

The role of "Food Hubs" in the relationship construction between organic farm producers through short chain supply in Porto Alegre (RS)

O papel dos "Food Hubs" na construção de relacionamentos entre produtores agrícolas orgânicos por meio da cadeia curta de suprimentos em Porto Alegre (RS)

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ABSTRACT

This article will analyze the role of food hubs, whose concept can be understood as that of multiplatform that sells fresh organic products, which generate interactive relationships between producers and consumers. Based on this premise, so that we can understand this conceptual transcendence, 3 food hubs in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre were chosen as a study to verify and understand how these relationships occur. Through the research, in a first analysis, it was possible to observe the various initiatives that generate loyalty, engagement, empathy between the parties and, above all, the incentive that leads to interaction and mutual knowledge. In this way, these food hubs proved to be promoters of the producer-consumer relationship, far beyond the mere communication of

information, which end up encouraging long-term interactions and empathy between the stakeholders involved in the entire process.

Keywords: short supply chain, food hubs, commercialization, organic.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisará o papel dos food hubs, cujo conceito pode ser entendido como o de multiplataforma de venda de produtos orgânicos frescos, que geram relações interativas entre produtores e consumidores. Partindo dessa premissa, para que possamos entender essa transcendência conceitual, foram escolhidos 3 food hubs na região metropolitana de Porto Alegre como estudo para verificar e entender como ocorrem essas relações. Por meio da pesquisa, em uma primeira análise, foi possível observar as diversas iniciativas que geram fidelização, engajamento, empatia entre as partes e, principalmente, o incentivo que leva à interação e ao conhecimento mútuo. Dessa forma, esses food hubs se mostraram promotores da relação produtor-consumidor, muito além da mera comunicação de informações, que acabam por incentivar interações de longo prazo e empatia entre os stakeholders envolvidos em todo o processo.

Palavras-chave: cadeia de suprimentos curta, centros de alimentos, comercialização, orgânicos.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article has an objective to analyze the role of online food marketing platforms, which can be understood from the perspective of "food hubs", which contribute to the construction of relationships between producers and consumers of organic food with appeal to healthy and sustainable foods. For this, to elucidate how these interactions occur, we resorted to research in the platforms arranged in an online way to obtain data and interviews with important actors about them, in line with the scientific literature on the subject. In this way it will be possible to create interview scripts with a more refined focus on the information you want to obtain, in addition to being able to perceive the relationships established in these trades with their consumers.

Therefore, it is interesting to identify how this process and effort to expand the relationship between producers and consumers is built beyond the role simple of the "food hub". Relying on some strategies, such as loyalty by purchase promises, subscriptions, and association, or even through incentives and engagements such as brand, philosophy and values. In addition to promoting events of common interest between producers and

consumers. To this end, it will be visualized the foods that bring together the activities developed by the hubs, their ability to be this assembled, and the accomplishment of tasks that reach consumers who would be below the rural producers.

This study is regional and intent to present and problematize the food hubs that are in the region of Porto Alegre - RS, due to being one of the most relevant cities of the State and the main administrative center of southern Brazil. Thus, some criteria were listed to enrich the research and be able to go straight to the objects that are intended to be studied. Some guidelines were thought, such as the position and ranking in the Google search of these food hubs, since this platform is widely used by several users, and has a good adherence in Brazil. And, as a content aggregator term, we use organic food delivery in Porto Alegre; sale of products locally; focused on food and including fresh produce; perform delivery, contains in its communication mention of sustainable and healthy products.

The analytical guiding look in these platforms follows a script of optimized criteria, which have both more punctual characteristics (such as the existence or not of a physical store), and more abstract in which evidence will be raised that require reflection and crossing of information with other factors to generate better conclusions on the subject. Regarding the interviews, they will follow a semi-structured script directive elaborated with topics of interest and more important questions that serve as a guide, and adaptations can be made according to the nature of the interviewee. Thus, it is difficult to measure the role of interaction and how it occurs, because it is a study that can present some noises in this regard.

Therefore, perceiving and studying the "feedbacks" of these hubs can show us elements that allow us to build this more concise narrative about the communication and interaction that occurs between the hub and its consumers, and in addition, the producers and suppliers who are also an active and relevant part in the process of its existence. At this point, the static analysis of the marketing platforms is not enough, but also the conversation with members and inquiry of the virtual interactions in addition to the analysis of the discourse presented by the "food hub".

So, in a preliminary search of Google's database, we came up with three main local "hubs" that fit these limiters. The first is (a) "Fresh organic"

(<https://freshorganicos.com.br/>), the second (b) "Local farmers" (<https://localfarmers.com.br/>) and the third (c) "Da Grota" (<https://www.dagrotaorganicos.com/>). It is important to observe that not all of them have a physical store for the acquisition of the products, working exclusively online, which is the case of Local Farmers and Da Grota. Soon, we realize that the hub does not necessarily have as normative to have characteristics and a physical space for its operation but can be something essentially virtual.

Another discussion that touches on this theme is in relation to the shops that in the first impression function as "food hubs", such as organic and natural products stores, for example. But it is good to emphasize that this article deals with these hubs as enhancers and users of short chains, to facilitate and bring together producers and consumers. Today there is a reuse of terms such as natural and healthy by large conventional food companies, which through marketing end up generating a kind of "smokescreen", making it difficult for the consumer to identify the differences between artisanal, natural, and traditional foods of conventional industrialized version.

Still at this point, it is important to realize that there is a process of conventionalization of the commercialization in organic products, in which in the production system, the issue of certification appears in a very protruding way. However, in general they end up following a line of production-distribution-consumption typical of long conventional supply chains.

In this article, we will not glimpse this debate, but noting the existence of this variation of establishments, it was necessary to justify the choice of the selection criteria of the three analyzed in the work, essentially acting as a hub. That is, to problematize those who act in a regional way, and who use short chains in the process, thus differentiating themselves from marketing networks in large chains. Another point was to observe the food hubs that have the participation of identified producers, thus being able to also estimate characteristics such as distance and area of operation. To this end, from the studies of Klein (2022), the importance of exploratory works for the collection of more general data is perceived, which contributed to a better selection of the possible hubs to be analyzed more deeply.

2 THEORETICAL REFERENCE

Food hubs have a broad concept and still in the process of being constructed by many sources, according to the "California Network of regional food hubs" (2010), the term is an integrator of distribution systems that "coordinates" produces, stores, processes, markets and distributes regional products, and may also cover additional activities related to marketing, rural tourism, production, gastronomy, among others.

Other authors who work with this thematic, such as Felicetti (2014) say that are a connection within the term of sustainability, the regional actors engaged, and the generation and participation in food systems integrated with this concept. Others like Rogers (2013), put it as facilitators of access to food, especially fresh, taking advantage of modern tools to make the distribution process more efficient, with online orders, collection points and delivery routes being at the same time convenient, but focused on efficiency. Digital hubs due to their characteristics of value and coopetition have the facility to generate engagement and loyalty, having modulations ranging from associations with monthly fees, subscription systems or even CSA (community-supported agriculture).

This relationship model can be used as an engine for other initiatives, such as courses, awareness projects and partnerships with government and civil entities. Given this, the "civic food networks" often use "food hubs" to coordinate and organize their initiatives, keeping the focus of interaction and debate of the community alive, while the hub ends up coordinating the product chain itself. (Maye and Kirwan, 2010).

In this analysis, the "food hub" is understood as a multiplatform used for marketing, communication, receiving, and other practices related to the purchase and sale of food, other services, and interactions, whether on a native web page, social networks, or other platforms. It will also be assumed that they can operationalize activities related to the distribution of products. As Driessen (2021) points out, the goal of food hubs would be precisely to integrate the producer and consumer. However, the author warns that there can be overlapping roles many times, as in the case of the managers of these Hubs also have a role of producer or consumer. This caveat is interesting and should be considered when a more detailed analysis of the subjects, but one cannot incur the generalizing error of thinking that all hubs have this behavior and this aspect.

This approach is also linked to the issue of localism and short chains. The short chains according to Marsden et al (2000) have a "multidimensional" characteristic, because it is linked to geographical issues, distance, the question of the number of intermediaries, chain links, among other questions. In the central point it presents the "awareness", that is, the recognition and estrangement between producers and consumers, being the flow of information the key point for its functioning. This "awareness" occurs through a sense of mutual notion of reality between participants in the chain.

This information could be passed on in many ways through the product or the relationship between the links in the chain. This can happen through direct contact, product labeling, brand reputation or various media, in the case of the object researched, in addition to all social communication (events and visits) and virtual (digital platforms) directly to the consumer. This form of information transmission is the main object used to characterize types of short chains. There are basically three types of short chains: face-to-face, proximity and expanded.

The multiplatform connectivity, with wide use of smartphones and new ways of accessing the network has enabled the creation of numerous innovative business structures, changing both the behavior of existing ones and enabling the emergence of new organizations. According to Lamberton & Rose (2012) and Sundararajan (2016), these behavioral changes are derived from the increased possibility of interaction, being mainly exploited by startups and large companies, generating a collaborative mutualism. With the pandemic and consolidation of platforms, their use has been expanded, including to support initiatives of local commerce and smaller players in the market such as regional food hubs.

At this point the lightness of the "food hubs" as a multiplatform virtual space, serves as a link between producers and consumers, and can become a space of exchange and adjustment (of production and consumption), adapting products and services, generating new forms of interaction and business. This function fits within the logic of the hub as a platform, service provision and hub of information and interaction, and can even generate a co-creative process (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014). This process is facilitated by the common goals and values between consumers and producers who use the hub, and the feeling of satisfaction when helping, the development of their interest

and sense of belonging helps the acceptance of cooperation (Chesbrough, Lettl, & Ritter, 2018).

The food hubs fall within locally produced organic food offerers. This system of organic production derives from initiatives that are often proposed and aim to think about the food systems themselves, in favor of a reduction of the environmental impact, improvement of the quality of the food, which is often linked to movements of traditional / local cuisine having then in organic / agroecological agriculture its base. Regarding practical issues, to comply with the initiatives transposed in the issue of urban/peri-urban agricultural production, formation of cooperatives of production, consumption, and marketing modalities more efficient in terms of environmental impacts (Blake, 2010), with strategies ranging from new forms of chain and commercialization to the productive model within rural properties.

Another necessary debate in relation to the hub is the movement for organic and agroecological agriculture, which despite not following "hard" parameters, has a series of initiatives originated in India, Japan and later France and the United States that acquired greater substance after World War II as an alternative to "industrial agriculture". In his critique, there are warnings about the dangers of pesticides, non-sustainability, extensive use of fertilizers and the impact this would have on the environment and food quality. The search for a more balanced production process in sympathy within the nature, in addition to several certifications with production criteria, has generated different production methods beyond organic/biological, such as "permaculture", biodynamic and agroforestry productions. Today organic agriculture and its variants are recognized by virtually every country in the world and are highly widespread in food production systems.

The consumption of organic food is often joined to projects and practices that are realized through actions focused on awareness such as SlowFood and the use of campaigns such as FoodMilles, using these attributes as a purchase criterion raised by various campaigns in order to raise and propose the need to reduce the "ecological footprint", "rural tourism/ecotourism" (Edwar-Jones, 2008), in this way the consumer consumes and expresses himself in order to fulfill the environmental and ecological agenda regarding food production.

In this matter, these hubs are shaped due to a change in values, whose influence on the economy are notorious object of the study of the New Institutional Economics (NIE), in which not only the influence of this environment and its institutions have on the markets, but also on the understanding of how these values change and spread through societies. For this reason, it seems fundamental to understand the imbrication that movements and institutions have in the formation of such values, analyzing case by case and their particularities.

According to North (1993), these values are part of what determines our actions and way of behavior within society, influencing our relationships and our consumption. Thus, to understand the new ventures and their adhesion by the consumer market, it is important to understand the drivers of the changes in the values that feed this market and, therefore, the movements that feed and spread it in the social fabric.

And, according to Pigatto (2006), the "information is a relevant factor within the channels, whose sharing consists of a key factor for the coordination of flows within the channels", this demonstrates the importance of better analyzing the forms of interaction and communication between the links of the chain, even in short chains. Therefore, the flow of information and the agility of processes occupy a central role in these enterprises. Therefore, understanding the logic of hubs benefits both producers, who seek the flow of their products, and consumers who aim at the price and quality of the goods they purchase.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In a first layer of the research, was carried out on the Google platform, it was shown using the terms listed methodologically, a series of establishments that did not meet the pre-established criteria for research, although it was not a detailed search, it was apparent the growing existence of restaurants and suppliers of frozen food, large networks selling "natural" products and "health market" and finally, sites of local products with a theme of sustainable and healthy (from which the sample was extracted).

Still, in this preliminary research it is clear the great importance given to the term "organic" both in the calls of the sites, as in their content, something that needs a more detailed analysis, since it represents to be a relevant niche for this type of establishment in general, compared to other establishments "not focused on the organic trade".

3.1 LOYALTY AND EFFICIENCY WITH PARSIMONY

In this research, initially a simulation of ordering in these chosen "food hubs" was made. At first, what draws attention is the need for mandatory registration, which requests a series of information ranging from address and name to preferences regarding products, form of communication, etc. This registration may seem like a kind of inconvenience and setback in an instant need to buy, the balances between benefits of this strategy are weighted by (Yeshin, 1998 and Zahedifard, 2012). In the case of the object researched, the search for the lasting relationship ends up weighing not only this registration and need for contact but being only one of the steps to building a non-ephemeral relationship.

The virtual food hubs analyzed presented, without exception, the possibility of subscription, that is, paying a certain amount to receive a recurring service. This type of possibility can be seen as a repurchase service and can also involve joint or association with the Hub, with access to information, courses, and discounts. This signature, in most cases comes with the possibility of customization, that is, choose between available products, or allow what the producer chooses, commonly referred to as "surprise me".

It is clear already in the first information obtained and in the process of purchase and interaction a dualism between "having an efficient and convenient service", and at the same time an invitation to "be a partner and not make a simple and ephemeral purchase". The communication of the platforms and purchasing system give priority to those who want to be a participatory and customary customer, the same happens with even more "rigidity" to producers who are "fixed" and constant in the supply of goods. The efficiency is noticeable in the analyses, but it is limited to not harming the contact and the opening of the site.

3.2 THE SEARCH FOR EMPATHY "AWARENESS" AND THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNICATION

This balance between loyalty, standardizing, flexibilization and customizing is part of maintaining a dynamism in the relationship and empathy. At this same point, the consumer needs to have their will and time preferences met as much as possible, to improve the experience, changing certain products at their convenience, choosing dates for deliveries, etc. This same consumer ends up having to understand seasonalities,

production fluctuations, logistical limitations and other problems arising from agriculture and processing.

Part of this understanding must be given by the recognition of the parties (awareness), this bridge is a central part of the communication and positioning of the food hubs, either by the more informal and direct communication model, or by the constant attempt of integration via events, messages and information about producers and consumer experience. These points proved to be very strong in the 3 food hubs surveyed.

A useful tool to fortify this contact between sellers and consumers is e-mail, which aims to show an attempt to be informal, and at the same time generate a more personal approach with users. According to one of the hubs interviewed, the user must feel welcome to communicate and be encouraged to get more involved, being part of the "ecosystem that is formed", instigating contact by showing the platform in an accessible way.

Often websites tend to close, try to defend themselves by being absent, making it difficult to contact, bureaucracy and forms. This stance brings an antipathy in exchange for leaving the company alone. In our case we want both those who receive the food and those who provide it to be comfortable to express themselves, whether out of joy or sadness, the frustration of expectations or thanks for what happened to them, so friendships are built. (Interviewee A)

The communication is focused on making the user actively participate in the platform and be willing to the relationship beyond the "business transaction". This focus of "more than a customer, a friend", despite the possible rhetorical exaggeration, demonstrates a willingness of the portal to make extra efforts to generate the relationship and keep it less focused on the product-price binomial. It is clear both from the communication through digital platforms, and from the information passed on by those who manage the hubs, that having buyers engaged and feeling part of the "aggregator between producers and consumers" is an essential part of planning.

On the one hand, there was a wide possibility of customization of the orders, baskets, and products of the weekly deliveries of subscriptions, much arising from the very possibility of interaction and direct orders between producers and consumers with the "food hub" often intermediating the demands. In the other hand, there is a call to understand the limitations of production related to seasonalities, climatic events or even

pests and diseases. The eventual "less diverse basket" of one week will be rewarded by a basket of products above the promised in the next.

The consumer is invited to be part of the production through his loyalty of the signatures and to be a partner in understanding and considering the producer, his desires, and possibilities. On the other hand, the producer also has the face of his consumers, their desires, and frustrations. Having as objective, within the possible to generate the pleasure and satisfaction.

In this relationship "the producer and the consumer have a face and a name", leading to another stage the customized marketing, because this is not automated, but more humanized. In relation to what we call the present producer, it is when a communication link is established with those who produce, in the local and in the rural areas, part of its attractiveness. All the places surveyed feature the producers who supply the goods, both in terms of their identification and location, and even beyond. Opportunity to visit the properties, information about the daily routine, activities and how they produce the food are commonly exposed on the platforms and in communications with registered users. Thus, causing a sense of belonging between those who buy and those who produce.

3.3 THE PRODUCER AND THE CONSUMER MUST ALSO BE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PLATFORMS AND INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER

Referring in the portals as "our families, partner families or even our producers" are terms used on the web to call and present at the same time the producer, his space and production system. By providing the name, surname, address, and social networks of the producers there is an attempt to humanize the exchange as much as possible, and to face the origin of the food, a kind of "humanizing market". By following day by day, having the communication in real time and the possibility of still visiting the properties, you have a stronger and more lasting experience of the land at the table than even the fair or an isolated rural visit, because you have the possibility of continued contact.

Just like the producer, consumer behavior has also been gradually changing, becoming active. There is a tendency to the emergence of the citizen consumer, engaged and/or conscious consumer. Not going too much into these nomenclatures and concepts, it can be attested that the consumer yearns for communication both with the producers

and the "hub" as with other consumers. This in relation to the food hubs analyzed occurs through social networks through discussion forums, videos and content posted, lives on the networks, events promoted by the "hubs" and even field visits and workshops.

Communication channels such as emails, discussion forums and social networks are good channels to have successful communication and the presence of active producers on the platforms are important points. But many of these initiatives would be hollowed out if they were not accompanied by a reception and interaction on the part of consumers. Loyalty and empathy are not only generated, but also fuels consumer interaction and active participation within the hub. Keeping this consumer active is of great importance to the food hubs surveyed.

3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL APPEAL, BUT ECONOMICALLY SUSTAINABLE

In relation to the issue of social responsibility, the appeal to cooperativism is a general characteristic in which all the "food hubs" surveyed have, participating in cooperatives either directly (through cooperative producers or even jurisdiction companies) or indirectly (through participation in projects and events). But it goes beyond that, themes such as "fair price" or "fair trade" are present both on the platforms, as well as in forum debates and events. Access to healthy and sustainable food, especially to this stratum of the population, is also frequent, having in 2 "food hubs" the direct donation of food in a constant way to them with parts of the revenue from the sale of products to other consumers.

Despite the more humanistic vision, passed by the "food hubs" analyzed, many of the characteristics also have a commercial purpose in search of efficiency and viability of activities. The subscriptions make it possible to schedule not only the production, but also to establish delivery routes, minimizing the distance between them with "economic, environmental and social" gains by the lower use of fuel and time, and being able to reach further and at a lower cost. This productive and logistical planning also encourages the division of labor and sharing of logistical and productive resources such as implements and means of transportation.

Respecting seasonality helps to be able to replace products that have become scarce or excessively expensive with other "substitute goods". In this way protecting long-term sales from very abrupt price fluctuations. Having the right distribution channel from the producer to the consumer on routes managed by digital systems, as well as marketing makes the process fast and cheap, and may have fewer intermediaries, paying more to the producer without burdening the consumer.

3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE FOOD HUBS STUDIED

The food hubs analyzed have their characteristics and processes that end up hindering or limiting their dispersion to other realities. Some of these characteristics, which are "points for their success" are also exclusive to a good portion of rural producers. This shows at first the limitation of this type of organization, and the opportunity for training and rural infrastructure to maximize income and inclusion in the digital market.

One of the first points is the access to the internet, much of the routine both of the "food hub" itself, and of the producers, along with other actors involved, ends up going through the internet, whether for information about orders, consultation on the site, route planning among other operational parts. The contact and relationship with the customer also have the internet as a focus, both for media, as for conversation and direct interaction. In this way, the internet becomes a fundamental factor to include in food hubs. Many participating producers have mobile internet, due to the proximity of the urban part of the city of Porto Alegre, but it was reported that already a few km away, there are areas without fixed or mobile internet.

Localization becomes at the same time a limiting factor for both producers and consumers. The logistics part in terms of collection and delivery of goods is linked to a good planning of routes, whose deviation turns out to be too expensive and time-consuming to be operationally viable. This is true for producers by the dates and forms of collection and storage, and consumers of a particular region, who need a priori, must have a considerable number to make the operation sustainable. This type of restriction ends up affecting mainly more peripheral producers, who are far from the main access roads and urban connections to consumers who are in more peripheral regions of the cities, as well as areas of lower income.

Another limitation observed is the impossibility of the food hubs surveyed to provide some common standards in industrialized products and even in some agricultural products. Respect for seasonality and some limitation of supply and price does not always have unanimous acceptance, the appeal to conscience and empathy often yield to the most instantaneous need and desires. At this point, the value given to the standardized or customized and exclusive become tenuous and often end up removing the choice for organic products from food hubs, being cited, for example, some hydroponics as "higher quality" when analyzing fresh vegetables.

3.6 FOOD HUBS WITHIN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SHORT CHAINS

Analyzing the functioning of food hubs and observing the reference obtained on short chains we can assess that there are some fundamental aspects perceived in this analysis. All the hubs that sell food, in their majority are of local production, of identified producers and fresh collection, having as virtual intermediary only the platform itself. This would put it not in the face-to-face direct sale (by the virtual intermediary and the delivery), would give the status of short chain of proximity. This, however, translates into the interpretation of the short chain from the geographical point of view and of intermediaries, and the analysis of the other aspects expected for this type of classification is still appropriate.

One of the aspects highlighted in this construction of the relationship of short chains is the tacit recognition between the parties, at this point, it is clear the good and clear communication made both through the website, as well as social networks, email and contacts made by food hubs and partners. However, at least in social networks, there is a low interaction and much of this occurs passively. This in a way evidences a great effort on the part of the "food hub", but not the same reaction on the part of those who consume. This "apathy" is often broken by reports and some interactions, emphasizing the bond of trust and the importance of this type of enterprise.

From the point of view and the different way that the "food hubs" operate, especially regarding the local trade of fresh organic products from family farmers, little is known about how they work. Therefore, we can think of its particularities from some main points, such as, there is a demand for this service, and traditional retail and organic

stores have not taken this space; there is direct participation of farming families both in production and in contact with consumers; the product is predominantly sourced from the site as opposed to organic sales sites that generally have mostly processed foods; There are many of the characteristics that make the "food hub" aligned with environmental, health and social concerns also end up being an integral part of points for its efficiency, and finally, they depend on a very specific ecosystem with limitations of technology, production, location, target audience, frequency, routes and synergistic producers.

These aspects show a niche of action, closely linked to the posture analyzed and information collected in the hubs regarding direct contact (interaction), proximity and speed of information. And on the other hand, they show a dominance of the commercial part and its viability over the strategies of the enterprises (which shows that, after all, they behave as an enterprise within the market regime) and perhaps a difficulty in generating a closer and more lively interaction with a significant portion of their consumers. This article cannot, in isolation, answer in exact parameters how early each of the characteristics is.

Therefore, it is possible to attribute to the short chain of proximity some issues related to the geographical distance and number of intermediaries during the route. In addition, the shortening of the flow of information must be considered, even if the attention focused on production and consumption is more predominant. The verification of the concern with seasonality, health, carbon footprint, social concern, etc., are examples of empathy derived from the recognition among the participants of the chain and, therefore, demonstrates the approximation of the links.

According to Klein (2022), there is a tendency for this type of enterprise to be linked to the dispersion of some values, whether of social responsibility or the search for a change in the food system. This research meets these values and characteristics that are managed in tune with the consumer, inviting him to be an integral part of this process, seeking a proximity within a shorter chain and a more empathetic relationship.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Became evident within the logic of the "food hubs" surveyed, that they have as their central objective, to generate an approximation between production and consumption through the construction of a relationship between the users of the platform, the producers and the managers of the hub. This construction takes place at first with the way that their positioning occurs in the "display" of their information, the way they communicate interactively, open, and impersonal, not limited to the mere communication of the product and its characteristics, but rather the search for an open and fast contact.

The inherent part observed is that of the trade and transit of goods, becoming a channel of sale of organic products in a digital way. But the research revealed characteristics that go beyond the simple sale of merchandise with strong positions in front of values, direct and frank communication. It was also evident the constant attempt to generate a direct interaction between producers and consumers, either through events, communication, or information present in the portals of the "food hubs".

The strong appeal to organic on websites and the call to social responsibility can be something that contributes to the growth of this niche of consumers, being present both in communication and influencing the design of their operational processes. Its differentiation from other models lacks an analysis of other hubs with different focuses. The consolidation in short chains becomes synergistic with the strategy of online, subscriptions and local production by the environment generated by the food hubs, with scheduled production, delivery routes and technological facilities.

However, this model to maintain its characteristics of efficiency and dynamism, ends up not being viable for many producers and consumers, which shows that this would not be a solution to the marginalization of some individuals. This demonstrates the present need to reconcile these strategies with the others when thinking about rural development and shows the importance of extension, education, and infrastructure in rural and peri-urban environments. The sites surveyed have existed for more than 4 years, showing that despite being a new model of organization, they have some resilience and may multiply in the coming years.

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