

## CHAPTER 4

# BIG BUSINESS IN THE SOCIAL COMMONS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE CARREFOUR VĂRĂȘTI AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE IN ROMANIA

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## **Big Business in the Social Commons: The Example of the Carrefour Vărăști Agricultural Cooperative in Romania\* / Chapter 4**

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### **Abstract**

If the commons were the subject of a revival with an explosion of their studies especially after the Nobel Prize in Economics awarded to Elinor Ostrom in 2009, few of them approached them from the point of view of big business. The reason for this absence is undoubtedly due to the fact that many commons develop against big business, as an alternative model. However, with the new age of the commons, which sees them extend to all the dimensions of social life, this paradoxical encounter begins to take place. The first part of this paper deals with it from a theoretical point of view starting from the model of the social commons. The latter makes it possible to highlight two specificities of the social commons related to the big enterprise: their polycentrism, on the one hand, and their translocalism, on the other hand. The second part deals with a special case of social commons with a large company: the Carrefour cooperative in Varast, Romania. Its study first shows that this case responds well to the characteristics of any common social. It then indicates the specificities of such a social common in which the intervention of the large enterprise confers on the common a translocal structure. Finally, it concludes on the ambiguity of the encounter between the commons and the big company: between potential recovery of the commons by the logic of profit for the shareholder or, on the contrary, evolution of the large company towards a new logic of value in the territories.

**Keywords:** Cooperative, Food short circuits, Social commons, Translocalism

**JEL-Codes:** P13, P32, Q13

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## Introduction

Our work is part of the vast stream of research on the commons which has been boosted in France since 2009 when the Nobel Prize in economics was awarded to Elinor Ostrom for her work on this topic<sup>1</sup>. Recent collective publications include *The Dictionary of Common Goods* (2017), *Towards a Republic of Commons* (2018) and *The Alternative of the Commons* (2019). More specifically, our research contributes to work addressing the commons from the perspective of the social and solidarity economy. This term, that emerged in France at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, designates social realities that include players historically involved in the non-profit economy (associations, mutuals, cooperatives, foundations), but goes beyond this definition in two significant ways. Indeed, since the law on the social and solidarity economy of July 2014, its definition is extended to companies that would not normally be covered by these statutes in the past, companies that pursue a social goal in addition to profit, that have democratic or participatory governance and that limit their profitability. This law has broadened the definition of SSE beyond a particular way of doing business to associate it with a mode of economic development. This expansion is of interest to us in that it opens up the possibility of another type of economy based on the local development of territories in a way that is both sustainable and inclusive. In order to provide a theoretical perspective to this definition associating the social and solidarity economy with a mode of local, inclusive and sustainable development, we have developed the model of the social commons (Defalvard, 2017).

In this study, we explore a dimension often ignored in the commons, that of big business. The commons, in line with the viewpoint of Ostrom (1990), is presented as a different mode of allocation of resources from that of the market or of the state. Independent of the market and the state, the commons implies self-governance of a community that ensures sustainability of resources for its members through a system of rules and rights. Big business generally does not intervene here even though it is a key player in global markets and is often linked to the state through public contracts, such as in the water sector with the involvement of Suez and Véolia. To go further, the commons are often considered to be an alternative to global markets and to state control (cf. Rendueles, Subirats, 2019). By examining an example of the commons in which big business plays an essential role, our research highlights a kind of paradox for the commons.

After outlining the model of the social commons in the first part, we will discuss an example of a social commons in which a large company, Carrefour, plays a structuring

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<sup>1</sup> The Nobel Prize in Economics, created in 1969, is funded by Bank of Sweden and is awarded in memory of Alfred Nobel. Elinor Ostrom, who did her thesis in political science after her subject was refused in economics (Fontaine, 2019), is the first female laureate.

role, in the second part. We will show what makes the Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative in Romania a commons for the food resource and examine the role played by this large company. Finally, in the third part, we will explain the particular characteristic that participation by a large company confers on a social commons. This characteristic refers to the translocalism of the territorial commons. Thus, via the large Carrefour company, the Vărăști community of actors involved in the cooperative, is connected at extra-local scales, not only to consumers in Carrefour stores in Bucharest as well as in other parts of Romania, but through the multinational dimension of the CSR of Carrefour, to a global arena. This is the paradox of the role of big business in a commons which we will discuss in our conclusions.

## **1. Social Commons and Big Business**

Based on the hypothesis that there are some similarities between the realities of the social and solidarity economy and the commons, we propose to develop a model of social commons to explore the relevance of these parallels.

### **1.1. The Model of Social Commons**

Following the Ostrom tradition, it has become customary to define the commons as the combination of three criteria. In this way, a commons is 1) the pooling or joint production of a resource 2) managed by a system of rules and rights in which the right of use of or access to the resource by members of the common is fundamental or priority 3) and self-governed by a community which defines its own methods of control and conflict management. This definition makes it possible to give the commons a basic structure, which avoids allowing it to fall into a catch-all category while also distinguishing it from the concept of the common good. This basic structure does not prevent the realities that are relevant to each commons from being unique to them.

The model of the social commons adds other features borrowed from the theory of justice of Amartya Sen (2010) to this basic structure. The first added feature is that these resources are linked to a universal right of access. Thus, the resources of the social commons come close to the definition of social commons that we find in the Italian tradition of *beni comuni* which describes the basic goods necessary to lead a good life (Barsani, 2011). Education, health, culture, housing, sustainable energy, food, employment and mobility are all resources to which the social commons attach a universal right of access.

The second characteristic is that the social commons transforms this universal right into a real, concrete right through a democratic conversion. The way in which people collectively construct the possibility of using the resource requires a voice from each and every member of the commons. It is obvious then that all commons that respect

the first three criteria are not necessarily social commons, either because they do not uphold universality of rights, in particular with regard to the right to use a certain resource, or because they are not based on local democratic governance which is the only way the universal right of use can be democratically transformed into a concrete right. This last point calls for a new institutional construction of law (Gutwirth, 2018) of which municipalism is a prime example (Rendueles and Subirats, 2019).

Some of the realities of the social and solidarity economy are more or less similar to our normative model of social commons (Defalvard, 2020). While the social commons is most frequently a set of realities backed by a local community based on mutual knowledge, this is not the sole expression possible. This is the case when the resource at stake is knowledge, as in the example of Wikipedia. In this example, the Wikipedia France association, by organising a virtual community of contributors who make knowledge universally available, is present in the global village. For some of them, digital commons have the other particularity of involving large companies in their operations: thus the Linux kernel is a code written by employees of large companies in the digital economy: Intel, Samsung, Google, etc. (Broca, Moreau, 2017).

## **1.2. What is the role of big business in the social commons?**

In a previous article (Defalvard, Fontaine, 2018), we addressed the question of the role of local authorities in the social commons by considering *Pôles Territoriaux de Coopération Economique* (Territorial Poles for Economic Cooperation) (PTCE). These were established by the SSE law of July 2014 as partnerships between actors in the social and solidarity economy, traditional businesses and other actors in the territory in order to develop shared strategies for local and sustainable development. As part of a new model of local development, the PTCE naturally include local authorities among their members. From this point of view, cooperative societies serving the collective interest allow local authorities to be stakeholders in the capital and governance of the cooperative and provide a sound legal vehicle for this alliance between local authorities and the social and solidarity economy for sustainable and united development of the territories (Draperi and Margado, 2016). But what about the role of large companies in the social commons?

We must begin by pointing out that the social commons and big business often find themselves in opposition. Thus, in two examples of a social commons, the platform of associations for short-supply-chain agricultural exchange in the Hautes-Alpes<sup>2</sup> and the solidarity wind farm in Béganne in Brittany<sup>3</sup>, they emerged in opposition to big business. In the case of the first, it was a defence against the multinational Nestlé which buys milk at 29 euro cents per litre, thereby preventing farmers from making

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<sup>2</sup> "Echanges Paysans Hautes-Alpes" is an association created in 2014 that foreshadows a cooperative society of collective interest: <https://www.echanges-paysans.fr/>

<sup>3</sup> "Energies citoyennes en Pays de Vilaine" is an association created in 2003: <https://www.enr-citoyennes.fr/>

a living from their activity. In the second case, it was against the public company, EDF and its monopoly on nuclear energy.

In the Ostrom's model of the commons, the notion of the polycentric institution is a first approach to exploring the possibility for large companies to participate in a commons. In her lecture given at the presentation of her Nobel Prize and subsequently revised, Ostrom (2011) emphasises the aspect of a complex system covered by the commons. Criticising the unifying ideological models of both the market and the state, analysis of the commons should, according to her, lead us to "ask ourselves how polycentric institutions can encourage or discourage innovation, learning, adaptation, reliability, the level of cooperation of participants, and the achievement of more effective, equitable and sustainable results at multiple scales." (p. 59-60). The participation of big business in a commons complicates its architecture because it adds a decision-making centre which is itself caught up in a complex system and opens it up to very large scales. This complexity, as Ostrom notes, comes from the different scales at which a common can be connected through embedded commons.

Another way of examining the role of big business in the social commons is through analysis of the translocalism of the latter. This translocalism is a characteristic of the social commons that is the linking up of the local solidarity networks that they have built around access to a resource at extra-local scales of solidarity, up to and including global scales. This translocal structure of social commons is now supported by digital, ecological and democratic vectors (Defalvard, 2020). By virtue of its multi-scale structure, big business, when participating in a social commons, is likely to instigate a movement towards a translocal structure. For us, this is a way of tackling the paradox arising from the conjunction of social commons with big business while considering its capabilities and potential, as we are going to do in this case study of the Carrefour multinational.

## **2. A social commons in the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative in Romania**

Our example transports us to the social context of Romania marked by a renewal of the social economy around social entrepreneurship. This renewal was also reflected in a law on the social economy adopted in July 2015 after much debate (Dragan, 2016). But this regeneration occurs against the backdrop of the rejection of certain forms of the social and solidarity economy and, in particular, of agricultural cooperatives which, today, are still tainted by the memory of the cooperatives imposed by force by the communist regime through the double phenomenon of expropriation and collectivisation. Most of the Romanian agricultural cooperatives did not survive the shock of post-communism in the face of the resentment of farmers who wanted to recover the losses they had suffered during collectivisation. This is why the recent creation of the Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative is an unusual phenomenon for two reasons: firstly, because it brings into the present day a past reality that is still roundly disparaged, and secondly, because it connects small producers from

Vărăști to Carrefour Romania, one of the subsidiaries of the sprawling French multinational. Our objective in this second part is to show how this improbable association caused a social commons around the food resource in the territory of Vărăști to emerge.

We should first indicate that there is keen interest in Romania in the stream of research that is the commons. Ostrom's seminal book (1990) was translated into Romanian in 2007, two years before she received the Nobel Prize. Since then, the commons and Ostrom's ideas on the subject have become areas of interest in various human and social sciences in Romania thanks to the efforts of Professor Dragos Paul Aligica of the University of Bucharest, a former doctoral student of Elinor Ostrom at Bloomington University in Indiana, as well as the work of the Centre for Analysis and Institutional Development in Bucharest, whose Advisory Board counted Elinor Ostrom as a member.

We start by describing the Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative and then proceed to offer an analysis from the perspective of the social commons.

### **2.1. The Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative**

The Carrefour Vărăști cooperative was created in 2017 by an association of five members contributing to its capital, four farmers from the village of Vărăști (6,081 inhabitants according to the 2011 census), located south of Bucharest in the Danube plain, and Carrefour Romania, the Romanian subsidiary of the Carrefour group. It was formed under the Romanian laws on cooperatives, Law 566/2004 on agricultural cooperatives, later supplemented by Law 164/2016. An initial presentation of the interests of its two stakeholders who came together in a David-and-Goliath type association to create this agricultural cooperative is of interest.

For the four small farmer members of Vărăști, there were several reasons for forming the cooperative, as indicated by one of them during interviews conducted at the cooperative. They mention first of all the difficulties encountered by the local producers of Vărăști with their traditional outlets, that is to say the wholesale market and the agricultural markets of Bucharest. For the second of these two, the difficulties come from the low volume of demand and the resulting variations. For the wholesale market, the problems are of a different nature because they call into question the behaviour of the former intermediary between Carrefour and local farmers, mainly concerning delayed payment for vegetables delivered and, sometimes, non-payment. Here, we find one of the three characteristics of cooperatives put forward by Charles Gide which he called economic emancipation, and which involves the elimination of intermediaries. In contrast, the advantage of the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative, at least as it has been designed, is that it gives local producers steady demand and stable income.



For Carrefour Romania, the interest of the Vărăști cooperative, as expressed by senior Carrefour officials on their website, is that it permits "a more equitable approach between these small producers and Carrefour". Here, we find an argument based on corporate social responsibility (CSR) imbued with a fair trade character. The general manager, Jean-Baptiste Derroncourt, also mentioned the good reputation and tradition of the farmers of Vărăști who were already providing a steady supply of vegetables to Carrefour stores in Romania. He also added that this local cooperation supports the supply of local fresh products and avoids the need for imports. Finally, this senior manager of Carrefour in Romania also referred to a suitable model for the development of small agricultural businesses in Romania, based on existing models in France and Spain (S-a lansat cooperativa, 2017).

After presenting the reasons behind its inception, we explain how the cooperative of Vărăști works in practice. Fresh vegetables are brought every day to a warehouse in Vărăști, which is collectively owned by the cooperative, by 80 small farmers from the territory, including the four member owners, before leaving every morning in two or three trucks to be delivered to the Carrefour central warehouse and then to the Carrefour hypermarkets in Bucharest and the rest of the country (Carrefour Romania, 2017). The cooperative operates most of the year except for a scheduled break in February due to the low temperatures that preclude growing in unheated greenhouses. The two winters of 2018 and 2019 were mild enough that this planned closure did not have to take place. Carrefour initially forecast that 5,000 metric tons of fresh vegetables per year would be received and distributed. In the first year, 2017, the cooperative had an activity of 3,300 metric tons with a taxable turnover of 3 million euros<sup>4</sup>. This has doubled for the year 2018, reaching 6.5 million euros according to information given by one of the farmer members interviewed, in excess of initial forecasts<sup>5</sup>.

## **2.2. Emergence of a territorial social commons**

To what extent is the Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative at the heart of a social commons around the food resource?

First, it checks the primary criterion of a commons through the pooled use of the warehouse for the distribution of fresh vegetables within the agricultural cooperative. Upstream of the process, before using this shared resource, as Dorel Buturuga (Gimbășanu, 2017), one of the four member owners, explained in an interview, responsibility for production, financing, land, technology, seeds, equipment, irrigation, labour, etc., falls to the small farmers who are individual owners of their own land. The warehouse is shared through a system of distributed rights which leads us to the second criterion. One point that needs to be highlighted is that the land on which

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<sup>4</sup> Interview by G. Ciascai in 2018 with the farmers of Vărăști and with the administrators of the Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative.

<sup>5</sup> Interview by G. Ciascai in 2019 with the administrators of the cooperative.

the warehouse was built was provided by one of the four member farmers and the investment required to build the 300 m<sup>2</sup> building, which we estimate to have cost 100,000 euros was made by Carrefour.

The Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative is at the centre of a system of distributed rights and duties based on the sharing of the warehouse. The five members have a right of collective ownership, management and transfer of the warehouse, while the four member owners and the 80 small Vărăști farmers who are not members have a right of access to the warehouse to transport and sell their produce. This right of access is recorded in a system of rules and duties that make these small farmers commoners. The latter have the right of access to the Carrefour Vărăști warehouse to allow them to sell their fresh vegetables according to a prior agreement (flexible, non-legal) with the cooperative. This agreement governs the quality of the fresh produce grown using traditional techniques without excessive quantities of chemical fertilisers and with an accepted level of pesticide. It also covers the quantity and type of vegetables to be supplied, which are systematically listed every two months including the following: onions, garlic, salad, courgettes, celery, dill, parsley, lovage, tomatoes, spinach, beans, aubergines, cauliflower, cabbage and radish. Agreement on quality and quantities is reached annually. Finally, under these conditions, farmers are remunerated at a price per quantity which is established weekly.

These first two criteria define a territorial commons made up of two circles, one comprising the five members of the cooperative and one with the 80 producers who grow vegetables on their 60 ha of land, including 15 ha of greenhouses, held as private property (Gimbășanu, 2017). This second circle was subsequently extended to 120 producers with over 100 ha in 2019<sup>6</sup> (Ciascai, 2019).

The third criterion is that of self-governance of the commons in line with Ostrom's thinking, where neither the market nor the state sets the rules. This self-governance is carried out within the cooperative by its five members who have proposed and defined the rules. Quality control and compliance with ecological criteria are ensured by the three directors of the cooperative (two member farmers and a representative from Carrefour).

Even more than a commons in Vărăști, the ecosystem generated by the cooperative makes up a food social commons. With the universal demand for healthy food, the commons is expanding into new territory, that of consumers who shop in the Carrefour stores established in Romania. The point here is to build a territorial food system that promotes the virtues of healthy eating. We are beginning to discover a complex institution in which Carrefour plays a decisive role.

What about its democratic values? We have seen that in the basic structure of a social commons, these are manifested in the fact that it gives a voice to all members.

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<sup>6</sup> Idem.

Initially, this right is reserved for the five members who are the sole decision-makers. This creates a situation of undemocratic self-governance, where the undemocratic character needs to be tempered, on the one hand, because the agreement with the 80 farmers was a subject of discussion and on the other hand, because the nature of the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative shows a will to be open at two levels: to open up the membership to five additional small farmers and to open up to suppliers from other neighbouring villages<sup>7</sup>. (Ciascai, 2018).

### **3. A polycentric and translocal commons via the large Carrefour company**

In this third part, we examine the role of the large Carrefour company in this territorial commons which closely resembles a social common. We do this from two different angles, taking Ostrom's view of the polycentric institution and from the perspective of the translocalism of the commons. We then consider the paradox raised by the position and role of big business in a territorial social commons by addressing the criticisms levelled at it.

#### **3.1. The polycentric institution of the Vărăști commons**

In order to consider the polycentrism in the Romanian subsidiary of Carrefour in the Vărăști commons, it is necessary to introduce a previously overlooked actor, the public authority. In this scenario, this actor takes two forms, the Romanian state and the municipality of Vărăști.

For the Romanian state, the 150/2016 Law on the short-supply chain of local agricultural products played a decisive role in the emergence of the Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative, as the manager of fruit and vegetable procurement for Carrefour Romania, Silviu Diaconu, recognised at the inauguration ("Premieră mondială la Carrefour", 2017). He implicitly acknowledged that the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative enabled Carrefour to be in compliance with this law. The law, it should be noted, was passed in response to a movement of unrest among Romanian agricultural producers whose access to the mass distribution network was restricted. Although the basis of the commons is indeed self-government by a community who establishes its own set of rules, this does not rule out the state having a role as long as it becomes a public partner (Bauwens, 2015). This is an essential issue for the commons given their ambition of offering an alternative way of linking up with institutions and with the State (Rendueles and Subirats, 2019).

In the polycentric Vărăști commons, the position of the Vărăști municipality is different from that of the state. While at the start, it showed a certain reticence, visible

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<sup>7</sup> Interview by G. Ciascai in 2018 of Vărăști farmers and with administrators of the Carrefour Vărăști agricultural cooperative.

in delays in providing the necessary authorisations for the establishment of the Carrefour warehouse in the town, it quickly became an active participant, convinced of the merits of the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative. The mayor of the town gave at least two reasons for this conversion during an interview. The first reason is an economic one linked to the added value brought to the territory by the increased and secure gains made by the Vărăști producers. It is important to underline that, according to him, tax revenues of the municipality have increased not only because the tax base is larger but also because the local producers exhibit more civic behaviour towards taxes<sup>8</sup>. The second reason is linked to an effect on territorial well-being, largely due to the intervention of Carrefour Romania in the region. As we have already mentioned, Carrefour's involvement in the agricultural cooperative of Vărăști is linked to its commitment to the well-being of the local community, driven in part by its CSR policy. This involvement has had an economic benefit by providing farmers with small equipment, but it also gave them the expertise to meet the requirements of the fresh produce supply chain in terms of both delivery times and the environment. There is a high level of satisfaction with the cooperative among the small producers, as twelve of them told us in an anonymous questionnaire. The second reason concerns Carrefour's social involvement in the well-being of the locality, in particular, through a philanthropic health initiative which enabled a few hundred women to benefit from a preventive breast cancer check-up conducted by a mobile medical practice funded by Carrefour (CSRMedia, 2017). The mayor of Vărăști also mentioned that another favourable development is the fact that farmers have seen an increase in their free time, allowing them to spend more time with their children.

### **3.2. Translocalism in the commons through big business**

However, this polycentric institution in which Carrefour plays a role not only has summits that link Carrefour to the public actors, it also occurs within Carrefour's CSR space of Carrefour which is, first of all, a media space at the national level in Romania but, also and above all, at the global level of the multinational group. Symbolically, the Carrefour group's 2018 372-page annual report opens with a photo of two farmers from Vărăști surrounded by beautiful vegetables. The communication and marketing activities of Carrefour Romania were very intense for the first two years, due in large part to the former director of communication and marketing, Andreea Mihai, who was very involved in the promotion of the cooperative and in CSR activities. After his departure, Carrefour launched, in the second part of 2018, a program called "Act for food –actiuni concrete pentru ca tu sa mananci mai bine / concrete actions to eat better", in which the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative was actively involved (Puiu, 2018).

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<sup>8</sup> Interview by G. Ciascai in 2018 with the mayor of Vărăști.

This is a translocalism of the commons where the local commons is linked to extra-local levels via the media space in which the CSR of a large multinational group operates. It is here that we find the paradox of the involvement of big business in a local social commons. Does this represent for Carrefour, via the ecological vector, a way of making a transition in our mode of economic development by participating in a new economic model based on the commons? Or is it simply a matter of capturing the value of the commons for the sole benefit of its shareholders and senior management in an adaptation particular to capitalism (Tsing, 2017).

Finally, we add that this translocalism of the commons via big business is not limited to the area of media communication, but also depends on the development of new relationships between economic actors by contagion (links with other companies) and by spin-off (from within the same company). Concerning the contagion effect, Carrefour may not be the starting point and it is worth mentioning the partnership of the German supermarket company Kaufland with the Cooperative Tara Mea / Mon pays, of the department of Vaslui for the supply of meat, vegetables, eggs and dairy products (Rotaru, 2018). This same type of agreement is found between the large distributor, Mega Image, a member of the Belgian group Delhaize, and the agricultural cooperative Legume de Vidra near Bucharest (Institutului de Economie Socială, 2015).

### **3.3. The role of Carrefour in the Vărăști commons: criticisms**

The role of Carrefour in the social and translocal Vărăști commons has been a source of scepticism and criticism expressed during the various conferences held to present our work. It seemed to us that these doubts and critical observations were preconceived ideas that did not take into account local realities. In our opinion, questioning of the role of big business must always remain grounded in factual analysis. At this level, the main question that these facts raise concerns the logic of the value that governs this system of complex polycentric and translocal relations: Does it follow an extractive logic, meaning that value is captured for the benefit of only a few of these members, or, on the contrary, does it adhere to a generative logic of value which seeks to maintain a sustainable living environment for all its inhabitants, both human and non-human? The fact is that at the top ranks of the Carrefour group, the general meeting of June 2018 validated a proposal by the board of directors to award a remuneration package of 7.3 million euros to its CEO, Alexandre Bompard, in addition to an allocation plan of free shares worth 3,596,428 euros (redeemable in 2022 subject to performance conditions). Given its presence in the CAC 40, there is no doubt that the Carrefour group applies an extractive logic of value. Nevertheless, this logic does not negate a generative logic of the value that the creation of the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative helps to produce in its territory by improving the living environment. Only a more in-depth study can answer the question of whether the generative logic of value triggered by the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative also nourishes the extractive logic of the multinational Carrefour and, above all, only

the future of the story will tell us if Carrefour's first steps towards a generative logic of value, constrained by Romanian law, it should be noted, are followed by other initiatives likely to effect a change in the paradigm of value.

## **Conclusion**

In our examination of the remarkable project of the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative, which reinvigorates the image of the agricultural cooperative in Romania by associating small farmers in this territory with the Carrefour multinational, we discovered the emergence of a social commons in which big business plays a preponderant role.

First of all, the Carrefour company in Romania is a member of the Carrefour Vărăști cooperative in which it is associated with four small local farmers who are also members of the cooperative. As a contributor to the joint capital of the cooperative and a co-owner of its premises, it is a stakeholder in the first circle around the shared cooperative warehouse that distributes fresh vegetables to Carrefour stores in Romania. It also participates in the second circle of this social commons, which is extended to include 120 small producers who supply the cooperative and who have a right of access to the warehouse according to an agreement which makes them commoners and, even more, includes the local community. Through its cooperation with small local producers but also through its involvement in the well-being of the local community, Carrefour is a central player in this social commons of Vărăști. Finally, through its large-scale distribution network throughout Romania and its CSR strategy, Carrefour operates a translocalism of this commons by linking it to extra-local, national and global scales. Ultimately, Carrefour, along with the other members of the Vărăști cooperative, is at the centre of a complex and polycentric institution in which the public authorities, both the Romanian state and the municipality of Vărăști, are also stakeholders.

For our part, the translocalism of the commons is the characteristic which gives the social commons the possibility of becoming the new dominant mode of development whose basic unit is the local territory as the factory was previously for communism. With this, it is no longer a question of the internationalism of the working class, but of the globalisation of the territories where working the land and global expansion are no longer mutually exclusive. Whether big business is an ally or an obstacle in this ecological, civic and democratic transition around the new paradigm of generative value, only the future will tell.

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