# Sustainability from farm to fork

Education and the social construction of the environment in an agro-food park - the case of F.I.CO

*Angela Di Pumpo*

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# Abstract

Alternative food systems are emerging as a response to globalisation and industrialisation. With environmental destruction increasingly becoming an issue alongside with the growing concern about traditional food systems, unconventional trends in food sector have risen steeply in the past decades. Their birth has also been accompanied by the broadened target of environmental education, seeking to exit the formal classrooms and to embrace society with its various contexts. In the will to provide a creative answer to the *un*sustainability in food production and consumption, these emerging trends engage in representations and movements that generate problems of environmental justice and sustainability. This study investigates the problematization of environmental aspects within F.I.CO, a newly born agro-food park in Bologna.

By linking environmental degradation with society's detachment from food production and nature, F.I.CO mimics the new trends and also claims to be an innovative platform that brings together producers and consumers around environmental education and sustainable practices. In this attempt, F.I.CO reconstructs the whole agro-food chain under one roof and makes it *visible* and *experienceable* for its visitors. Attention is thus drawn within F.I.CO on the lack of transparency within the current food system, which F.I.CO seeks to change through bright glass windows on the production chain and through education. Changing consumers' behaviour in favour of a growingly aware society is thus presented as a solution to the unsustainable features of the current scenario. However, this study shows how, in representing the problem in the way it does, F.I.CO is articulating environmental friendliness through food consumption. The emphasis is in fact on consumers, who are made responsible for the issue. This is reflected in the rise of the *responsible consumer* as a subject position. Hence, this study concludes that in perpetuating the knowledges of green governmentality, F.I.CO is dropping the responsibility of an ethical food sector on individuals' shoulders. Buying in F.I.CO thus is presented to the visitors as the way to become part of the solution.

*Keywords:* sustainability, problematization, environmental education, transparency, green governmentality, subject position, responsible consumers.

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# Abbreviations

| | |
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| ESD | Education for Sustainable Development |
| F.I.CO | Fabbrica Italiana Contadina |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organization |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |

# 1 Introduction

The alarming pace at which natural resources are being depleted and climate change is advancing comes with no surprise to the ears of the society. Furthermore, the link between these events and sustainability is frequently emphasized. Nevertheless, sustainability is not a one and fixed entity. Rather, its meaning its constantly in flux, with its discursive construction being a prerogative of politics. An investigation of the articulation of the discourse of sustainability and its effects within our society is thus among the purposes of this thesis. As Bacchi & Goodwin (2016) state: "Following Foucault, discourses are understood as *socially produced forms of knowledge* that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak" about a defined thing. This thesis is informed by these post-structural premises and sees discourse as being productive of the reality (ibid.). In this sense, it is an aspect of governance. With governance here I refer to any act that ultimately aims at shaping the conduct of individuals (ibid.). In constituting the meaning of reality and the foundations for human collaborations, discourse is thus embedded with power.

The report Our Common Future in 1987 (United Nations, 1987) proclaimed the birth of the discourse of sustainable development and brought on the international scene the need of joined efforts to promote sustainability and fight climate change. Simultaneously, sustainable development was emerging as a wicked problem (Pryshlakivsky & Searcy, 2012). This implies that it has an uncertain nature and multiple causes (Rittel & Webber, 1973). As to mirror its complexity, the international arena have advanced solutions that are multi-dimensional and cross-discipliner, so to take into account all the levels involved. Among them, education has been reconsidered for its role in in promoting behavioural change. In 2002 the World Summit for Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg gave in fact birth to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (UNESCO, 2002).

In line with the complexity of the problem, the international political arena expressed the need for ESD to be holistic (ibid.). Hence, to be a comprehensive method to raise environmental awareness and most of all critical thinking in citizens (ibid.). The underlying assumption is thus that citizens lack awareness and the tools to critically think when it comes to environmental issues. The discursive construction of sustainability is one of the core aspect that this thesis intends to question. What emerges from political document is in fact that sustainability is a challenge, a problem that requires solutions. The naturalization of sustainability as a problem, however, leaves unquestioned the making of it as such, thus the discursive practices involved in its production. Informed by these premises, in this thesis I aim at interrogating this problematization and its implications.

The holistic turn in education translated also into the fact that education was no longer meant to be held only in classrooms, but to spread and insinuate itself in the various contexts of the social, in order to stimulate learning (UNESCO, 2002). This is what non-formal and informal educational programs refer to. The emergence of ESD made it thus possible for different stakeholders to engage in non-formal teaching. The private sphere in this context has seen a growing recognition of its role with regards to sustainable development (Gneiting, 2017). As Blowfield & Dolan (2014) argue, it went from being the development tool to becoming the development agent.

In this context, food education projects have been increasingly blossoming. This might be ascribed to the importance of food in our everyday life and to the link between the food chain and biodiversity loss.

FAO (n.d.) in fact states that:

> "Since the 1900s, some 75 percent of plant genetic diversity has been lost as farmers worldwide have left their multiple local varieties and landraces for genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties." and "Today, 75 percent of the world's food is generated from only 12 plants and five animal species. Of the 4 percent of the 250 000 to 300 000 known edible plant species, only 150 to 200 are used by humans. Only three - rice, maize and wheat - contribute nearly 60 percent of calories and proteins obtained by humans from plants."

That said, food education projects can be argued to provide the ideal means for raising awareness in this context. Among them, the biggest agro-food park in the world opened in Bologna on the 15th of November 2017. Its name is F.I.CO Eataly World, an acronym that stands for Italian Farming Factory (Fabbrica Italiana COntandina) (FICO Eataly World, 2017b).

## 1.1   Research *problem*

However, while it can appear laudable that the private sector is willing to make a change towards sustainability, the discursive construction of sustainability in such projects could profoundly exacerbate its state rather than contributing to its improvement. In the case of private projects, Gneiting (2017) argues that the risk is of green-washing and "business cherry picking SDGs based on their benefits to companies". Thus I argue that an understanding of the discursive practices involved in the production of knowledges in these contexts could shed light on the implications for the society. Hence, for the purpose of this thesis I focus on F.I.CO, a non-formal project of education newly born in Bologna.

   F.I.CO recreates and displays in one place the whole Italian agro-food chain, from farm to fork. Based on my observations, it seems like the aim F.I.CO is trying to achieve is to give visitors an opportunity to learn about sustainable food production and consumption and the biodiversity of Italian food products. In this thesis it is thus investigated in light of its political character, that is, its intention to promote a behavioral change. Behavioral change in this context is intended as consumers ending up in making different choices than before.

   The emphasis will be on how sustainability, despite appearing as a natural issue, is rather made such, thus it is problematized. This means that sustainability is "made to be a problem" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), and a defined kind of problem. This allows F.I.CO to pose a solution to it, which reflects where F.I.CO thinks the problem is. However, since there are power imbalances operating in the discursive construction of sustainability, the problematization process results in the assignment of the responsibility to some actors rather than others. This inevitably affects the way we live our lives.

## 1.2   Research aim

The aim of this enquiry is thus to unfold how governing takes place in F.I.CO through the problematization process of sustainability. On a deeper level, this means that I am interested in how individuals' conduct is steered as a result of the problematizing activity of sustainability in F.I.CO. As mentioned before in fact the ultimate goal of governing is to change how people act. In their exercise of power, govern*mentalities* set boundaries to the conduct of individuals (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Within the infinite field of possibilities, they do so by perpetuating *knowledges* that define as true a certain kind of reality, while excluding other options (ibid.). In operating in such way, the underlying assumptions that support the exercise of power are reinforced.

   The goal of this thesis is thus to unveil the knowledges that are involved in the production of truth in F.I.CO regarding sustainability. Furthermore, the aim is to unfold the assumptions that sustain the problem representation of sustainability in F.I.CO. Such project is appealing for this thesis because it is a privately funded initiative whose claim is to operate in a sustainability-oriented direction. By investigating how sustainability is problematized in this context, this thesis aims at understanding what are the implications at the societal level. For this purpose, I ask the following research question:

- **How is F.I.CO problematizing sustainability?**

- What are the knowledges involved in producing a defined truth of sustainability in F.I.CO?
- What are the underlying assumptions of the problematizing activity of sustainability in F.I.CO?
- What are the implications for our society?

## 1.3   How will the problem be investigated?

The research question calls for an understanding of the conceptualization of sustainability within F.I.CO. Central to the analysis is thus the questioning of governing practices, in this case within F.I.CO, in producing  problems in a defined way. This form of critical analysis opens up for reflections on alternative ways to look at the *issues* and consequently to pose solutions for change (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). It thus invites politics to take into account the consequences of their problematizing processes.

   I consider F.I.CO to be engaged in governing practices because it is the place where a certain problematisation of sustainability occurs. In fact since F.I.CO's problematization of sustainability determines where F.I.CO thinks the problem lies and whose responsibility it is, knowledge of the governing practices of F.I.CO will also help to understand what it is left unquestioned in this process (ibid.). The focus is thus on the power dynamics operating in F.I.CO to establish a certain kind of *truth*, thus on the practices that make it possible for a certain reality to emerge. Power in this sense is intended to operate at the broader level of the structure and not to be intimately linked to the agents (ibid.).

   In the attempt to unveil how sustainability is problematized in F.I.CO, I draw on the WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) approach by Carol Bacchi (2009). This theoretical framework is Foucauldian-inspired and relies upon post-structural premises. In a nutshell, this means that it takes distance from the idea of a founding subject, and that it sees subjectivity as being constituted in discourse (Bacchi, 2014). Hence, since the nature of subjects is seen as contingent, poststructuralists direct their attention not on *who* says what, but on "*what* is said" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), that is the *practices*. The aim of the framework is to "make politics visible" (ibid.), thus to uncover how governmentalities engage in problematization practices. For this purpose, it takes into account the power relations and the knowledges involved in the production of a defined problem representation.

   In conducting the analysis through the WPR approach I attempt to question the governmental practices taking place in F.I.CO and uncover the implicit assumptions behind their problematization of sustainability.

# 2 The WPR approach

The critical approach underlying this enquiry has its roots in discourse analysis and post-structuralism. By drawing on Bacchi's (2009) WPR (What's the problem represented to be?) framework in this thesis I investigate how F.I.CO problematizes sustainability through discourse analysis' lenses. Problematization in this sense is intended as "a historical process of producing objects for thought" (Bacchi, 2012). For the purpose of this enquiry discourse is conceived in a Foucauldian way as being *that* which determines what it is true or false in a specific context (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). It follows that power is involved in establishing objectivity. In this sense, power has a productive nature. It is deeply rooted in the societal structures, which shape and define the agency and the limits to its conduct.

This production of normativity in fact involves the exclusion of other information. In other words, "things could be otherwise" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Thus, the making of them involves governance (ibid.). For the purpose of this thesis, F.I.CO is considered to be engaged in governance.

Governing occurs through problematization (Bacchi, 2012, Bacchi, 2010,Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), this meaning that the ways in which problems are represented have a big impact on how we conduct our lives. The effects of a problem representation in fact insinuate in many domains of our society. This means, among other things that, through problematizations, some people are made responsible for the problem. This is what is referred to as subjectification, the discursive construction of subjects that originates from the way problems are constructed. Furthermore, it means that the way problem are represented affect how we think and act upon them. In this enquiry I thus investigate the effects produced by the problematization process within F.I.CO, focusing on the discursive, lived and subjectification implications. The attention is thus dedicated to the practices that make it possible for a certain reality to emerge, while leaving others in the shade. The focus on practices is an important aspect since the premises behind the framework are not that people intentionally want to steer and govern other people. They are themselves the products of dominant knowledges, which they contribute to perpetuate. So it is important to investigate the practices that occur in places like F.I.CO since they can show us how we are governed and what can change about it, if the effects of governance are deleterious for our society.

The WPR framework is inspired by the work of Foucault on problematization, and has a post-structuralist print (Bacchi, 2009). In other words, interesting for the researcher is "what is said" regardless of the agent saying it (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). This is because *things* have a contingent nature, as well as *subjects*, thus they arise as a consequence of the dominant discourses (what Foucault calls knowledges)(ibid.).

In this thesis thus I attempt to look at the presence of knowledges and analyze under which conditions their domination is made possible. In doing so, I focus on how environmental education engages in conceptualization of the environment that affects the way we act and think about it. As Gruenewald (2004) argues: "EE [environmental education] emerged as a cultural response to international awareness that human beings were negatively impacting their environments and causing ecological and social crises".

Thus in this study F.I.CO is used as a case of how environmental education problematizes the environment.

## 2.1 The operazionalization

In order to conduct a research through the lenses of the WPR framework, Bacchi (2009) proposes to "walk backwards". In other words this means that, starting from the solution,

one can understand where the problem is thought to be and whose responsibility it is (ibid.). Here thinking is to be understood as a practice (Bacchi, 2010).

Bacchi proposes that what needs to be done about something (or what it is done) sheds light on the implicit and explicit assumptions about the problem (Bacchi, 2012). Hence, for the purpose of this enquiry I investigate what F.I.CO does about sustainability in order to understand where, according to F.I.CO, the issue lies.

For the application of the WPR approach to a research analysis, Bacchi (2009) has listed 6 questions, that represent the core of the framework and serve the purpose of guiding the researcher. They are:

1. What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?
3. How have this representation of the problem come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
6. How/where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Being it the aim of the approach to uncover the political within governing institutions, it can be applied in various contexts. For the purpose of this thesis I apply the questions to text documents that I obtained from the interviews I conducted. The material of analysis is thus mainly interview transcripts.

An important step in the WPR approach is to engage in self-problematization. This means that, as a contingent subject, the researcher is invited to question his/her own beliefs and preconceptions and to include them in the analysis, so to enhance the validity and credibility of the research.

# 3 Literature review

Being the intention of this enquiry to interrogate how sustainability is problematized in F.I.CO and what assumptions it carries within, this section has been thought about with the aim to provide a brief historical overview on the discourses of sustainability and on the emergence of new trends within the contemporary food sector.

## 3.1 On sustainability

The most used definition of sustainability stems from Our Common Future (United Nations, 1987) in 1987 where sustainable development was defined as "the ability to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future" (ibid.). As Brown (2016) argues "*an underlying assumption of the report was that the major causes of environmental destruction are short-sighted growth strategies, which could be remedied through use of appropriate technology*" (Brown, 2016). Thus by

assuming that the problem was on short-sighted growth strategies, the discourse of sustainable development had the effect of shifting the focus from the current environmental situation to the desirable *future* one.

Following Our Common Future (United Nations, 1987), sustainability was conceived by the international political arena as being constituted by three pillars: Society, Environment and Economy, as shown in Figure 1 below. The *sustainable* stool on which our World was meant to sit from then on needed to rely on the equilibrium among its three legs.



*Figure 1. The sustainable stool. Own figure.*

In this view, Sustainability is interconnected with Society and Economy. On a deeper level this implies that, in being interconnected, sustainability and economy interact and are dependent on each other. This suggests that sustainability was then constructed as being inseparable from progress.

From then on, the words sustainability and sustainable have been spreading in our society to the point of becoming used in our common everyday language. As Engelman (2013) puts it: "We live today in an age of sustainababble, a cacophonus profusion of uses of the term sustainable to mean anything from environmentally better to cool." These different discursive constructions have also created room for what is called green washing, defined as "the practice to make unwarranted or overblown claims of sustainability or environmental friendliness in an attempt to gain market share" (Dahl, 2010). On this note Brown (2016) argues that sustainability behaves as an "empty" signifier and that this affects its use in political and decision-making contexts. The concept of empty signifier is used in discourse theory and has been developed by Ernesto Laclau. Put briefly, an empty signifier is a signifier whose meaning is constantly negotiated. In other words, it is something that means nothing in itself. Its meaning is assigned based on its link with other discursive elements.

Simultaneously, probably due to the inclusion of other factors, the international political arena has advanced the understanding of sustainable development as a wicked problem (Pryshlakivsky & Searcy, 2012). The concept of wicked problem indicates issues whose causes are uncertain and varied, and for which an unambiguous and exhaustive definition hasn't been formulated (Sun & Yang, 2016). This makes it even harder to design solutions to such problem, as actions need to spring from multiple directions in line with the multi-causality of the issue (Pryshlakivsky & Searcy, 2012).As Barbehön (2018) argues: "Today, wickedness typically refers to a situation in which (among other things) long-term strategies are needed in order to cope with complex problems which will appear over and over again in the future, in which time is pressing due to self-enforcing dynamics, and in which well-established techniques of knowledge acquisition seem no longer valid." The depiction of socio-political conditions as wicked problems thus called for a renewal of *techniques of knowledges* that become considered inappropriate. It might be due to this acknowledgement that the contribution of different stakeholders to the management of sustainable development was deemed to generate greater benefits.

## 3.2   Emergence of new trends in contemporary food sector

Farmers' markets and more localised food-systems have experienced a steep growth in
North America (Betz & Robert, 2015; Alkon, 2008) and Europe during the past decades
(Murdoch & Miele, 2002). The literature suggests that this is the expression of new trends
in the food sector, that is increasingly moving towards alternative food-systems seeking to
counteract the global capitalistic logic of food production. Such places – as local farmers
markets-  in fact seem to arise as a resistance to mass production, which is challenged for
its "pronounced and extended linkages between the sites of production and consumption"
(Murdoch & Miele, 2002). Industrial agriculture  is in fact argued to be constructed around
the absence of a physical place of production (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005), in order to
"marginalize nature in food production" (Murdoch & Miele, 2002). Alternative food-
systems in this context rather seek to emphasize the importance of the *place* and its role in
re-establishing a relation with nature through the consumption of local and natural food.
As Murdoch & Miele (2000) argue "Locally recognisable foodstuffs, which bear clear
traces of the 'clean' and 'green' environments in which they have been produced, become
desirable objects of consumption for they enshrine both product differentiation and
proximity to nature". Places such as local farmers' markets thus become an opportunity to
re-establish a face-to-face meeting with the producer. This reconnection and the further
consumption of local food is also presented as an opportunity to act environmentally
friendly. As Alkon (2008) argues "Support for local, organic farms is described as an
alternative to a practice that allegedly wastes natural resources and threatens biodiversity".
In Alternative food-systems thus buying local and short-chained products is associated with
acting sustainably and contributing to the preservation of biodiversity. As DuPuis &
Goodman(2005) argue "localism becomes a way to maintain rural livelihoods". Moreover,
it can be observed that in this emerging alternative food-systems there is also a recognisable
component of environmental education. The purchase of food is in fact accompanied with
the will to stimulate learning, which is done through reporting facts about sustainable
agriculture, and "ecological data on plant diversity and animal habitat". (Alkon, 2008)
Alternative food systems thus become a place where knowledge, besides products, can be
exchanged. This contributes to the creation of linkages between food consumption and
environmentally sustainable practices and knowledge (ibid.).

# 4   Research design

## 4.1   Methodology

This enquiry aims at understanding how the concept of sustainability is problematized in
F.I.CO, a corporate non-formal contexts of education. For this purpose, I use the WPR
approach by Bacchi (2009). Despite it being originally designed for policy texts, it has in
fact evolved through the years to embrace different contexts and research needs. This does
not mean that this enquiry is not considered a policy analysis; on the opposite, in a post-
structural analysis the political is everywhere. The aim of this research is thus to dig out
and display the political of F.I.CO, which is thus considered a political institution. The
analysis will concern texts documents and, in this particular case, interview transcripts.
There is already a body of researches testifying the application of the WPR approach to

interview transcripts. Examples are Bastian & Coveney (2014) and Jenkin et al. (2016). Moreover, Bacchi has dedicated the last part of the book Poststructural policy analysis (2016) to the operationalization of the WPR approach through semi-structured interviews (PIA – Poststructural Interview Analysis). Interview transcripts are hence treated like policy texts and are considered a valuable method for qualitative data analysis. This is possible because a poststructural analysis of interview transcripts is not concerned about the intentions or the motives behind interviewers' speech (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). As mentioned already, it focuses on *what* is said, and not on *who* says that (ibid.). Subjects are in fact regarded as contingent. This, as Bacchi & Goodwin claim (2016) "makes it possible to treat interviews – or more precisely interview transcripts – as texts." Thus the aim is to dig out the normative implications behind what is said in an interview and to map what subjects " it is possible to become" (ibid.).

Given these premises, in order to answer how sustainability is problematized in F.I.CO, I conducted 8 semi-structured interviews. These constitute the material of analysis, alongside with field notes generated through passive observation and freely available online documents of F.I.CO. Semi-structured interviews are a suitable choice for this enquiry as they allowed me to generate text documents representing the voice of F.I.CO. With a post-structuralist approach, when the question concerns what language is available and what (power relations) is accomplished with that language, the individual who uses language is less important as an explanation of meaning, than language itself. For this reason, I did not apply any sampling strategy for the choice of my interviewees.

The first interview occurred about a month after my first attempt to establish contacts with them and getting myself known. In fact, several phone calls and emails during the first two weeks only left me frustrated, as I was always ending up with being forgotten. Building trust required time, and knowing no one working in F.I.CO did not make things easier for me. My experience was that calling myself a Master student was limiting my possibilities. I often had the feeling that I was not worth the time of the people I wanted to interview, probably due to the fact that my initial strategy was to start from the top of the hierarchical ladder. After some attempts, in which I had become the interviewee rather than being the interviewer, I dropped this strategy and thought about other ways to negotiate access, following the suggestions of my supervisor and co-supervisor. Changing the dress code (from "casual" to more "elegant"), calling myself a researcher and bypassing emails and formal contacts in favour of a more *raw* approach, revealed to be the most efficient methods. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they were generally interested about my study, access was not immediate and was often postponed due to the need of asking authorization. I eventually gained access by interacting with people working within F.I.CO, by making regular visits, by attending events and short courses and setting interview dates after establishing informal familiarities with the employees. Some interviewees provided other contacts, in the will to help me. It seemed that after the first interviews, I had managed to get myself known and break the ice, so to say. Then it became easier to set other dates, and to end up by interviewing the academics that at the beginning were showing resistance to my request.

Furthermore, I took field notes during the 20 visits at F.I.CO, which occurred over a period of two months (February – March 2018).

These notes are used in two ways:

- as a material of analysis, as they contain general information about F.I.CO as well as more detailed records of objects, signs and the spatial arrangement of the park
- to engage in the *self- problematization,* as they also concern personal beliefs and impressions, which represent a useful material during the analytical process.

For the semi-structured interviews I elaborated an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. This gives structure while creating room for further in-depth exploration of topics that are interesting for the analysis. All the interviews occurred in Italian (my mother tongue) and were recorded, with the agreement of the interviewees. I have then transcribed the recordings and translated only the excerpts that will be present further on in the sections concerning the findings.

# 5  Data analysis

## 5.1  Procedure

For the analysis, I proceeded as follows. Since my aim in this thesis is to understand how sustainability is problematized, at first I clustered information in the interview transcripts and in the field notes that were directly or indirectly relating to sustainability. I repeated this process until I was sure that implicit and underlying assumptions were part of the information I gathered. In order to enhance the validity of my research, I used online documents of F.I.CO, which also described the project before it was born. This helped me to contextualize the project from an historic point of view, and to have access to information that the interviews did not cover as much in depth. My main source was the media kit of F.I.CO (which is freely available online for everyone), which consists of 18 PDF sheets describing the project in detail. The kit also contains pictures, which I was given the authorization to use. The advice to use the media kit was given to me by the interviewees, concerned about covering all the aspects I was interested in. I welcomed their advice and found important to triangulate the analysis with media information. Another website was mentioned by some interviewees, in which information were to be found in a video format. I analyzed the 4 short videos and made them part of the gathered data. As for the transcript and the field data, I repeated the analysis several times, to be sure I was including all the relevant information in the codes. The further I was advancing with the process, the more evident and detectable underlying and implicit assumptions became.

Once the coding was done, I further categorized the data based on the *knowledges* I identified. They have guided and deepened the analysis until the end.

Once understood how F.I.CO problematizes sustainability, I wanted to investigate the discursive infrastructure that supports the problematization. Thus I looked for the elements that were showing how power was used to govern.

Inspired by the book of Glesne "Becoming qualitative researcher. An introduction" (1992) I scanned the texts frequently asking the questions: - who am I seeing more? And whom not? - so to be aware of how power was discursively used for subjectification as well as discursive and lived effects.

## 5.2  Limitations

I am aware that, for how well prepared and structured, a research might still contain limitations. In this enquiry, I have done my best to minimize them as much as possible. However, I have analyzed F.I.CO through the lens of a post-structuralist approach, which

denies an essentialist subjectivity. Despite my self-interrogation about my own analysis, I am aware of being constituted as a subject. Hence, I might not have entirely succeeded to go beyond the effects of how I am governed. This can possibly affect my research. In other words, another researcher might come to different outcomes than mine, even if performing the research under the same conditions, using the same data. Furthermore, I am a novel researcher. I do not claim any experience with interviews. However, for the purpose of this enquiry, I chose to base my analysis on interview transcripts. I have prepared for that by studying the literature on how to design and to do interviews and I have performed interview trials and adjusted the questions whenever needed. Nevertheless, I am aware that my novelty in the field of social science might still constitute a limitation.

# 6 F.I.CO? (*Cool?*)

Before moving on to the analysis, in this chapter I provide a brief overview of F.I.CO, the project I investigate in this thesis.

Figure 2 below has the aim to give a visual idea of F.I.CO and its spatial arrangement. The Italian Farming Factory covers a surface of 10 hectares, that are conceived as follows:
- 2 are dedicated to open-air fields and stables
- 8 host the main building.

Within the main building one can find: 40 farming factories, more than 45 restaurants and refreshment points, a market space, areas for sport, children, reading activities and services (a book shop), 6 classrooms, 6 large educational carousels, theatre and cinema facilities, a congress centre and the F.I.CO Foundation (FICO Eataly World, 2017b). The shops (the Italian word is: *botteghe*) and the kiosks (the Italian word is: *chioschi*) are spaces where producers can sell their products directly to the visitors. Some of these products can be: dry meat, beer, pasta, soft cheese, etc. There are also 40 production factories with big glass walls. The range of industries varies from large to small-size ones.

F.I.CO is a host organization, which means that these factories also exist outside the context of F.I.CO and are renting its space in order to have another production facility within its walls. Besides the shops, there are also restaurants as well as little stands where visitors can buy food on the go. Regarding the open-air fields and stables they are home to different varieties of plants and animals. They are used for didactical purposes as well as raw materials for the production whenever possible. The didactic fields "are divided according to the different food production chains for which their products are generally used" (FICO Eataly World, 2017d). Some examples include: aromatic herbs, vegetables, cereals and berries. There is also an area named the Orchard of Biodiversity, which includes 15 ancient rare or endangered plant species (ibid.). Lastly, a biodynamic garden displays how agriculture can be performed by means of this technique. Explanatory panels are situated at the entrance of the garden.

For what concerns the stables, they host 200 species of animals who represent "the main native Italian breeds frequently found in farming" (FICO Eataly World, 2017c).

*Figure 2. Map of F.I.CO. Credits: FICO Eataly World*

Moreover, at F.I.CO's entrance it is possible to rent a tricycle for free. These are bikes with one wheel in the back and two in the front, in between of which there is a wood basket that visitors can use for shopping while riding. There are thus bike lanes within F.I.CO. Moreover, scattered around the main building, there are 6 multimedia carousels, which are interactive stories about the connection between human beings and nature. Lastly, explanatory panels guide customers throughout their visit both inside and outside F.I.CO.

# 7 Analysis

I present my findings in the following sections. The analysis is based on the WPR approach by Bacchi (2009), a Foucauldian post-structuralist inspired framework constituted of 6 questions. As suggested by Bacchi & Goodwin (2016), the questions will be answered in the order they have been conceived. The findings are presented in small chapters, each of them having an introductory part that explains what will be found in the paragraphs that follow.

## 7.1 A non-formal context of education

In the following lines I provide a brief description about what a non-formal context of education is and I then move to F.I.CO's elements qualifying as such.
In defining non-formal education, ISCED (2011) (International Standard Classification of EDucation) states:

> "Education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals.

> [...] It caters for people of all ages, but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars."

F.I.CO qualifies as a non-formal context of education due to the following elements: education in F.I.CO is institutionalized. The education provider is the F.I.CO Foundation for Food Education and Sustainability, a joint partnership between 4 Italian Universities. The Foundation organizes seminars, short classes, and events, some of which are open to the general public, while others targeting a specific group of the society based on the topic they are addressing (e.g. a class about the rights and the duties regarding the energetic sector, which was specifically held for University students – notes from interviews). Some of these class can be attended by paying a fee, some others are freely accessible to everyone. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are shops having their production facilities within F.I.CO's walls. Some practical events and hands-on activities can be organized also by these shops, which give a demonstrative class regarding the production process of foodstuff they sell. Last but not least, the 6 multimedia carousels mentioned above, which interactively teach about the link between human beings and the elements of nature. They are also accessible by paying a fee.

For the purpose of this enquiry, F.I.CO is considered to be engaged in governance, that is to have the ultimate goal to guide individuals' behaviour towards a desired direction.

Governance in F.I.CO occurs through the problematization of sustainability, that is the practice through which F.I.CO makes sustainability a problem and, specifically, a defined kind of problem. With education being one of the core elements of F.I.CO, in this thesis I interrogate how the problematization of sustainability is performed through education. That is, how sustainability is problematized in a non-formal context of education, such as F.I.CO.

For the purpose of this thesis, education is considered as a practice. This means that the analysis concerns all the elements that consitute a direct or indirect input to learning. All these elements are treated as text.


## 7.2   The loss of transparency – detached from the land

This chapter opens up the analysis of the problem representation in F.I.CO. I address the first question of the WPR approach, with a focus on the elements that are important to understand how F.I.CO constructs the problem.

### 1.   What's the problem represented to be?

In order to understand what's the problem represented to be in F.I.CO, I begin with what F.I.CO does. I embrace Bacchi's suggestion to "walk backwards" (Bacchi, 2009), thus to look at what solutions are proposed in order to understand where the problem is thought to be and what needs to change about it (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). My use of the verb to think here, as in the whole enquiry, is to be intended in a Foucauldian-inspired way. This means that, in line with post-structuralism, I treat thought as a practice (Bacchi, 2012). The goal of question 1 is thus to find an "entry point" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), a window on the implicit assumptions that lie behind a defined problem representation. This opening on the problematization process is consituted by the solutions. The poststructuralist Rose (2000) talks about "answers" and "questions" rather than "solutions" and "problems". Thus on this line, one could also ask: What is F.I.CO an answer to? That is to understand what is the set of questions that produces F.I.CO as an intelligible answer (Bacchi, 2014). In the following lines I address all these points.

The Italian Farming Factory is a host organisation,

> "a space entirely dedicated to the Italian agro-food chain", "the ideal place where to narrate the development of the agro-food chains from the field".

Another interviewee further states:

"the aim was to make it visible for each citizen.. to show what it is the agro-food chain. Many kids, many youngsters, they don't even know where the egg comes from, they know the egg exists but they don't know there's a hen that created it. So to bring people closer to this world of food they [the founders] came up with this park".

These first quotes suggests that what F.I.CO does is reconstructing and displaying the agro-food chain. They also suggest how the lack of information about food production is considered an issue that the display of the agro-food chain can help solving. However, we are still left with the question of what the problem is according to F.I.CO. In order to understand this, we need more information.

As mentioned above, F.I.CO occupies a surface of 10 hectares, in which it hosts open-air fields and stables as well as 40 production facilities and shops within the main building. The interviewees have suggested the importance of the connection between these two elements. The stables and fields represent the first ring of the agro-food chain –the raw materials – whereas the production facilities inside, or farming factories, as F.I.CO calls them, represent the second ring – the transformation. These production facilities are situated along the perimeter of the main building and they have big and bright glass walls, which create a window on the production process. In this way, the transformation of raw materials that occurs within the main building can be easily followed by visitors. An example of such farming factories is found in Figure 3 below, which shows some kids witnessing and recording the production of Italian liquorice.



*Figure 3: Italian licorice making. Credits: FICO Eataly World*

In this regard, an interviewee states:

"it is fundamental for me to showcase a lot the production, so the laboratories are fundamentals [note: the interviewee refers to the production facilites], to show people how you make bread, the basic recipes, how you make cheese..and to explain in one project the whole production process"

and another one says:

"we want to show the transformation of the product with these big and very bright glasses, very big you see [note: the walls of the farming factories], also to make people curious"

There are various elements within F.I.CO that can be attributed to what I call the transparency. Glass walls are an example. I argue that they symbolize the abatement of a barrier that, according to F.I.CO, exist between producers and consumers. Furthermore, there are explanatory panels situated in front of each facility, as well as all around F.I.CO. This suggests that they also play an important role for the transparency in the project. I argue that these elements suggest that in the project of F.I.CO it is important to not leave anything unsaid. The panels, together with the glass walls, seem to be a symbolic representation of this. This is what I refer to as transparency.

Lastly, on the shelves of F.I.CO's shops as well as at restaurants or kiosks, the finished product can find the approval or disapproval of the worldwide daily visitors. Selling points are thus the closing ring of the agro-food chain – *from farm to fork*.

As other interviewees state:

> "saving the environment is FICO [cool]" and "sometimes we are so informed about other products that we consume outside of our body and we forget about food which is the only thing we ingest, and the best way to know it better [..] is to see its chain".

> "because it's good that whatever I eat, whatever I consume.. I want to know exactly what it is.. Well I think it's a need that is definitely important and that maybe 40 years ago people didn't have because we were still an agricultural country, we had an almost direct contact.. each of us had a relative, a grandfather, a mum who was a farmer and so you had a direct contact with the earth that got lost in the past 30-40 years"

All these elements lead me to argue that in advancing solutions that aim at reconciling the distance between consumers and producers, F.I.CO is representing the problem of (un)sustainability to be the loss of contact with the land and the production process. The way they suggest for achieving change is to bring people back to the land and to the way food is produced, so to bridge what they describe as a gap from the production to the (sustainable) consumption. Thus the problem assumed to be solved by this displaying of food production is constructed as a problem of gaps and lack of transparency between consumer and production. F.I.CO in fact seem to express that our society is experiencing a lack of food-related knowledge due to the loss of contact with the land. This is why F.I.CO proposes a solution that bridges this gap.

The contact with the production process seem to reach its highest through the hands-on experiences, which offer a direct interaction with the production process (Figure 4). Thus I argue that the symbolic expressions of the reconciliation between consumers and producers is to be found in all these elements described above: the glass walls, the panels and the hands-on experiences. The representation of the problem in such a way, gives F.I.CO the opportunity to pose a change to this condition. This change is brought forward in two ways:

- by reproducing the whole agro-food chain under one roof, where glass walls and explaining panels emphasize the need and the return of transparency
- by providing an educational project regarding food and sustainability.

I argue that these two elements are to be seen as connected, meaning that the agro-food chain serves also an educational purpose in itself and that education is performed through the display of the agro-food chain.

Thus if I were to use Rose's language and ask "What is F.I.CO an answer to?", I would say that F.I.CO is an answer to the gap that the society is experiencing between the way food is produced and the way it is consumed.

However, the elements described above have a deeper meaning. They do not only bring people closer to the world of food. As I will show in the next chapter, they are considered to affect individuals' awareness.

## 7.3 Scratching the discursive surface

The goal of this chapter is to advance with the analysis of the assumptions that support the problematisation that was discussed in the previous chapter. Hence, I will proceed by highlighting which discourses need to be in place for certain things to be thought as natural. In other words, I scratch the discursive surface to spot the "taken-for-granted" knowledges (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016).

In this chapter I answer question 2 of WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009), which is:

**2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?**

The goal of question 2 is thus to unveil which *knowledges* need to be in place for the statements to have sense or be recognised as true (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Thus the aim is to unfold the discursive practices involved in the govern*mentality* within F.I.CO. The term governmentality here is referred to the combination of institutions, procedures and reflections that constitute the infrastructure through which power can be exercised within a defined setting (ibid.).

I focus on the assumption that education is a driver to individuals' awareness, as I mentioned before. Here education , as also mentioned earlier in the text, is intended as a practice. This means that education is comprised both of verbal and non-verbal inputs, which are part of the analysis. Thus I first explain what are the elements that led me to the identification of this assumption during the analysis and I then discuss it. This means that bring in some literature outside the context of F.I.CO in order to show how these knowledges exist beyond F.I.CO's borders.

***If I see → I do, if I practice → I act.***



*Figure 4. Hands-on experience in fresh pasta making. Credits: Corso_Sfogliamo. FICO Eataly world.*

As the chapter above explains, the agro-food chain is advanced from F.I.CO as a solution for the reconciliation of the distance between consumers and producers. This reconciliation finds its expressions in the many elements (what I call the transparency) that symbolize the knocking down of the barriers that, according to F.I.CO, exist between production and consumption. However, the analysis can go futher. My goal now is to understand what is

the set of questions that produces F.I.CO as an intelligible answer (Bacchi, 2014). That is, what are the assumptions that lie behind the problem representation in F.I.CO?

A recurrent theme in the interviews is the importance of explaining. As described also earlier in the text, explanatory panels can be found almost anywhere in F.I.CO. They provide all sorts of information, from charts and tables reporting the number of biodiverse species that can be found within the Italian territory, to steps describing the production process of e.g. the panettone (typical Italian Christmas cake), to advices about good recycling practices (own notes from interviews).

As one interviewee stated:

"Teaching it's like an informational service to the customer, so the customer doesn't have to be a customer, he/she has to be increasingly more aware. Slow Food says that he/she has to be a co-producer, because his/her choices have to be decisive and influence food production towards a better quality. Let's say that the aim is not to give training courses, but to create consumers that are more aware"

The implicit assumption behind these words is that information will have an effect on consumers' minds, and will result in an increased awareness. This will in turn influence their decision-making process and stir it in a more desirable way. Thus the display of the agro-food chain together with the panels, the hands-on experiences and the events will bring visitors closer to food, and will ultimately help them making more sustainable decisions as consumers. Hence the deep-rooted and taken-for-granted knowledge is that education is a driver to environmental awareness. It follows that the assumption is that consumers do lack awareness, and that this is an important factor when it comes to food consumption, as it relates to sustainability. Thus the lack of awareness becomes the problem to solve. As one interviewee stated:

"What's the end goal? More than the end, this is the beginning of the project.. I thought of a food education project, of education to sustainability. [..] Well let's say I think that food education is for everyone, we are all bad-mannered from a food point of view, we don't know any more what food is, we waste it, we eat badly and we want to spend very few money, but if you really have to start from someone, the earlier the better.. but not to say what you have to eat, where you have to buy.. but to teach us all that food has value: nutritional, environmental, social, linked to our identity and export."

With the will to solve the problem of unsustainability and awareness lacking, F.I.CO proposes a solution in which consumers are shown and explained how food production occurs. Moreover, they are given the chance to actively participate in the production process (through events and hands-on experiences). All these factors are a solution for the lack of awareness concerning food production and consumption in our society. Thus I argue that the consumers' mind and understanding are ultimately created as the problem to be solved through the displaying of food-making and the information. The underlying assumption is that the problem of unsustainable societal behaviour towards food can be solved through education, thus that education is a driver to behavioural change. With behavioral change here I refer to consumers ending up in making different choices than before. This assumption goes beyond F.I.CO's borders.

Behavioural change has been the object of study of many researches in the past decades. Following the acknowledgement of the international political arena that natural resources are finite and that human activities have a strong impact on their depletion, several researchers have analyzed human behavior with the intention of finding the key to trigger its change in a desired direction (Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002). Despite being it considered a complex thing, there has been a conspicuous number of models trying to encapsulate the factors responsible of change (ibid.). Among them, knowledge, together with other factors (such as e.g. values, intention, norms, etc.), has been and continues to be under the spotlight. This assumption can in fact still be found in the numerous campaigns intending to spread awareness in our society in order to steer behavior in a more eco-friendly direction (Soron, 2009). In her study, Dubuisson-Quellier (2010) states that market incentives,

information and labeling schemes are the most used policy tools in sustainable consumption policies. The underlying belief is that these tools will be effective in raising awareness, and thus consequently in promoting change ( in this case, sustainable consumption). This idea is found also in the interviews I conducted, as for example in the words of one interviewee:

> "If we talk a bit more in general, not only about this place here, it's obvious that the more information, the more aware the customer is. If the whole chain, the whole Italian food production system begins, for example, to tell exactly in the labels.. so to force everyone involved in the production to tell exactly not really the nutritional values of an oil, but where it was cultivated, where it was harvested and when it was bottled, so more information on the labels, we can say that F.I.CO won one of its battles."

It is interesting to note that this is described as a *battle*, thus an on-going unresolved fight. In my interpretation, this fight has its roots in the fact that consumer behaviour has been at the centre of the political arena for decades, however environmental improvements are yet to be seen. Thus, political institutions feel they still have to *fight* for it. In the case of F.I.CO my interpretation is that the way to fight it is to educate and to be transparent.

## 7.4   The powerful discursive infrastructure

This section is dedicated to the third question of the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009a), which asks:

**3.   How has this representation of the problem come about?**

According to Bacchi & Goodwin (2016), the goal of question 3 is to "disrupt any assumption that what *is* reflects what *has to be*." The aim is to reveal how some knowledges become legitimate, under which historical and cultural conditions their dominance is rendered possible (ibid.). This form of analytical intervention draws on Foucault's genealogy. As Bacchi & Goodwin (2016) state: "The aim, through genealogies, is to *play off* subjugated knowledges against the rights of a science that is in the ends of the few". Subjugated knowledges indicate those knowledges that have been hidden or covered (ibid.). The researcher is thus invited to identify the subjugated knowledges and to interrogate the conditions that brought to their burial. Thus in this chapter I start by describing the historical conditions preceding the realisation of F.I.CO and I then move on to a discussion about the subjugated knowledges.

   F.I.CO was born on the venue that was previously hosting the CAAB, the agri-food centre of Bologna, which was thought about as a centre that could gather in one place the food retailers and/or producers (fish, meat, fruit and vegetables) and all the firms working within the food business, with the aim described as being a platform for the distribution in Italy and all over Europe (own notes from interviews). The CAAB was conceived in the 70's and realised 20 years after, when the market of food distribution had undergone changes and the imports of foodstuff had started to be handled by the small distribution with a rather diversified offer. The result was that this place (the CAAB) found itself to be too big for its purpose, and could not catch up with its initial investment. This is when a project about "a thematic agro-food park" (the current F.I.CO) was presented for the requalification of the CAAB in 2012. The already existing wood infrastructure of the building was described as ideal for the project F.I.CO, also because of  the photovoltaic roof (one of the biggest of all Europe) (notes from interviews). What other conditions made it possible for F.I.CO to emerge and for its knowledges to become legitimate? I now move on with some data regarding the situation in Italy and Europe.

   In the same year (2012), Italy had registered an increase of 4.2% of young people between the age of 18 and 34 that moved back to the countryside, the main reason behind this choice being that life in the countryside was considered to be healthier (Coldiretti Mantova, 2012). Thus in those years Italy was witnessing an inversion of tendency – from the city to the countryside. The opportunity to live in the countryside was becoming more

appealing, especially among the young portion of the population, who saw in it a chance to conduct a healthier life and to be "innovative" (ibid.)

On the European level, the agricultural sector was undergoing a reform in a more sustainable direction, in line with the international goals of sustainable development. The CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) reform that started in 2010 and that was effective from 2014, was designed to respond to three main "challenges" (European Commission, 2013):

- Economic  (food security and globalisation, a declining rate of productivity growth, price volatility and pressures on production costs)
- "Environmental (resource efficiency, soil and water quality and threats to habitats and biodiversity)"(ibid.)
- Territorial (linked to rural areas).

The conditions mentioned above were suitable for the realisation of F.I.CO. In being a project enclosed in the frame of sustainable development, with the aim of sustainability in the agricultural sector and a focus on biodiversity, F.I.CO was the ideal project to sustain this inversion of tendency (return to the countryside) that the Country was experiencing. What are the *knowledges* whose dominance was possible under these conditions?

Within the data (interview transcripts and online documents) I identified two main *knowledges* in F.I.CO. These discourses are interconnected and concern respectively waste and biodiversity. I address each of them separately in the following paragraphs, where I also explain how they are relate to F.I.CO's representation of the problem. These sections have a two-fold aim: to show what are the emergent knowledges within these discourses and to shed light on the subjugated knowledges.

### *Wasting sustainably*

The discourse of waste is frequently recurring in the data. In order to unfold how is it thought about, I borrow the words of two interviewees:

> "We are slowly trying to be a park that is 100% virtuous, so we forced everyone working here to use recyclable material, biodegradable.. I mean no plastic. Or you know also the glasses are made of compost.. these are the examples that we are giving. We would also like the small amount of waste from agricultural production and farming to be used in a closed cycle here.. let's say that in 2 years we would like to be able to self-sustain ourselves"

and

> "the photovoltaic helps a lot, the waste sorting is done well, we use everything compostable and then at the end of the evening we don't waste anything of our production.. we give it to an association that in turn gives it to people in need"

The emerging themes regarding waste are linked to the concept of recycling and plastic-free solutions. The interviewees have repeatedly stressed the importance of compostable material when talking about waste. I argue that this suggests that the discourse of waste in F.I.CO is constructed around the knowledge that recycling, using compostable material and having photovoltaic panels is synonymous with acting sustainably. By providing compostable packaging, F.I.CO is in fact claiming to be sustainable, in this case meaning that it contributes to avoid plastic. The discourse of waste is thus intimately linked to the discourse of sustainability within F.I.CO, as recycling and using compostable materials and renewable energies are described as sustainable practices. The construction of the problem of waste in such a way, however, is rather narrow. Waste reducing practices are not part of the representation of the problem of *un*sustainability. Thus I argue that knowledge about waste reducing is subjugated, and is played-off by the discourses of recycling and renewable energies. These discourses exist and are perpetuated in our society beyond F.I.CO's borders. I suggest that they are connected with the discourse of limited resources, according to which there is a finite amount of resources which we ought to pay attention to. As stated by one interviewee:

"the soil, the water, the air are all limited natural resources that need time to regenerate"

This suggests that the construction of meanings around the discourse of waste follows the logic of a finite natural capital. With the problem being depicted as such, renewable energies and recycling are constructed as a valuable solution. However, I argue that the discursive construction of sustainability in such a way let other competing knowledges to remain covered in the political scene. This, I suggest, is the case of waste reducing. During my passive observation in F.I.CO I noticed the recurring presence of some panels inviting visitors to shop as much as they wished because their food could be effortlessly delivered home anywhere (as shown by the drawing of a plane). Moreover, as stated by another interviewee:

> "But we sell these products also externally, not only in F.I.CO.. we also sell them in the national market"

I suggest that this shows that sustainability in F.I.CO is constructed as a commodity, as a label, as something that belongs to the product regardless of what will happen to it. The subjugated knowledge about waste reducing is played-off by the discourse of renewable energies and recycling. In other words, it seems that the narratives of recycling and producing with *green* energy have affirmed themselves as dominant within the political discourse of F.I.CO, allowing competing discourses to sink down.

### *Biodiver- city*

Within F.I.CO the discourse of biodiversity occupies a central place. It is stated that:

> "Italy has the highest rate of biodiversity in the world as demonstrated by its large number of plant varieties and animal species. These things have to be shared and demonstrated" (FICO Eataly World, 2017e).

This quote suggests that F.I.CO is seeing something problematic in the fact that the Country's biodiversity is not shared and demonstrated enough. The solution F.I.CO advances for this problem is thus a place in which "the wonders of Italian biodiversity" are showcased (FICO Eataly World, 2017b). For instance, in the open-air fields biodiversity finds its highest expression in what it is called the Orchard of Biodiversity, which is:

> "an area of 300 square meters already planted within F.I.CO representing forgotten fruits and biodiversity plants. Also a clone of the oldest fig tree in Italy and probably in Europe – located in Parma – has been planted in this orchard, which will become a 'living laboratory' for training and research." (F.I.CO Foundation, 2017).

This quote suggests that a symbolic expression of biodiversity is found in the fig tree planted in the orchard. Moreover, besides being an acronymous for Italian Farming Factory, the word *fico* in Italian means fig, the fruit of the fig tree. This connection is shown F.I.CO's logo, on which the final letter of the word represent a fig that is hanging on its tree (Figure 5 below).
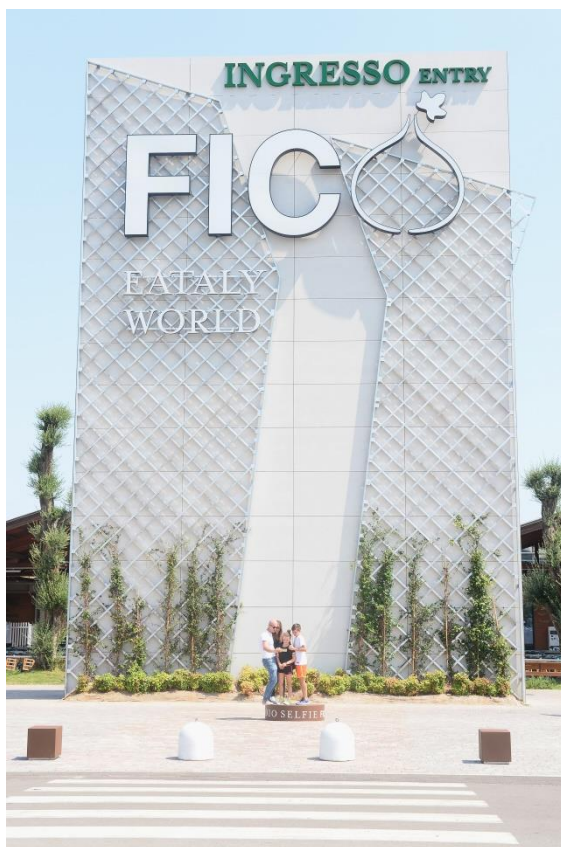
*Figure 5: FICO's entrance. Credits: FICO Eataly World*

The recurrent presence of this symbol (the fig), to the point of being embodied in F.I.CO's own name, suggests its prominent role with regards to biodiversity and to the core values of the project itself. It is not explicity stated why the fig tree is considered a representation of biodiversity. However, I argue that the last quote suggests that the discourse of biodiversity in F.I.CO is constructed around the knowledge of resilience, of which the fig tree is a symbolic representation. It was in fact stated that this fig tree, which is probably "the oldest" within Europe "will become a living laboratory for training and reseach" (F.I.CO Foundation, 2017). I argue that this quote show how the fig tree is considered to have desirable features (resiliency) that make it as a model ("a living laboratory") for the preservation of other species and thus the conservation of the biodiversity heritage. I argue that these desirable features are represented by its resilience, suggested by its old age, implicitly meaning that this tree has characteristics that have allowed and allows it to cope with changing conditions. The study and the identification of these features can thus prove itself helpful with regards to sustainability.

When talking about biodiversity the interviewees stated that:

> "Biodiversity is life. We have an animal biodiversity, a plant biodiversity and human biodiversity. Biodiversity is diversity, so it's richness. So I think it is fundamental not to think to the monoculture, also the monoculture of the mind, but to be open to the diversities that characterize nature, also the human one. The risk otherwise is that we lose all the richness we have gathered in the world's history."

and

> "the respect for environment is our future, and for animals obviously and biodiversity.. I mean we already killed many of them with pollution, with hunting, with everything. And the world is beautiful because various, so let's keep this biodiversity until it's possible".

These quotes further show how in F.I.CO's signs and in F.I.CO's words, biodiversity is a treasure to be preserved. F.I.CO expresses that biodiversity is the key to a healthy planet. Moreover, F.I.CO represents the problem of unsustainability to be the lack of

representation and sharing of biodiversity, which education can help solving. It is in fact possible to book a tour with the *Ambassadors of Biodiversity*, trained guides that share and show the biodiversity within the agro-food park. I suggest that this emphasis on the demonstration is to be connected with the motif of transparency, introduced in the early sections of the analysis. The solution to the problem is in fact depicted as the showcase and education about biodiversity. However, I argue that, embedded in F.I.CO's discourse of education and biodiversity, there are power relations that result in forcing F.I.CO (through discursive structures – thus F.I.CO itself) to compete with other local food initiatives. These initiatives, from which by necessity F.I.CO distracts attention, are the daily farmers markets who make local food without the educational ambition.

This consequence of the problem representation sheds light on the subjugated knowledges in this regard. I argue that these knowledges concern local, seasonal and short-chain products. I suggest in fact that in F.I.CO's representation of the problem, biodiversity seem to be constructed as an attribute that plants and animals possess, regardless of their provenience. I suggest that this is shown by the presence of plant and animal varieties transported to F.I.CO from all over Italy. This sheds also light on the fact that the discourse of biodiversity within F.I.CO seem to be constructed around domestic plant and animal varities, the subjugated knowledge being wild species and ecosystems. This is the reason why this section is called biodiver-city.

## 7.5   Uncovering silences

In this chapter I move forward with the analysis, focusing on question 4 that asks:

> **4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be thought about differently?**

Question 4 of the WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009) is interested in investigating what is left unsaid in the identified problematisation, thus where are the gaps. Furthermore, it invites the researcher to explore creative alternatives to formulate the *problem*.

My analysis shows that the *problem* of unsustainable societal behaviour towards food (unsustainable consumption, which in turn affects sustainable production) in F.I.CO is represented to be the loss of transparency in food production due to the gradual detachment from the land our society experienced. As a consequence, this brought us to being disconnected from the process of food production, and thus to lack awareness about it. Thus my analysis suggests that it is for this reason that F.I.CO's solution to bridge this gap is to display the agro-food chain from farm to fork and to make it visible, through glass walls, explanatory panels and hands-on activities; in other words, through transparency and education, as explained earlier. These elements are in fact considered to be effective in raising awareness. The whole agro-food park is thus constructed around the idea that, given people the tools to be conscious and critically think, they will be acting differently and thus make better environmental decisions. In F.I.CO this is done through what is called edutation, which is education in a fun way (education + entertainment) (FICO Eataly World, 2017d).

This fun motif is in fact stretching along all the interviews I conducted, suggesting that it plays a crucial role within the agro-food park concerning education. As some interviewees stated:

"my aim is to narrate the park from an emotional point of view, because it's with feelings that you reach people's hearts"

"that's what I love the most about my job: to make people having fun while informing them, because if you have fun you will remember more"

These quotes suggest how F.I.CO's representation of the problem is that education is not fun enough, and that this affects the learning outcome. For this reason, the proposed solution is to educate without losing the fun factor. The 6 multimedia carousels, that are scattered all around F.I.CO, seem to cover a prominent role. They are described as follows:

"FICO Eataly World recounts our journey on this Earth through 6 different stories, each about the thousand-year old relationship between humankind and Nature. A true journey of re-discovery which takes place inside FICO's 6 interactive educational Carousels. Each Carousel is designed into 3 different *edutaining* areas: an area dedicated to the **"wow" factor**, one to **passive learning**, and one to **interactive learning**." (FICO Eataly World, 2017d).

The last one is called Man and the Future and its main theme is agriculture in the future. Given the importance of agriculture in F.I.CO's project, I focus on this carousel to highlight some of the gaps within the identified problem representation in F.I.CO.
When exploring Man and the Future, visitors can learn about the principles of hydroponic agriculture, and on a later phase they can select, among a variety of seeds, the one they chose to plant (FICO Eataly World, 2017d). A code is assigned to each plant and, through a phone application, the growth cycle of the plant can be monitored until full development (ibid.). Figure 6 below is a representative image of this carousel.



*Figure 6. Man and the Future. Credits: FICO Eataly World.*

My analysis suggests that this carousel embodies the limitations and the silences of the problem representation in F.I.CO. F.I.CO's representation of the problem in fact shows that there is considered to be a profound gap between producers and consumers, which affects society's consumptions patterns. F.I.CO's solution to the problem is to bridge this gap through transparency and edutation, which are considered to play a prominent role in raising environmental awareness. However, I argue that sometimes these experiences can increase rather than reduce the distance between producers and consumers, contributing to deepen the alienation of the society towards food. This is for instance the case of e.g. the carousel of Man and the Future. I consider as alienating the fact that the growth phases of a plant are monitored through a phone application. I argue that this example is representative of the gaps within the problem representation in F.I.CO. I argue that the problematization process of F.I.CO leaves in fact unproblematic the impact of such experiences on society's reconciliation with the food production process.

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The goal of question 4 of the WPR approach is also to bring alternative problem representations. Denying essentialism and starting from the premise that things are contingent, it thus encourages to advance suggestions on what could have gone differently, which different paths could have been taken. I reflected a lot on this point, and searched for literature examining the problematization of sustainability in similar contexts, or for other existing examples of agro-food parks, with which I could compare the problematization process lying behind. I did find these examples. However, I found myself concluding that the *problem* is in the problematization of sustainability itself, thus in the creation of sustainability into the problem as we know it. In particular, in the creation of sustainability as a wicked problem. This forces political institutions to be busy finding a solution to it, each of them assigning the responsibility to some actors, thus spreading it. I argue that this generates confusion. The alternative scenario that I propose has thus its starting point in the rejection of frammentation. It proposes to gather the pieces of the puzzle and to discard the ones that don't match. It further invites to look at the whole so to understand how to keep it together.

## 7.6 Reaching societal structures

This chapter serves the purpose of unveiling how a problematization insinuates itself and has effects in different domains of the social.

5. **What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"? (Bacchi, 2009)**

The premises lying behind a post-structural analysis and in this case of Bacchi's WPR approach is that a problematisation, in assigning the responsibility for the issue to some people rather than others, it produces effects that target societal groups in different ways (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Question 5 aims at unfolding the effects that are produced as a result of a defined problem representation. The approach recognizes that the effects of a problematisation insinuate themselves at many layers of the social (discursive, subjectification and lived) (ibid.). Discursive effects can be identified by analysing how the problematisation delimits the field of possible thoughts and words that can be expressed in relation to a given subject (ibid.). Subjectification effects refers to which subjects arise as a result of a defined problem representation (Bacchi, 2009). Lastly, lived effects are those spreading in the daily life of individuals and are a result of both the discursive and the subjectification effects.

I start with subjectification effects. Discursive and lived effects will be following afterwards.

**The individualisation of consumerism – the rise of responsible users**

> *"Here more than consuming we use a different verb: make use of, because to consume means to destroy, so if you feel a destroyer, then you have a responsibility towards food and natural resources needed to produce it, so the message and the action that we bring forward with the Foundation and everything that we do is that when you want to make use of a food commodity you have a life cycle of that commodity that involves natural capital.. we always think of economic capital, but there's also natural capital and maybe this is the most important one.. the soil, the water, the air are all limited natural resources that need time to regenerate, thus within the responsibility of this use there is also the time to allow natural resources to regenerate. This means to not over-produce and to not waste, so responsible use is a method that, together with the biodiversity, we adopted."*

The subject position that is created as a result of the problematizing activity in F.I.CO is the one of the responsible users. This can be seen in the quote above, as well as in the discourses that constitute the infrastructure that supports the exercise of power in F.I.CO discussed in question 2. This powerful set of knowledges has ultimately the effect of

switching the responsibility from the governments (or the political institutions engaged in the problematisation) to the consumers. As a result, the consumers are asked not to be consumers anymore, but to co-participate in the production process to the extent that they can affect it, thus ultimately steer market demand towards a (more) sustainable direction.

The subject position that is created is thus the one of the responsible user, a user that has a grip on the consequences of his/her actions. But what does this imply? Dubuisson-Quellier (2010) in her research traced back the genealogy of this subject position. She states that "consumers are identified as primary agents for change today" (ibid.) and that this subject position has its roots in the phenomenon of political consumerism. This means that consumers, in being citizens, can express their political concerns through the purchase of products. This is the subject position created in F.I.CO as a result of the problematization process of sustainability. What this implies at a deeper level is that the responsibility for environmental change is dropped on consumers' shoulders, while leaving unquestioned other factors/people and their contribution to the "problem".

However, the aim of this enquiry is far from discrediting the belief that people's actions matter. It is rather to show how responsibilities are thought about as a result of power imbalances (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). On his study about green governmentality, Seyfang (2005) argues that "consumers are effectively locked into particular consumption patterns by the overarching social structure or market, business, working patterns, urban planning and development". Here the author refers to institutional consumption (State's purchase for roads, hospitals etc - which contributes to half of the total consumption in western Europe) which happens away from individuals' eyes, who therefore are not given the possibility to choose in this context.

I argue that by representing the problem in the way it does, F.I.CO creates a societal distinction based on the moral imperative that the *good citizens* are the ones who take care of the environment through their consumption choices, whereas the *bad citizens* are the ones who reject this subject position. In this regard, it is also interesting to note that the multimedia carousels of F.I.CO as well as the hands-on experience are accessible only by paying a fee (own notes). Pricing, as well as symbols and materials, are being part of my analysis because I consider them a symbolic expression that plays a role in education.

Given that information actually translates in more environmentally friendly behaviour, it is a privilege that not everyone can afford. The problematization process of F.I.CO thus also results in a societal distinction based on economic principles. By setting a price on education F.I.CO is in fact creating a *food bourgeoisie*, thus an elitist group who can afford being sustainable – because it can afford paying for more information.

**Discursive effects**

As mentioned before, question 5 is interested in understanding how a problematisation sets boundaries between what is possible to think and say about a given "thing" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). This is what is referred to as discursive effects.

In identifying the problem of unsustainable consumption in citizens' detachment from food production, F.I.CO is placing an emphasis on individual responsibility, thus placing a boundary on what is thinkable about other actors' impact. The role of government and F.I.CO itself in this matter is not questioned, thus reinforcing the existence of the dominant subject position of the responsible user. In their study about green governmentality, Soneryd & Uggla (2015) argue that: "This way of addressing citizens is a crucial element of regulatory mechanisms that appeal to 'free will', implying the individualization of responsibility. However, this is not the same thing as, or necessarily congruent with, whether and how people *are* individualized, meaning that they act and define themselves primarily as individuals rather than as parts of collectives or in terms of their social relationships." On a deeper level this means that individuals are told they can choose and make a difference through their actions; however, there are missing infrastructure in our society as well as political constraints that undermine and limit the exercise of individuals'

power. These can ultimately give rise to forms of rebellion and resistance to capitalist ideologies and neoliberal forms of governance (ibid.).

In bringing forward this form of green governmentality through its problematisation of sustainability, F.I.CO is leaving unquestioned the role of economy and market rules in steering consumptions patterns, and ultimately affecting production cycles. I suggest that the subjugated knowledge within this discourse is reflected in the impossibility to think that it is the responsibility of the State to create the conditions that allow a sustainable management of resources.

**Lived effects**

Last but not least, the problematizing activity of sustainability within F.I.CO has also effects that manifest themselves in the daily life of individuals. These lived effects can be identified as a combination between discursive and subjectification effects, and they find their expression in how people conduct their lives.

The problem representation in F.I.CO has the effect of identifying consumers as "primary agents for environmental change" (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010), thus as political actors that can steer market demand through their consumption choices. How does this translate into people's lives? What are the constraints that arise as a result of the identified problem representation? Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) state that the coming together of these effects materializes into "dividing practices, which function to separate groups of people from one another and which can also produce 'governable subjects' divided within themselves". Building on these premises I argue that the lived effects that stem from the problem representation in F.I.CO result in the division of social groups based on economic factors and on the moral imperative of being *green*, as argued earlier in the text.

## 7.7   Points of rupture

This last chapter is dedicated to the last question of the WPR approach, which is:

> 6.   **How and where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/ or how can it be disrupted and replaced?**

With question 6, the post-structural analysis through the WPR framework comes to an end. At the same time, this question opens up ways to "destabilize taken-for granted 'truths'", it creates room for creative thinking about alternatives, and it encourages the exploration of paths of resistance against "pervasive and authoritative problem representations". This form of critical intervention is inspired by questions 2 and 3. It is informed by question 2 because it asks how the underlying assumptions that support the exercise of power in F.I.CO can be replaced. At the same time, it draws from question 3 because it seeks to understand how the practices and processes that allow domination can be disrupted. In approaching this question, these are my starting points.

The deep-rooted knowledge that underlie the identified problem representation in F.I.CO is that education is a driver to behavioural change. Alongside with green governmentality, this discourse has the effect of dropping the responsibility for change on consumers' shoulders. It sees knowledge and practice as a barrier to actions, and it does not take into account other factors that hinder an effective empowerment of citizens in decision-making processes or the role of other actors. Furthermore, the dominant *knowledges* within F.I.CO that allow and reinforce this form of governmentality, as described in question 3, are to be found in the discourses of waste and biodiversity, who constitute the powerful discursive infrastructure that supports the exercise of power in F.I.CO. These discourses again produce and perpetuate the subject position of the responsible user, leaving unquestioned the impact of the State and other political actor in contributing to environmental

destruction. How to disrupt and replace this pervasive domination? The dominating discourse "consumers first and citizens second" (Maniates, 2001) could have its point of rupture in that consumers identify themselves primarily as citizens. This means that they reject the subject position according to which they are asked to express their political concerns through their consumption choices, causing a shift of the discourse towards 'citizens first and consumers second'. However, this requires a profound reform of the dominating system, asking political institutions to take on the responsibility for change or to create room for an empowerment of citizens.

# 8  Conclusions

Through this enquiry my aim was to bring to light the invisible discursive structures and processes that allow governance within a non-formal context of education. More precisely, my research aimed at investigating and questioning how sustainability is problematized in F.I.CO (Italian Farming Factory), a newly born project in the outskirts of the city of Bologna. The theoretical premises my enquiry relies upon are that, in advancing solutions in the context of sustainability, F.I.CO sees sustainability as something problematic that needs solving. My analytical intervention has unfolded itself through the WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) approach by Bacchi (2009) which is informed by post-structural premises and the problematization approach of Foucault (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). The goal is thus to dismantle the processes that lead to the dominance of some discourses within our society, as they perpetuate and reinforce a certain kind of reality that is the product of imbalanced power dynamics (ibid.). The point of departure is the contingent nature of things and the discursive processes involved in their production. Things in fact are made to be (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Thus, they can also be *unmade* (ibid.). So it goes for problems. They were not born as such. Rather, problems are a result of a production process where some things are *made* problematic (ibid.). The investigation of the processes that led to their emergence can thus shed light on the power dynamics involved in their making. This is turn can help understanding  what are the consequences of these dominant *knowledges* and where the responsibility is thought to lie.

These are the premises that have guided my analytical intervention.

Through the unfolding of the discursive infrastructure that supports the problematization of sustainability in F.I.CO I show that F.I.CO engages in governance by guiding individuals' conduct towards a desired direction. This is done through the problematization of sustainability. In advancing solutions that aim at reconciling the distance between consumers and producers, F.I.CO is in fact representing the problem of (un)sustainability to be the loss of contact with the land and the production process. These elements are in turn considered to affect individuals' environmental awareness. In the will to solve this problem, F.I.CO proposes an agro-food park in which the whole agro-food chain is reconstructed and displayed, from field to fork, thus providing an opportunity to experience (directly or indirectly) how food is made and where it comes from. A symbolic expression of this reconciliation is found for instance in the glass walls that create a window on the food production process that occurs within the main building. The glass walls symbolize the abatement of the barrier that, according to F.I.CO, exists between producers and consumers. Thus they bring back the transparency that went lost and are considered important in developing awareness.

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However, in representing the problem in the way it does, I suggest that F.I.CO is assigning the responsibility for it to individuals, thus engaging in the subjectification process that sees consumers as leading agents for change. Individuals are made responsible because it is through their consumption choices that they are asked to influence market demand. Thus in perpetuating the knowledges of green governmentality, F.I.CO is contributing to the reinforcement of the dichotomy consumer-citizen. This means that consumers are regarded as citizens that can express their political concern through their consumption choices.

However, this representation leaves unquestioned many aspects. An effective empowerment of citizens in our society is in fact actually lacking (Uggla & Soneryd, 2015), as they are included in the decision- making processes only to some extent. Thus this depoliticization process doesn't hold when decisions concern e.g. State purchases such as infrastructures, hospitals, etc. for which the voice of citizens is not heard (or not even asked!) (Seyfang, 2005). That said, my suggestion is not to shape every decision-making process into collaborative management of resources. It is rather to highlight how the representation of the problem is the result of imbalanced power dynamics that have effects in our society. Through the WPR approach I identified the subjectification, discursive and lived effects of the problem representation. I showed how some educational elements are creating a societal distinction on the basis of economic income. This is because they are accessible only by paying a fee, thus they are a prerogative of the *food bourgeoisie*.

Furthermore, I suggested that some practices within F.I.CO, while intending to bridge the gap, are rather sharpening the distance between the consumers and the production process, but their impact is not questioned in the problem representation.

Further researches could deepen the understanding of the processes involved in the problematization of sustainability within a non-formal context of education such as F.I.CO. They could investigate similar projects and advance suggestions for change. Moreover, they could interrogate which effects arise as a consequence of different interpretations of sustainability, and how the apparatus of knowledges they rely upon is constructed. Lastly, this body of researches could serve the purpose of engaging in a societal reflection on wise ways to live in harmony with the Earth.

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