate the subordinated position of local subjects and improve human conditions (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2014). While acknowledging ways in which the story of MSF could be told from a capitalist and commodification discourse, we choose to read for difference rather than dominance (Gibson-Graham 2008).

### Data Collection and Analysis

Our research into this alternative economy was multi-method, collecting data from semi-structured interviews, observations, and written, visual, and online documents. The primary method used was the semi-structured, in-depth interview, which is ideal for collecting nuanced data on the consumer and producer experience (Mason 2002). Rather than only studying individual affective states, we also looked for cultural categories and shared meanings, which are especially important for the community-level analysis we desired (McCracken 1988). Over 35 hours of recorded interviews with the owner, consumers, MSF employees, and people in the producing community yielded over 520 pages of transcribed single-spaced text.

The first author spent four days at MSF and in the surrounding community, observing employees and people in the community as they went about their lives and work, which enabled us to obtain a “*perspective in action*” on top of the “*perspective of action*” provided by the interviews (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991, pp. 15–6). Interviews were conducted with 19 people who work at the farm, most of whom were women aged 30–50 with only primary school education; working at MSF was their first formal employment. These interviews lasted between 10 and 45 minutes and were conducted as the people did their jobs such as harvesting, baking bread, and loading the packages to be delivered to customers. An additional six interviews were conducted with managers and office staff, and lasted between 60 and 170 minutes. In order to learn more about MSF’s impact on the community, we also interviewed 10 people in the local community, including the *muhtar* (village leader), local business owners, people living in nearby villages, and former employees of MSF. All of these interviews were conducted in Turkish. A follow-up visit three months later enabled an interview with the owner, member checks with key informants, and observations of changes on site.

We also conducted interviews with 12 consumers who are involved in MSF. Building from initial contacts who were customers of MSF, we used snowballing to find other informants. Based on MSF’s clientele, the sample was focused on middle- to upper-class women aged 35–60 who live in Turkey’s largest cities—Istanbul and Ankara. Ten of the 12 informants were still customers, ranging from brand new to

seven year customers. Those who no longer bought from MSF helped prevent misguided generalizations. The interviews with consumers lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and were mostly in English.

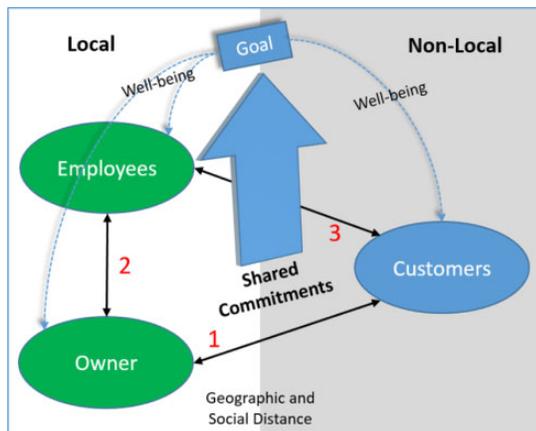
The richest source of documents was the weekly emails (current and archived) Pinar sends to some 40,000 people. These emails range between one and five pages and are a substantial source of information about the farm’s founding, ethos, and mission. We focused on the weekly emails from January to December 2013 and March to August 2015, at which point saturation was reached. MSF’s website ([www.ipekhanim.com](http://www.ipekhanim.com)) is another repository of information, including the story of the farm, photographs, and responses to frequently asked questions. Newspaper and magazine articles, as well as documentaries, also provided helpful sources for triangulating data about MSF to inform our interviews and challenge our assumptions and explanations.

Our analysis of the collected data is an emerging product of an open-ended process of gradual induction (Lofland and Lofland 1995). We used a combination of open coding and axial coding to label, separate, compile, organize, and assign units of meaning to our data (Charmaz 1983; Miles and Huberman 1994). The first part of our analysis involved scanning all the data (520 pages of interview transcripts and 205 pages of documents) and searching for dominant and emerging themes. Our next stage was axial coding, where we explored relationships and patterns in the data around the various open-coded categories in order to create a data-driven conceptual structure to help understand shared commitments in alternative economies.

Checking for researcher effects, member checks, triangulating, and looking for negative evidence were a few of the tactics used to help assure the validity of our conclusions (Miles and Huberman 1994). Because visitors from other parts of Turkey and abroad come frequently to MSF to observe and talk to the employees, we feel potential research effects on the site were mitigated. Conversations between the authors, one of whom was not on site for data collection, provided a check of the effects of the site on the researcher. Triangulation of multiple data sources, including the aforementioned interviews with many different types of actors, observations of MSF and the community, documents about MSF from two different years, and coverage from outside news sources, were used to test our findings. We also searched for negative evidence in the interviews, such as customers who feel no shared commitments with Pinar or people in the community who feel MSF has harmed the area’s well-being.

### Findings

Our emerging model in Figure 1 depicts that shared commitments among networked actors is oriented toward their shared goal. The figure shows a multi-agent conceptualization (Caruana and Chatzidakis 2014) of the interdependence of elements in the marketing system (Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006). We introduce the model here to orient the reader toward the direction of the findings.



**Figure 1.** Inductive model of shared commitments.

As shown in Figure 1, the triangle formed by links 1, 2, and 3 depicts our findings about how shared commitments have developed between and among the owner, employees, and customers. As previously explained, we theorize that each of these shared commitments *between* actors is characterized by a) collective action, b) congruent values and goals, and c) concern for the future welfare of other actors. These elements are part of commitment *to* a particular goal or course of action, rather than to the organization or to an exchange partner.

Figure 1 also represents how the owner and employees are local, while the customers are non-local, separated by geographic and social distances (Raynolds 2002; Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008). Of the three links, links 1 and 3 depict how the geographic and social distances can be traversed. Due to space constraints we have chosen to discuss in detail how shared commitment has developed between customers and employees (link 3) because it is the most challenging of the shared commitments to develop in the spatially extended AFN. Links 1 and 2 are more easily shown, but we will focus on the findings that shared commitments can develop over a spatially extended network, even between customers and employees, who are more socially and culturally different. If the employees and customers can directly work together, have congruent goals and values, and have a concern for one another's future welfare, the network becomes stronger, not just hinging on the owner.

### **Existence of Shared Commitments between Customers and Employees**

We first present evidence that shared commitments, *a choice of a course of action in common with others*, do in fact exist between customers and employees and then analyze in more detail *how* these shared commitments have developed. First, despite the geographic distance, we see examples of collective action toward the same goals. Customers frequently mention how they pay more for products in order to provide employment for women in the village who grow and prepare natural food. "I know that a woman is working for me there and she is

earning money; maybe she is bringing money to her family to her son or daughter and this makes me happy . . . I have a more direct contact" (Ceren). Visits to the farm and thanking the employees, phone calls to the employees for advice, and recommending to friends are other behavioral examples of how customers and employees work together. One employee reflected on how meeting with the customers motivates their work, "When they say 'thanks for your good work' we also feel proud. We do our work with even greater joy" (Feyza).

Second, our time in the field shows that customers and employees have congruent goals and values. "The most important thing is that we really grow all of our own natural food . . . All of our customers know this" (Candan). According to one employee, customers say to them, "You live naturally. It's not like that in the city. Clean air, everything is organic" (Feyza). A customer reflected her related values and goals in this way: "So the natural way of farming is dead I guess, except for small grass roots organizations like [MSF] . . . What we eat is really affecting us, our bodies, our children. So it is not just for a small number of people, for a city, it is for the world; it is very important" (Rengin). They have common values of growing natural food for a healthier lifestyle and future.

Third, our data show that employees and customers have a concern for each other's long-term welfare that goes well beyond an economic exchange. When asked the reasons for her involvement with MSF, one customer answered in the following way:

The top one [is that] the people who are working there are really getting involved with something wonderful, earning money and are able to spend their money as they wish . . . They are capable of buying or doing things that they had been dreaming of but had never been able to do . . . So dreams are coming true. (Rengin)

Another customer communicates her concern for the long-term welfare of the villagers: "People started to earn decent money by working under decent conditions—especially women. They've got their jobs now, their social security is paid . . . they enjoy what they do . . . And [Pinar] has started to turn these villages into . . . self-sustaining, traditional farming villages" (Gizem). One customer (Emine) shared that although she is turned off by what she perceives to be Pinar's greed and desire for fame, her commitment to the employed women's well-being is enough for her to continue as a customer. Employees frequently express concern about the health problems of their urban customers and share a deep belief that their health can be improved through the products from the farm. "Everyone else's health is as important as our own health" (Kevser). Having made a case for the existence of shared commitments between customers and employees, we turn now to our findings of how they have developed.

### **Development of Shared Commitments between Customers and Employees**

Table 1 summarizes how shared commitments, defined earlier as *a choice of a course of action in common with others*, developed between different actors.

**Table 1.** Development of Shared Commitments.

Shared Commitments	How Shared Commitments Develop	Explanation of Dyadic Nature
Shared Commitments between Owner and Customers (Link 1)	Connection to owner's story	Shared commitments are built as the customers relate with the owner's story
	Focus on quality over price	Owner selects price based on quality and sharing benefits with employees, rather than profit; likewise, consumers care less about price and more about the health and social value of the products
	Personalized communication	Personalizing reciprocal communications resocializes the producer-consumer link
	"Inclusive" framing Customer involvement and acknowledgment	Diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing that includes customers Shared commitments grow as the owner gives customers ways to be involved and thanks those who are
Shared Commitments between Owner and Employees (Link 2)	Founding with everyone's contributions	"There was my land, and their knowledge . . . we met up and began to work" (Pinar, 15 April 2013 email)
	Independence and respect at work	Given by the owner and earned by the employees
	Working alongside each other People first	Unity in their work and value of each other as people Mutual commitment to continue employment despite changing family circumstances
Shared Commitments between Customers and Employees (Link 3)	Facilitated interactions	The owner introduces employees and customers
	Human touch in products/packaging	Employees do non-mechanized work; customers care that the food comes from people
	Distance-spanning technologies	Customers care about life on the farm, employees are willing to let their work and lives be displayed
	Physical visits	Mutual concern as customers visit the farm and employees travel to events in the cities

As explained previously, we will discuss in detail only link 3, the most challenging of the shared commitments to cultivate. The findings come from an exploration of how MSF's urban customers can develop shared commitment with employees in local communities hundreds of kilometers away. Our analysis reveals that shared commitments that traverse this distance have been developed by the owner facilitating meetings between customers and employees, a human touch in products and packaging, the use of distance-spanning technologies like cameras, and physical visits between locales.

*Facilitated interactions* are one way that customers and employees develop shared commitments. The owner demonstrates an effort in her communication to help customers get to know the workers on the farm. She frequently refers to her neighbor Sefer, who plants, or the women who bake bread, and in the following email she summarizes that practice:

Seven years have now passed. © In seven years we formed a dream, we made that dream real, we gave it a name . . . . We began everything with my daughter Silk's name. After, the number of names grew and multiplied, did you realize it . . . ? You learned my name. My father's, son's, daughter-in-law's, grandchild's . . . Sefer's, Derya's, Sister Ganimet's, Big Silk's, Ahmet's, Zubeyde's, Bilhan's . . . you came to know all the girls. (Pinar, 2 September 2013 email)

Our interviews showed how Pinar's introducing the employees has been effective in helping customers feel a shared commitment with the women in the village. One customer explained, "And there are women there. I should say that affects me too, really, because I am a bit feminist, and I like encouraging women in this area. So she is really helping local women working over there, that is what I believe" (Aleyna). The stories about the customers' busy lives or health ailments relayed to employees likewise motivate employees about the importance of the healthy food they produce. Mutual knowledge of one another's stories helps shared commitment develop.

The *human touch in products and packaging* received by customers is another point of connection between employees and customers. "[Human-] packed—you can understand that somebody packed it for you, you can easily understand this, so this is also effective for me. It is not like a machine . . . just doing the packing, no, it is someone who is doing it" (Aleyna). Handwritten labels and expiration dates and the list of items checked off by hand with many different marking and notations displays that the box was sent by women working on a farm, rather than from a mechanized factory. These human touches are part of decommodification (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and help customers develop a concern for the farm's employees because the customers can visualize the employees working there.

*Distance-spanning technologies* help traverse the social and geographic distances between urban and rural communities. Pinar installed several web cameras around the farm so customers can actually see the employees, and each week she sends out a password through which customers can access the live feed. The cameras were mentioned in almost every interview, such as in the quote by this customer:

At MSF you can even watch them, which is cool, really cool. Also you tend to have a connection with them, because you know who bakes your bread, you know the name. Sometimes you may even know the person's child's name. It is very nice. It is like you are . . . part of this small village, and living with them. (Ebru)

Technology is being used to close the distance between the rural and the urban, to such an extent that this informant feels a part of the village, without even visiting it. Customers also connect with employees over the telephone. "Sometimes customers even call on the phone to learn something and to talk . . . Some of our customers ask, 'How do you make this?' They want to listen. For example, they want to try our bread. They call to ask, 'How can we do it?'" (Merve). Live video and phone calls help close the distances between the communities.

This spatially extended alternative economy also fosters shared commitments through *physical visits* of customers to the farm and employees to events in the cities. Pinar frequently announces the availability of guest houses where customers can stay in order to observe and help out at the farm, meet the workers, and experience village life. "I am inviting you to visit. Escape, come . . . Don't hold back, insist. There's room! ☺" (Pinar, 21 March 2015 email). According to one of the employees who welcomes guests to the farm, about 3,000 visitors come annually. Many of the guests want to get involved and not just be spectators. "The guests continually want to come here for 10 days, 20 days, one month, and they want to work. 'We don't want a vacation, we will work with you, we will help' is what they really want" (Nihal).

Many of the employees discussed how much they appreciate customer visits. "Guests come . . . They all thank us, say they are very happy, love what they ate, and from now on can more comfortably eat based on what they see, how clean and nice our environment is. They always leave thanking us. We are pleased with them; they are pleased with us" (Sibel). Employees from MSF also travel to Istanbul and other locations to meet with customers at festivals and meetings of civic organizations, which are other face-to-face opportunities to build rapport. For many employees, this is the first time they have visited Istanbul, and it gives them more insight into the lives of their customers. However, not all of the employees travel to events and not all of their jobs provide equal contact with the guests. One employee shared, "We wonder [about the lives of the customers] but we don't get many chances to ask because we don't do things one-on-one with them" (Deren). Increased direct contact between more of the employees and customers could further strengthen shared commitments.

Facilitated interactions, personalized packaging, the use of live video, and visits to the farm and city are ways that shared commitments are built between customers and employees. We

turn now to the impact of the shared commitments on the local subjects and community.

### *Well-being Outcomes in the Local Community*

Alternative economies aim to minimize economic domination and exploitation, alleviate the subordinated position of local subjects, work towards localized development, and improve human conditions (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2014). The data analysis provides evidence that MSF's alternative economy is fulfilling this goal. Through the shared commitments among the owner, employees, and customers, we observed strong well-being improvements in the local subjects' empowerment at work, financial opportunities, and affirmation in society, as well as development in the local community.

The owner's commitment to her employees has allowed them to experience work satisfaction outside the home for the first time and have opportunity for personal development (Lane 1992). Pinar provides the workers a way to do what they know and are good at. One long-time employee shared the satisfaction of working and being able to support herself:

To produce things, to provide use to something . . . for example, to know your place inside this farm is a really beautiful thing. I am saying that here I am providing benefit. I am earning and I am able to buy the things that I need. I am also going to school with what I earn . . . I am doing everything myself. This gives me peace. (Suzan)

Our findings corroborate research that shows self-direction and discretion over one's work helps employees be more self-confident and less self-deprecatory (Kohn and Schooler 1983). For example, one baker shared the following: "Since coming here . . . my self-confidence has really increased. I have more trust in myself" (Kevser). Another woman has expanded her responsibilities at work from cleaning to welcoming and relating with guests. "Since beginning to work here I have learned so many things. Before I couldn't speak like this" (Damla). Like Damla, many of the women shared that they have grown in their confidence in speaking with guests, in their assertiveness, and in self-confidence.

Customer's willingness to pay a premium and the owner's commitment to share the farm's financial benefits has improved the financial well-being of the employees and their families. The employees have the financial ability to send their children to school, whereas most of them were unable to continue past primary school. Many of the women mentioned the freedom they feel since making their own money and not being dependent on their husbands.

Our lives changed a lot. Before only my husband was working. I was looking to my husband's hand [for things]. Sometimes when I wanted something he would say there was nothing. Struggling with life, children, this, that . . . Since coming here I have my salary, my health insurance . . . I am able to pay for things for my kids. (Kevser)

Customers also improve well-being through visiting and talking to the employees at the farm. The employees feel pride in having customers value their work. “Guests are coming. They want to meet whoever is packaging their box. I have met a lot of them . . . It’s a beautiful thing. It’s always great when they say ‘Thanks for your good work’; we also feel proud. We do our work with even greater joy” (Feyza). As customers affirm the quality of life in the village, they challenge the modern discourse that people in developed cities with high incomes are better off.

Our interviews and observations from the surrounding community also corroborate how shared commitments in alternative economies can alleviate the subordination of local communities. Urbanization and the decline of local farming are considerable trends in Turkey (Aydin 2010; Balaban 2012). One informant in the village explained how young people are typically leaving villages to work in factories in the city in order to get health insurance and social security (Tarkan). An employee who grew up in the village Ocakli described how MSF is helping to stem the tide of villagers to cities.

It is certainly good for this village [Ocakli]. Actually almost everyone in the village works here. It is opening the door of employment to women who have never worked before. They came and worked. They earned money. Certainly something very good has happened. Before this was a stagnant town. Later the farm got bigger and the workers who came from outside made it a more active place. (Suzan)

Customers’ willingness to pay more for food they know is employing women in the village influences more people to remain in villages. One customer shared her perspective on the impact on well-being in the village:

I know that there are a lot of female workers there. I am very, very happy for that. Because this is a small village, I mean, [Pinar] seems to have changed something in the place that she lives, the way women work. The way they can earn money. This is a good example for us Turkish women . . . I would like to support her action in this part of Turkey, so even if it is higher prices, if it is employing women in her farm, it is a motivation for me. I prefer this to giving my money to [a supermarket] and . . . the [large holding that owns it]. (Ceren)

As people consider an alternative discourse and think and consume differently, the impersonal and industrialized form of agriculture in Turkey is being challenged. Informants from the local community, the farm, and the consumer community believe that this alternative economy is improving well-being for the villages and society as a whole. They are united in wanting to see the model proliferate and see expanded connections between consumers and producing communities all over Turkey.

## Discussion

The concept of shared commitment is foundational to alternative economies. Although it was previously introduced (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2014), the notion has

never been formally conceptualized or properly developed. The aims of our study were to conceptualize and empirically show shared commitments exist in alternative economies, examine how they develop, and explore their impact on the well-being of individuals, localities, markets, and society, and specifically, how non-local actors can be drawn into shared commitments to improve local well-being outcomes. The context we have explored is a large AFN bringing together an owner, over 100 employed villagers, various actors in the community, and tens of thousands of urban consumers in exchanges not underpinned by motivations of profit.

Our emerging model (Figure 1) depicts shared commitments between the different actors who are enacting alternative forms of marketplace participation (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2014). Shared commitments are *between* actors and *to* a particular goal or course of action. The triangle formed by links 1, 2, and 3 depicts the shared commitments between the owner, employees, and customers. These links that form the foundation of alternative economies are shared commitments, rather than simply exchanges in a traditional marketing system (Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006).

The prominent arrow rising from the triangle depicts that the shared commitments are *to* a particular goal. In alternative economies, the goal is to minimize economic domination and alleviate the subordinate position of local subjects. Applying a synthesis of the literature on commitment (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995), we theorize that in each shared commitment link: (a) The actions taken are collective and toward the goal, (b) the values are congruent among the actors and the goal shared, (c) there is concern between the actors for the goal of the future welfare of all. The two-way arrows between actors in Figure 1 depict that shared commitments need to be dyadic in nature (third column of Table 1) or the commitment is not shared. While an owner or customer may have a commitment to a particular course of action, these only become shared when it is held in common with others.

Table 1 summarizes our findings of how shared commitments, *a choice of a course of action in common with others*, can develop between the actors in a network. These emerged from our data analysis as key ways actors were drawn together in collective action, shared values and goals, and in concern for the well-being of others. We hope these may be adapted to a variety of alternative economies, and that other actions will emerge. For example, a person or people looking to spark an alternative economy should be inclusive in how they frame the vision and get as many people’s participation from the outset, especially empowering local people to be involved in the founding. In this way, the emancipation of local subjects can be enacted through “non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based on mutual aid and shared ethical commitments” (Day 2005, p. 9).

Figure 1 also depicts the geographic and social distance between the local and non-local communities in this spatially extended alternative economy. Our in-depth study of MSF corroborates the well-being improvements around dense ties and interdependence within a local community (Putnam 2001). At the same time, our case study has shown that shared

commitments can lead to well-being across a dispersed network (Wellman 1999), both for customers outside the local community and for the owner and employees within the community. MSF would not exist in the form it does without the involvement of distant customers.

We affirm the more common examples of alternative economies in which actors are in the same local community (e.g. Schor and Thompson 2014), but are also invigorated to think about the diversity that is possible in alternative economies. When it comes to AFNs, the existence of spatially extended models which can still garner shared commitments provide hope for an increasingly urbanizing world. While CSAs and urban farming are important, the reality is that most agricultural land will be long distances from cities (Stagl 2002). Alternative economies are more likely to proliferate in agriculture if geographically distant producers and consumers share commitments.

We have shown how shared commitments can still develop across a substantial distance. Geographically distant consumers can be motivated in ways such as hearing about the provision of stable employment and dreams coming true for women. Customers can be drawn together with an owner through a story that resonates and inclusive framing that empowers customers to stand for changes in the food system where they are. Distance spanning technologies and physical visits to their respective worlds are among the ways that customers and producing employees can be drawn into shared commitments with one another. Our findings reveal how resocialization and shared commitments are developing over a spatially extended network.

Figure 1 also depicts the well-being outcomes flowing from the shared goal to each of the actors in the network. As detailed in our findings, employees are being empowered and the stream of people leaving the villages has been stemmed. If shared commitments were absent in any of the links in the network, we reason that the well-being of all of the actors in the alternative economy would decrease. If the customer and owner do not have shared commitments (link 1), they will relate more on the basis of price and profit. The employees would likewise be squeezed in their work conditions and benefits in order to reduce costs. If the owner and employees do not have shared commitments (link 2), the employees are more likely to be quickly replaced with cheaper employees and the owner and customers are less assured of the quality of the food and denied the satisfaction of seeing the empowerment of employees and improvements in the local community. If the customers and employees do not have shared commitments (link 3), the customers will be less likely to pay a premium for the satisfaction of the personalized labor of the employees, thus shrinking employment opportunities in the village. The existence of shared commitments is the foundation for the goals of alternative economies being met.

We find MSF an exciting example of a marketing system's effect on society. In the face of growing industrialization of agriculture and commodification of food in Turkey, MSF has become a formidable alternative. This market plays a valuable

role in allowing communities in rural and urban areas to connect and to have mutually beneficial exchange. Among the things being transferred from the producer community to the consumer is food embedded with a shared commitment to a certain set of values (Raynolds 2002). The consumer community is transferring surplus financial resources, but also affirmation of village life and traditional farming and food preparation. Beyond dyadic seller-buyer transactions, we see positive marketing system consequences (Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006), such as opportunities for employment of women in their own village, an alternative discourse about food standards, and a rethinking of the preeminence of profit.

This case study of MSF offers evidence for alternative economies providing opportunities for minimizing economic domination and exploitation and alleviating the subordinated position of local subjects (Campana, Chatzidakis, and Laamanen 2017). MSF is an example of how shared commitments, or *a choice of action in common with others*, can lead to substantive well-being improvements for all actors involved in an alternative economy.

## Conclusion, Limitations, and Research Extensions

There are several limitations to this study. While qualitative work is powerful for generating concepts and exploring meanings, we leave measuring the degree of shared commitments and their impact on well-being to future research. We also leave testing the applicability of our emerging framework (Figure 1) in other alternative economic settings to future studies. MSF is a single AFN situated in a particular country with its own culture and context. We invite research on shared commitments in other contexts.

The scope of the current study did not allow for a detailed examination of the comparison of well-being outcomes for local subjects in a traditional commercial market and an alternative economy. For example, comparing alleviation of subordination of producers in a factory versus an alternative economy could be enlightening. Another open question from this study is the broader implications of women working inside and outside the home. Future research could also explore more deeply the ill-being outcomes (e.g. Ekici, Sirgy, and Lee 2013) that may come from shared commitments within an alternative economy.

While acknowledging its limitations, we hope that the case study of MSF has illuminated how shared commitments can form and lead to the minimization of economic domination and exploitation. Even in a spatially extended network, producers and consumers connect to improve the welfare of one another. Local subjects are empowered and their local community affirmed. MSF turns away customers because of overwhelming demand and consumers ask for this type of market to be replicated throughout the country—hopeful indicators of the potential for growth of diverse alternative economies based on shared commitments.

## Acknowledgments

The authors thank the editor, special issue editors, and three anonymous reviewers for their support and constructive comments. We also thank Pinar Kaftancioglu and the many helpful employees and customers of Miss Silk's Farm that were so welcoming to us.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## References

- Alexander, Andrew and Alex Nicholls (2006), "Rediscovering Consumer-Producer Involvement: A Network Perspective on Fair Trade Marketing," *European Journal of Marketing*, 40 (11/12), 1236-53.
- Arnould, Eric, Alejandro Plastina, and Dwayne Ball (2009), "Does Fair Trade Deliver on Its Core Value Proposition? Effects of Income, Educational Attainment, and Health in Three Countries," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 28 (2), 186-201.
- Aydin, Zulkuf (2010), "Neo-Liberal Transformation of Turkish Agriculture," *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10 (2), 149-87.
- Balaban, Osman (2012), "The Negative Effect of Construction Boom on Urban Planning and Environment in Turkey: Unraveling the Role of the Public Sector," *Habitat International*, 36 (1), 26-35.
- Campana, Mario, Andreas Chatzidakis, and Mikko Laamanen (2014), "Special Issue on Alternative Economies, 2017," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 34 (3), 408-09.
- Campana, Mario, Andreas Chatzidakis, and Mikko Laamanen (2017), "Introduction to the Special Issue on Alternative Economies," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 37 (2), 125-30.
- Caruana, Robert and Andreas Chatzidakis (2014), "Consumer Social Responsibility (CnSR): Toward a Multi-Level, Multi-Agent Conceptualization of the 'Other CSR'," *Journal of Business Ethics*, 121 (4), 577-92.
- Charmaz, Kathy (1983), "The Grounded Theory Method: An Explanation and Interpretation," in *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings*, Robert M. Emerson, ed. Boston: Little Brown, 109-26.
- Day, Richard J. (2005), *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. London: Pluto Press.
- Dees, J. Gregory (1998), "The Meaning of Social Entrepreneurship," Stanford University: Draft Report for the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership.
- Ekici, Ahmet, Joseph Sirgy, and Dong-Jin Lee (2013), "Shopping Ill-Being, Its Measurement and Relation to Shopping Well-Being and Overall life Satisfaction," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 33 (4), 397.
- Garbarino, Ellen and Mark S. Johnson (1999), "The Different Roles of Satisfaction, Trust, and Commitment in Customer Relationships," *Journal of Marketing*, 63 (2), 70-87.
- Geiger-Oneto, Stephanie and Eric Arnould (2011), "Alternative Trade Organization and Subjective Quality of Life: The Case of Latin American Coffee Producers," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 31 (3), 276-90.
- Gibson-Graham, Julie Katherine (1996), *The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, Julie Katherine (2006), *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, Julie Katherine (2008), "Diverse Economies: Performative Practices for Other Worlds," *Progress in Human Geography*, 32 (5), 613-32.
- Gundlach, Gregory, Ravi Achrol, and John Mentzer (1995), "The Structure of Commitment in Exchange," *Journal of Marketing*, 59 (1), 78-92.
- Gustafsson, Anders, Michael D. Johnson, and Inger Roos (2005), "The Effects of Customer Satisfaction, Relationship Commitment Dimensions, and Triggers on Customer Retention," *Journal of Marketing*, 69 (4), 210-18.
- Hudson, Ian and Mark Hudson (2003), "Removing the Veil?" *Organization and Environment*, 16 (4), 413-30.
- Jarosz, Lucy (2008), "The City in the Country: Growing Alternative Food Networks in Metropolitan Areas," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24 (3), 231-44.
- Kilbourne, William (2004), "Globalization and Development: An Expanded Macromarketing View," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 24 (2), 122-35.
- Kohn, Melvin L. and Carmi Schooler (1983), *Work and Personality: An Inquiry into the Impact of Social Stratification*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Pub.
- Lane, Robert (1992), "Work as 'Disutility' and Money as 'Happiness': Cultural Origins of a Basic Market Error," *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 21 (1), 43-64.
- Lee, Roger (2000), "Shelter From the Storm? Geographies of Regard in the Worlds of Horticultural Consumption and Production," *Geoforum*, 31 (2), 137-57.
- Lofland, John and Lyn Lofland (1995), *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Marsden, Terry, Jo Banks, and Gillian Bristow (2000), "Food Supply Chain Approaches: Exploring Their Role in Rural Development," *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40 (4), 424-38.
- Mason, Jennifer (2002), *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage.
- McCracken, Grant (1988), *The Long Interview*, Vol. 13. Ontario: Sage.
- Meyer, John and Natalie Allen (1991), "A Three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment," *Human Resource Management Review*, 1 (1), 61-89.
- Miles, Matthew B. and A. Michael Huberman (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mittelstaedt, John, William Kilbourne, and Robert Mittelstaedt (2006), "Macromarketing as Agorology: Macromarketing Theory and the Study of the Agora," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 26 (2), 131-42.
- Montiel, Marta, Angel Collado, Henk Renting, and M. Padilla (2010), "Between Food Ethics, Solidarity and the Social Construction of Alternative Markets. Exploring the Dimensions of Grassroots Food

- Movements in Spain,” 9th European IFSA Symposium, Vienna, Austria (July 4-7).
- Morgan, Robert and Shelby Hunt (1994), “The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing,” *The Journal of Marketing*, 58 (3), 20-38.
- Mowday, Richard, Richard Steers, and Lyman Porter (1979), “The Measurement of Organizational Commitment,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 14 (2), 224-47.
- Murdoch, Jonathan, Terry Marsden, and Jo Banks (2000), “Quality, Nature, and Embeddedness: Some Theoretical Considerations in the Context of the Food Sector,” *Economic Geography*, 76 (2), 107-25.
- Nelson, Valerie and Barry Pound (2009), *The Last Ten Years: A Comprehensive Review of the Literature on the Impact of Fair Trade*. Greenwich: University of Greenwich, Natural Resources Institute, commissioned by the Fairtrade Foundation.
- Press, Melea and Eric Arnould (2011), “How Does Organizational Identification Form? A Consumer Behavior Perspective,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38 (4), 650-66.
- Putnam, Robert D. (2001), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.
- Raynolds, Laura (2002), “Consumer/Producer Links in Fair Trade Coffee Networks,” *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42 (2), 404-24.
- Schor, Juliet B. and Craig Thompson, eds. (2014), *Sustainable Lifestyles and the Quest for Plenitude: Case Studies of the New Economy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sharp, Jeff, Eric Imerman, and Greg Peters (2002), “Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): Building Community Among Farmers and Non-Farmers,” *Journal of Extension*, 40 (3): 1-6.
- Stagl, Sigrid (2002), “Local Organic Food Markets: Potentials and Limitations for Contributing to Sustainable Development,” *Empirica*, 29 (2), 145-62.
- Thompson, Craig and Gokcen Coskuner-Balli (2007), “Countervailing Market Responses to Corporate Co-optation and the Ideological Recruitment of Consumption Communities,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34 (2), 135-52.
- Wallendorf, Melanie and Eric Arnould (1991), “ ‘We gather together’: Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18 (1), 13-31.
- Watts, David, Brian Ilbery, and Damian Maye (2005), “Making Reconnections in Agro-Food Geography: Alternative Systems of Food Provision,” *Progress in Human Geography*, 29 (1), 22-40.
- Weber, Klaus, Kathryn Heinze, and Michaela DeSoucey (2008), “Forage for Thought: Mobilizing Codes in the Movement for Grass-Fed Meat and Dairy Products,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53 (3), 529-67.
- Wellman, Barry (1999), “The Network Community: An Introduction,” in *Networks in the Global Village*, Barry Wellman, ed. Oxford: Westview, 1-47.

### Author Biographies

**Forrest Watson** is completing his PhD in Marketing at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. He received his BA in Business and Government from Franklin & Marshall College (Lancaster, PA) and his MA in International Relations from Bilkent University. His research interests include quality of life, macromarketing, transformative consumer research, and social marketing.

**Ahmet Ekici** (PhD, University of Nebraska-Lincoln) is an associate professor of Marketing at Bilkent University. His main research areas are public policy and marketing; macromarketing and relationship marketing. His refereed articles have been published in a variety of journals including *Journal of Macromarketing*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, and *Social Indicators Research*.