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# **Cultural Knowledge and Circular Intellectual Capital: Extending Knowledge-Based Theory for a Sustainable Economy**

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## **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

# Cultural Knowledge and Circular Intellectual Capital: Extending Knowledge-Based Theory for a Sustainable Economy

## Structured Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper advances Knowledge-Based Theory by relocating the locus of knowledge from the firm to the territorial ecosystem. It conceptualises cultural values as ecosystem-level knowledge assets and theorises how the Slow Food Movement codifies and circulates culturally embedded knowledge. The study integrates Knowledge-Based Theory, stakeholder theory, and circular intellectual capital to develop a conceptual framework explaining regenerative ecosystem dynamics.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study adopts a theory-building qualitative design based on an analytically informed case. It draws on interpretive synthesis of prior empirical studies, secondary material, and illustrative evidence from the Piedmont-Slow Food ecosystem, including Kauss brewery. The approach combines theoretical integration with contextualised analysis to generate conceptually grounded propositions rather than statistical generalisation.

**Findings:** The findings show that cultural values such as craftsmanship, reciprocity, territorial embeddedness, and conviviality function as ecosystem-level epistemic infrastructures. Slow Food operates as a knowledge codification and translation mechanism. Knowledge is reproduced through practices such as intergenerational transmission, community governance, and open knowledge sharing, generating circular intellectual capital. Ecosystems characterised by these dynamics exhibit regenerative capacity and long-term innovation potential grounded in shared meaning systems.

**Originality:** The paper offers three original contributions. It extends Knowledge-Based Theory by theorising ecosystems as loci of knowledge assets, advances stakeholder theory by conceptualising epistemic alignment as a mechanism of durable engagement and reconceptualises circular intellectual capital as a culturally embedded regenerative system. It also introduces a novel conceptualisation of Slow Food as an infrastructure for knowledge governance, opening new directions for research on culturally grounded innovation ecosystems.

Keywords: knowledge-based theory, intellectual capital, collective knowledge, Slow Food, stakeholder engagement, circular economy

## 1 Introduction

The Slow Food Movement has evolved from a locally rooted initiative in Piedmont into a globally influential platform shaping alternative food networks, sustainability discourse, and agri-food entrepreneurship. Existing scholarship has extensively examined Slow Food as a social movement, a form of alternative governance, and a catalyst for sustainable food practices. However, a crucial dimension remains neglected: the epistemic and knowledge-based foundations that enabled a territorially embedded set of cultural values to become institutionalised and globally scalable.

Our conceptual paper advances the argument that the emergence of Slow Food can be understood as the transformation of territorial cultural knowledge into circular intellectual capital, and that this transformation offers a novel extension of Knowledge-Based Theory (KBT). In specific, we contend that culturally embedded values in Piedmont functioned as a pre-organisational knowledge infrastructure that preceded firms and formal institutions (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2022), and that the Slow Food Movement (SFM) subsequently acted as a mechanism for codifying, stabilising, and diffusing this knowledge globally. As pointed out by Cacciolatti & Lee, 2025 ‘The Piedmontese traditional values and principles... have been popularised around the world by the SFM. The SFM managed to reinterpret and utilise Piedmontese local knowledge and values as a form of high-impact social innovation’ (p. 303). Despite the importance of these dynamics, the literature has not yet addressed a fundamental question: how do territorially embedded cultural values become the epistemic foundation of ecosystem-level intellectual capital, and through what mechanisms does this transformation generate regenerative rather than depletive knowledge dynamics? KBT offers no answer because it locates knowledge within the firm. Stakeholder theory offers no answer because it locates engagement in interests and governance rather than in shared epistemic frameworks. Circular intellectual capital theory offers no answer because it remains anchored in organisational rather than ecosystem-level processes. In this paper we address all three blind spots simultaneously.

Notwithstanding the importance of the SFM values, their implications for knowledge theory, intellectual capital, and ecosystem research have not yet been systematically developed. KBT, as conventionally applied, cannot account for the sustainability dynamics of territorial ecosystems because it treats knowledge as a proprietary asset accumulated within organisational boundaries, rendering the pre-organisational cultural foundations of coordination and the regenerative dynamics of knowledge circulation analytically invisible.

Second, we make a contribution to Stakeholder theory by theorising stakeholder engagement not only as an interest-alignment process, as commonly conceptualised in the literature, but rather as an epistemic process grounded in shared knowledge frames, values, and evaluative criteria.

Lastly, we contribute to emerging debates on circular intellectual capital and regenerative ecosystems by demonstrating how knowledge can accumulate through use, sharing, and reinvestment, rather than through extraction and appropriation.

This paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we present the theoretical foundations, integrating KBT, Stakeholder theory, and circular intellectual capital. In Section

3, we develop a conceptual framework that reconceptualises cultural values as ecosystem-level knowledge assets and positions Slow Food as a knowledge codification mechanism, presenting some propositions. In Section 4, we outline the methodological approach and present a case analysis drawing on Piedmontese cultural values, Slow Food principles, ecosystem actors, e.g. Kauss brewery. In Section 6, we discuss the analysis and the relevance of the propositions for KBT extension. In Section 7, we present the practical implications, followed by the conclusions in Section 8.

It should be noted that this paper is a conceptual theory-building contribution in the tradition of analytically informed case research (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). It does not present primary data collection or test hypotheses statistically. It uses secondary qualitative material and an illustrative case to elaborate a theoretical framework and derive propositions amenable to future empirical testing. Readers should therefore interpret the propositions as conceptually grounded claims rather than empirically validated findings.

## **2 Theoretical Foundations**

In this section, we develop an integrated theoretical foundation for the study. We begin by revisiting KBT to identify its strengths and conceptual blind spots. We then mobilise Stakeholder theory as a complementary lens to explain how shared knowledge frameworks enable durable engagement among heterogeneous actors. Then, we connect both perspectives to emerging debates on circular intellectual capital, which provide the conceptual bridge towards understanding how culturally embedded knowledge can become regenerative ecosystem infrastructure.

### ***2.1 Knowledge-Based Theory: Strengths and Limitations***

KBT has long positioned knowledge as the most strategically significant resource of organisations and economies. Within this tradition, firms are understood as social communities specialised in the integration and coordination of dispersed knowledge (Lundvall et al., 2002; Freeman, 1991). Knowledge heterogeneity, tacitness, and embeddedness are widely recognised as sources of competitive advantage, and innovation systems are seen as emergent from networks of interacting actors (Edquist, 2013; Freeman, 1991).

While KBT has developed sophisticated explanations of how organisations exploit and recombine knowledge, it remains structurally firm-centric. Even systemic approaches, such as national or regional systems of innovation, tend to conceptualise knowledge as circulating primarily within and amongst organisations rather than as embedded within cultural and territorial substrates (Edquist, 2011; Lundvall et al., 2002). This assumption produces three theoretical blind spots. We observe that (i) KBT struggles to explain where shared epistemic structures originate before firms and formal organisations exist. Then, (ii) KBT under-theorises cultural values as a form of knowledge, treating norms and identities as background context rather than epistemic infrastructure. Finally, (iii) KBT pays limited attention to the regenerative dynamics of knowledge, that is, how knowledge stocks can increase through circulation, reciprocity, and intergenerational transmission rather than through proprietary accumulation. The emerging ecosystem literature similarly highlights the limitations of firm-centric analysis, showing that value creation in complex interdependent settings emerges from non-generic complementarities among multiple actors operating under shared rules rather than from the strategies of any single organisation (Jacobides et al., 2018); yet this literature, too, has focused primarily on governance architecture and modularity rather than on the cultural and epistemic substrates that make ecosystem-level coordination possible in the first place.

Furthermore, the RIS (Regional Innovation Systems) literature offers a partial corrective to these blind spots. Asheim and Gertler (2005) distinguish between analytical, synthetic, and symbolic knowledge bases, noting that symbolic knowledge, which is grounded in cultural meaning, narrative, and aesthetic values, is most strongly embedded in territorial and institutional contexts. Asheim and Coenen (2006) further argue that the national and regional institutional framework shapes the character of innovation processes, with cultural factors operating as active structuring mechanisms rather than background conditions. These insights are consistent with our argument, yet the RIS literature remains anchored in innovation performance and firm-level knowledge utilisation rather than theorising cultural values as a form of intellectual capital in their own right or examining how social movements can act as knowledge governance mechanisms.

Our framework, *de facto*, builds on and extends this tradition and the Piedmontese agri-food ecosystem inherently challenges these assumptions. Empirical studies of alternative food networks demonstrate that coordination frequently relies on shared understandings of quality, trust, territorial responsibility and moral commitment rather than on formal contractual arrangements (Fonte, 2008; Goodman et al., 2012; Renting et al., 2003). This

suggests the presence of a shared evaluative knowledge system that precedes organisational structures and actively shapes ecosystem behaviour. Thus, we aim to extend KBT, and to do so, we conceptualise territorial cultural knowledge as pre-organisational intellectual capital on which organisations feed (from an epistemic point of view), rather than as contextual noise around firm-level knowledge processes.

This limitation of KBT also raises a further question: how do such shared epistemic foundations enable sustained collaboration among multiple actors? Addressing this question requires complementing KBT with a relational perspective, which we develop in the next section through Stakeholder theory.

## **2.2 *Stakeholder Theory As an Epistemic Complement***

KBT alone cannot completely explain the adoption of shared evaluative knowledge that precedes organisational structures in an ecosystem. However, stakeholder theory has made substantial contributions to understanding how organisations engage with multiple actors, negotiate legitimacy, and co-create value across complex environments (Greenwood, 2007; Dentoni et al., 2016). In food systems research, stakeholder engagement is often linked to democratic governance, food sovereignty, and sustainable outcomes (Godek, 2021; Jarosz, 2014).

Stakeholder theory typically explains engagement through interests, power, legitimacy, and governance structures (Mitchell et al., 1997), while paying less attention to the epistemic foundations that make engagement meaningful and durable. Why do some ecosystems sustain long-term collaboration despite market pressures, while others fragment into opportunistic behaviour? Why do some stakeholder networks generate trust, reciprocity, and co-creation, while others collapse into transactional relationships?

Research on alternative food networks suggests that engagement is frequently sustained through shared cultural frames, moral commitments, and collectively recognised notions of quality and responsibility (Fonte, 2008; Grasseni, 2013). These shared meanings operate as cognitive and normative infrastructures that stabilise expectations and enable cooperation.

We therefore complement KBT with Stakeholder theory and extend our understanding of stakeholder engagement by considering it effective when it is grounded in shared epistemic frameworks, rather than only in aligned interests or formal governance arrangements. However, explaining engagement through shared knowledge alone remains

insufficient if we do not also account for how such knowledge systems are reproduced and strengthened over time. This leads to the need for a further conceptual layer, developed through circular intellectual capital.

### **2.3 *Circular Intellectual Capital and Regenerative Knowledge Ecosystems***

Recent debates in intellectual capital research increasingly emphasise that knowledge should not be conceptualised solely as a static stock, but as a dynamic, relational, and systemic resource (Rosli & Cacciolatti, 2022). This shift is reflected in growing work linking intellectual capital to sustainability transitions and circular economy dynamics, where knowledge resources are understood as enabling systemic change rather than firm-level accumulation (Farrukh et al., 2023; Minoja & Romano, 2021; Zheng et al., 2024).

Recent conceptual developments further formalise this direction through the emerging notion of circular intellectual capital, which explicitly integrates circular economy principles into intellectual capital frameworks (Raimo et al., 2025).

Circular intellectual capital can be defined as a configuration of knowledge resources, capabilities, and relationships that enables value creation through circular economy principles, particularly regeneration, recirculation, recombination, and systemic renewal rather than linear extraction and depletion (Raimo et al., 2025). This definition is conceptually bounded in three important ways.

First, it departs from the seminal understanding of intellectual capital as a firm-level stock of human, structural, and relational assets managed for competitive advantage (Edvinsson and Malone, 1997; Bontis, 1998; Petty and Guthrie, 2000; Matos et al., 2025). Circular intellectual capital shifts attention from asset ownership towards the dynamic reproduction of knowledge through circulation and use. Instead, circular intellectual capital highlights the dynamic reproduction of knowledge through circulation and use, not its ownership or enclosure. Second, circular intellectual capital is analytically distinct from green intellectual capital. On the one hand, the green intellectual capital literature focuses on environmentally oriented human, organisational, and relational resources that enhance environmental performance and green innovation within firms (Chen, 2008; Jirakraisiri et al., 2021; Asiaei et al., 2023). On the other hand, circular intellectual capital is not defined by environmental orientation alone but by the circular logic governing how knowledge resources evolve, emphasising regeneration, mutual reinforcement, and system-level learning across actors. The following Table juxtaposes green versus circular intellectual capital.

Table 1: Conceptual distinction between Green Intellectual Capital and Circular Intellectual Capital.

| Dimension                 | Green Intellectual Capital                                     | Circular Intellectual Capital                                             |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unit of analysis          | Firm                                                           | Ecosystem / socio-economic system                                         |
| Primary orientation       | Environmental performance and green innovation                 | Regenerative knowledge dynamics and systemic renewal                      |
| Knowledge dynamic         | Accumulation and management of environmentally oriented assets | Circulation, reciprocal reinforcement, and intergenerational reproduction |
| Governance logic          | Proprietary: managed within organisational boundaries          | Relational: distributed across actors and territories                     |
| Outcome focus             | Reduced environmental impact and green competitive advantage   | Collective resilience and long-term adaptive and innovative capacity      |
| Representative references | Chen (2008); Jirakraisiri et al. (2021); Asiaei et al. (2023)  | Raimo et al. (2025); Martínez-Falcó et al. (2025); Matos et al. (2025)    |

Finally, circular intellectual capital is inherently systemic in orientation. It becomes analytically meaningful where knowledge circulates across organisational and territorial boundaries, enabling collective learning and long-term adaptive capacity rather than firm-level optimisation. Recent work, therefore, interprets circular intellectual capital as an extension of intellectual capital theory that shifts the unit of analysis from asset stocks to regenerative knowledge dynamics operating across ecosystems and socio-economic systems (Raimo et al., 2025; Matos et al., 2025).

Related work on circular intellectual capital also demonstrates that intellectual capital configurations shape organisational and system-level capabilities for circular economy implementation (Martínez-Falcó et al., 2025). This suggests that the extant literature supports a reconceptualisation of intellectual capital as regenerative, relational, and embedded within socio-ecological systems rather than as a proprietary stock of intangible assets.

This view is consistent with critical and systemic perspectives in intellectual capital research that call for moving beyond linear accumulation models towards relational, processual, and ecosystem-oriented understandings of value creation (Dumay, 2016; Guthrie et al., 2012). These perspectives emphasise that intellectual capital evolves through interaction, learning, and social embedding rather than through extraction and proprietary control, which aligns closely with the regenerative dynamics observed in the Piedmont-Slow Food ecosystem.

The Piedmont-Slow Food context provides a rare and unique empirical instance where such regenerative dynamics are observable. Local actors actively invest in preserving knowledge across generations, strengthening community capabilities, and reinvesting skills

into the ecosystem. Alternative food networks prioritise local skills development and intergenerational transmission because ‘this not only strengthens the local economy but also reinforces the cultural fabric of the community’ (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2025, p. 315).

Also, knowledge sharing is not treated as a loss of competitive advantage, but as an investment in collective resilience. The example of Kauss Brewery making its malt production know-how available to other local breweries illustrates how ecosystem-level intellectual capital can grow through circulation rather than appropriation (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2025, pp. 319-320). These dynamics support a reconceptualisation of intellectual capital as circular and regenerative, grounded in cultural practices of reciprocity, community responsibility, and long-term stewardship of knowledge resources. In the next section, we use these integrated theoretical foundations to build our conceptual framework and derive some propositions.

### **3 Cultural Knowledge and Circular Intellectual Capital: Conceptual Framework and Propositions Development**

We build on the integrated theoretical foundations developed in the previous section to develop a conceptual framework that reconceptualises cultural values as ecosystem-level knowledge assets and positions the Slow Food Movement model as a prototypical mechanism for knowledge codification and circulation. Prior research has documented how the Slow Food Movement institutionalises values, narratives, and practices into durable knowledge infrastructures that enable diffusion and learning across geographically dispersed communities (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2022; Goodman et al., 2012; Marsden, 2013). Our framework for cultural knowledge and circular intellectual capital extends KBT beyond its traditional firm-centric boundaries and proposes a model of circular intellectual capital grounded in culturally embedded knowledge systems. In this section, we also derive a set of propositions.

#### **3.1 Cultural Values as Ecosystem-Level Knowledge Assets**

KBT has long recognised that knowledge is embedded in routines, practices, and shared understandings rather than residing exclusively in individuals (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996). However, these insights have rarely been extended beyond the organisational level. With this framework, cultural values constitute a distinct form of collective knowledge operating at the ecosystem level.

Cultural values do not only function as normative orientations but also as epistemic infrastructures. This means that they shape how actors interpret quality, evaluate legitimacy, establish trust, and coordinate behaviour under conditions of uncertainty. In this sense, values operate as shared evaluative knowledge that structures expectations and enables coordination in the absence of formal hierarchy. Research on alternative food networks demonstrates that shared cultural meanings around authenticity, quality, territorial responsibility, and care for producers and environments are central to how actors organise production and exchange (Fonte, 2008; Grasseni, 2013; Goodman et al., 2012). These shared meanings are not peripheral social features but central knowledge resources that enable collective action and they are coherent with work in stakeholder theory that recognises engagement as grounded in legitimacy, shared frames, and moral evaluation (Greenwood, 2007; Harrison et al., 2010) and not only in power and interests. This reinforces the argument that epistemic alignment is a critical precondition for durable cooperation. For the purposes of this framework, *epistemic alignment* is defined as the degree to which actors in an ecosystem share evaluative frameworks, including norms of quality, legitimacy, and responsibility, such that coordinated action becomes possible without recourse to formal hierarchical governance.

Our novel perspective on territorial cultural values extends KBT by conceptualising cultural values as a form of pre-organisational intellectual capital. Rather than emerging from firms, such knowledge often precedes organisational formation and shapes which organisational forms are seen as legitimate or desirable within a territory. This insight is consistent with broader institutional scholarship that recognises that shared cognitive frames and cultural logics structure economic action (Thornton et al., 2012), but it has not yet been fully incorporated into KBT.

It should be noted, however, that institutional logics are not necessarily aligned across all actors in a territorial ecosystem (Thornton et al., 2012). Market logics, community logics, and civic logics may coexist in tension, and actors carrying different logics will interpret quality, legitimacy, and responsibility through incommensurable evaluative frameworks (Besharov and Smith, 2014). The process of epistemic alignment that we theorise is therefore not automatic or frictionless. Rather, it is a historically achieved and ongoing accomplishment, sustained precisely by the cultural practices, governance mechanisms, and collective infrastructures that the Slow Food Movement provides. The Piedmontese agri-food ecosystem is characterised by relatively strong cultural cohesion and a dense civil society infrastructure, conditions that we explicitly recognise as boundary conditions of the model. Where such cohesion is weak or where competing logics predominate, the translation of

cultural values into circular intellectual capital may be contested, partial, or delayed. We therefore propose that

**Proposition 1:** Territorial cultural values constitute ecosystem-level knowledge assets that function as foundational intellectual capital, enabling coordination among actors before the establishment of formal organisational structures.

### ***3.2 Slow Food as a Knowledge Codification and Translation Mechanism***

Cultural values reside in the territory through shared knowledge. Cultural values represent latent knowledge resources, so a question arises as to how such knowledge becomes stabilised, formalised, and transferable across contexts. Our framework proposes that organisations such as the Slow Food Movement can be conceptualised as a knowledge codification and translation mechanism.

Social movements are increasingly understood beyond their political or cultural phenomena nature, extending into carriers and producers of knowledge (Della Porta & Pavan, 2017). Movements can stabilise meanings and diffuse them across geographically dispersed networks through narratives, principles, practices, and organisational devices. The SFM, in specific, performs precisely this function. Its principles of 'good, clean, and fair', its institutional devices such as Presidia, Terra Madre networks, and taste education initiatives, and its emphasis on conviviality and biodiversity function as mechanisms through which tacit, territorially embedded knowledge becomes articulated, standardised, and transferable.

From a KBT perspective, this implies that knowledge integration and coordination are not achieved only within firms, but also through movement-based institutional architectures that operate across organisational and territorial boundaries. This observation challenges the current theoretical assumption that firms are the main knowledge integrators and suggests instead that knowledge governance can occur through hybrid organisational forms embedded in civil society.

Empirical studies of food movements show that such codification processes enable local practices to become globally legible without erasing their contextual specificity (Goodman et al., 2012; Marsden, 2013). This capacity to translate local cultural knowledge into portable frameworks is central to understanding the scalability and durability of the Slow Food as a global phenomenon. Thus,

**Proposition 2:** Social movements such as the Slow Food function as knowledge codification mechanisms that transform territorially embedded cultural knowledge into transferable ecosystem-level intellectual capital.

### 3.3 *Circular Regeneration of Knowledge Through Ecosystem Practices*

In our framework, we further propose that once cultural knowledge is codified and institutionalised, it can circulate through ecosystem practices in ways that generate circular intellectual capital (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2022). *Ecosystem-level intellectual capital*, as used here, refers to the aggregate of human, structural, and relational knowledge assets embedded in a territorial ecosystem rather than in any single firm, enabling collective learning, coordination, and adaptive capacity across the ecosystem as a whole.

Circularity here does not simply imply repetition, but refers to the capacity of knowledge resources to grow through use, sharing, and reinvestment. This process is what we term *circular knowledge regeneration*: knowledge resources grow rather than deplete through use, sharing, reciprocal exchange, and intergenerational transmission, generating increasing rather than diminishing returns at the ecosystem level.

Previous research on commons governance and community-based systems demonstrates that collective resources can be sustained and even strengthened through practices of reciprocity, stewardship, and shared responsibility (Ostrom, 1990). Similar dynamics have been documented in alternative food systems, where knowledge transmission across generations, collaborative experimentation, and mutual learning are central to system resilience (Marsden, 2013; Renting et al., 2003).

These processes challenge the assumption that knowledge must be protected through exclusion to retain value. Evidence from wider agri-food system research suggests that knowledge resources embedded in networks generate greater long-term value when sustained through embeddedness, trust, and social capital rather than competitive isolation. Research on knowledge management in global food systems demonstrates that network embeddedness and relational capital function as critical infrastructures enabling coordination, learning, and resilience across complex actor constellations (Sporleder & Moss, 2002). This supports the interpretation of knowledge in the Piedmont-Slow Food ecosystem as a collective resource that is reproduced through stewardship, reciprocity, and ongoing social interaction rather than depleted through use. This is coherent with established scholarship on collective resource governance, which shows that shared resources can remain robust when supported by culturally embedded norms, trust, and community enforcement mechanisms (Ostrom, 1990).

Within the proposed framework, circular intellectual capital emerges when ecosystem actors engage in practices that reinforce, rather than deplete, shared knowledge resources. Conviviality, storytelling, apprenticeship, and community engagement (which are also all Slow Food characteristics) become not only cultural practices but mechanisms for the reproduction of intellectual capital. Such practices also strengthen stakeholder relationships, reinforcing the epistemic foundations of collaboration discussed in Section 2. Thus, we propose that

**Proposition 3:** Circular intellectual capital emerges in ecosystems when knowledge is reproduced through practices of sharing, reciprocity, intergenerational transmission, and collective stewardship.

### ***3.4 Integrative Framework and Implications for Theory Development***

Taken together, the three components of the framework articulate a dynamic process. Cultural values operate as foundational ecosystem-level knowledge assets. Social movements such as the Slow Food codify and translate these assets into institutionalised principles and practices. These practices then enable the circular regeneration of intellectual capital through ongoing interaction among ecosystem actors.

The process model that we developed, relocates the locus of knowledge from the firm to the ecosystem, expands the definition of knowledge to include culturally embedded evaluative frameworks, and introduces regeneration rather than appropriation as a central dynamic of knowledge-based value creation. Our framework also suggests that durable engagement is grounded in shared epistemic foundations that are reproduced through everyday practice rather than only in governance mechanisms. Thus, our final propositions are

**Proposition 4:** Ecosystems characterised by strong culturally embedded knowledge assets and codification mechanisms exhibit greater regenerative capacity and long-term innovative potential than ecosystems where knowledge remains primarily firm-bound.

**Proposition 5:** Stakeholder engagement is more likely to be sustained and generative when actors share culturally embedded epistemic frameworks that are reinforced through circular knowledge practices.

In Appendix 1, we summarise the main studies underpinning the conceptual model, while Figure 1, which follows, illustrates our conceptual model.

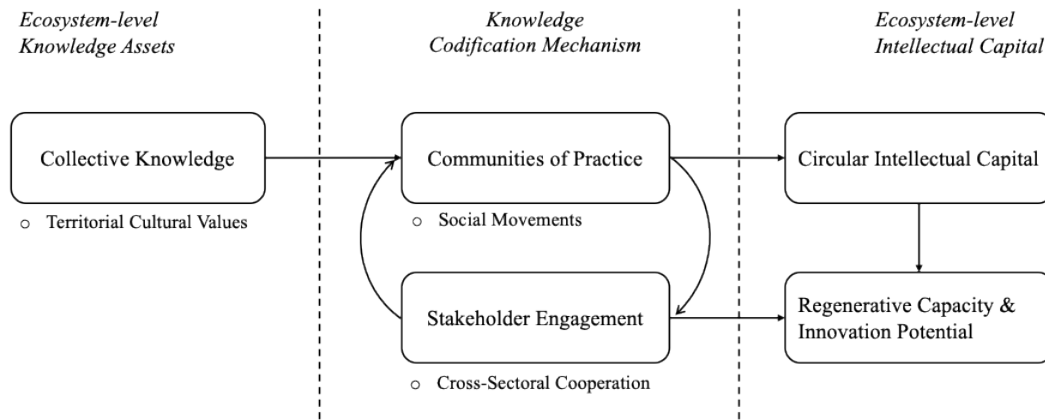


Figure 1: Conceptual model showing how ecosystem-level knowledge assets are utilised to generate ecosystem-level circular intellectual capital through a knowledge codification mechanism rooted in social movements and communities of practice, and cooperation by means of stakeholder engagement.

#### 4 Methodological Approach and Case Analysis

In this study, we adopt a qualitative, theory-building design that combines conceptual development with analytically informed case material. The purpose is not to test hypotheses, but to elaborate a theory through a revelatory empirical context. This approach is consistent with established traditions of inductive and abductive theory development in organisation and innovation research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia et al., 2013). The Piedmontese agri-food ecosystem and the emergence of the Slow Food Movement constitute a rich setting for this purpose, because they allow close observation of how culturally embedded knowledge becomes institutionalised and circulates across actors over time.

##### 4.1 Methodological Rationale and Source Selection

Our study adopts a qualitative, theory-building design grounded in an analytically informed case (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). This approach is appropriate when the objective is to elaborate and extend theoretical frameworks rather than to test hypotheses or produce statistical generalisations (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gioia et al., 2013). The purpose of the empirical material presented in this section is to refine the conceptual framework (rather than validating the propositions inductively), through close engagement with a theoretically revelatory

context, following what Dubois and Gadde (2002) term systematic combining: an iterative, abductive movement between theoretical constructs and empirical observations that progressively tightens the fit between framework and evidence.

**Source selection.** Documentary and secondary sources were selected through a purposive, theory-driven process. Inclusion criteria required peer-reviewed studies published in SSCI-listed journals, with the exception of foundational theoretical texts and edited volumes of established scholarly standing. Sources were identified across three complementary bodies of literature: empirical studies of Piedmontese food cultures, regional identity, and knowledge transmission; scholarship on the Slow Food Movement, alternative food networks, and agri-food governance; and sociolinguistic and ethnobiological research documenting the cultural plurality of the Piedmont region. The Kauss Brewery case is drawn from Cacciolatti and Lee (2025), a peer-reviewed, empirically grounded account, supplemented by publicly available organisational documentation cited solely for factual confirmation of specific practices. Sources were excluded where they lacked academic provenance, relied on journalistic or consultancy evidence, or addressed the Piedmont context only tangentially without substantive empirical depth. The resulting corpus was treated as a structured body of evidence rather than an exhaustive literature review, consistent with the analytical purpose of theory elaboration.

**Interpretive synthesis procedure.** The synthesis followed an abductive logic (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), moving iteratively between the three theoretical frameworks, namely Knowledge-Based Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Circular Intellectual Capital, and the assembled empirical material. In practice, this involved three analytical phases. In the first phase, the empirical sources were read against the three blind spots of KBT identified in Section 2.1, examining whether and how the documented practices in Piedmont exceeded or challenged the explanatory boundaries of the firm-centric model. In the second phase, the sources were read with attention to the mechanisms through which stakeholder engagement was sustained, specifically whether coordination was achieved through shared epistemic frameworks rather than through formal governance arrangements alone. In the third phase, the sources were examined for evidence of circular dynamics, that is, instances in which knowledge resources were reproduced, strengthened, or redistributed through use and sharing rather than depleted through appropriation. Each phase was conducted independently before the findings across passes were integrated into the unified conceptual framework presented in Section 3. Discrepancies between the theoretical expectations and the empirical material were

treated as analytical opportunities, prompting refinement of the constructs rather than resolution by exclusion.

***Linking empirical material to propositions.*** Each proposition is grounded in convergent evidence from at least two independent empirical sources, as summarised in Table 3 and Appendix 1. Convergence was assessed across three distinct layers of evidence: the Kauss Brewery practices documented in Cacciolatti and Lee (2025); the Slow Food institutional architecture, including Presidia, Terra Madre networks, and convivia, as documented in the alternative food network literature; and the independent ethnobiological and sociolinguistic scholarship on Piedmont, which was produced entirely outside the Slow Food and agri-food governance literature and therefore constitutes an epistemically distinct source of corroborating evidence. Where only one source supported a conceptual claim, the claim was either reformulated at a more modest level of abstraction or moved to the discussion as a direction for future research rather than retained as a formal proposition. This triangulation across sources provided the basis for the analytical generalisation that the study claims (Yin, 2018), and the mechanisms theorised are proposed as transferable conceptual tools, not as empirical regularities derived from a sample.

#### ***4.2 Research Design and Case Selection***

Our chosen case is selected following a logic of theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Piedmont represents a rich and revelatory case because it is both the territorial origin of the Slow Food Movement and a region characterised by deeply embedded cultural traditions around food, production, community, and place. These traditions are well documented in the literature on food heritage, ethnobiology, and cultural geography.

The selection of Piedmont as the empirical context is justified by its theoretical revelatory character (Yin, 2018), not by claims of typicality or universality. We are explicitly aware of the risk of geographic exceptionalism, that is, the risk of mistaking contextually specific conditions for general mechanisms. To guard against this, we distinguish clearly between the specific cultural substrate of Piedmont, which is historically constituted and not straightforwardly replicable, and the theoretical mechanisms that operate within it, namely epistemic alignment, knowledge codification, and circular regeneration, which are proposed as transferable analytical constructs. The framework's generalisability is analytical rather than statistical: the mechanisms we theorise may manifest in different forms depending on a given territory's degree of cultural cohesion, civic density, and institutional infrastructure. We do

not claim that every agri-food region can or should replicate the Slow Food model but rather, we claim that the mechanisms observable in Piedmont offer conceptual tools for understanding analogous dynamics elsewhere.

Empirical research shows that food-related practices in Piedmont are strongly associated with identity, memory, and social organisation. For example, Delpero and Volpato (2022) demonstrate how traditional aquaculture practices in the Poirino highlands are deeply embedded in local identity and knowledge transmission across generations. Similarly, Fontefrancesco and Volpato (2022) document how the revival of community ovens in the Western Alps of Piedmont constitutes a process of collective cultural reproduction, where food practices act as mechanisms for rebuilding social ties and shared meaning. These studies support the view that Piedmontese food cultures are not just symbolic, but constitute active infrastructures of collective knowledge.

Our analysis draws on three complementary forms of empirical material. First, we use secondary qualitative evidence from peer-reviewed studies documenting practices within Piedmontese food communities and alternative food networks. Second, we incorporate the illustrative case of Kauss Brewery as an organisational manifestation of ecosystem-level practices. This case is particularly important because Kauss Brewery, an agricultural business that closes its circular supply chain within 50 km of its headquarters, does not belong to the Slow Food Movement, even though it embeds many of its principles. This is because the Slow Food principles are rooted in the traditional, Piedmontese archetypal worldview. Third, we draw on documented practices associated with Slow Food Presidia, Terra Madre communities, and other aligned actors operating in the region.

Our analysis follows a theory elaboration logic (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). The case material is not used to test the propositions but rather to refine and ground the conceptual framework developed in Section 3. Our analysis proceeds by identifying culturally embedded values, examining how these values are reflected in Slow Food principles and organisational practices, and interpreting these patterns through the lenses of KBT, Stakeholder theory, and circular intellectual capital. We chose this form of analytical generalisation as it is appropriate when the objective is theory development rather than statistical inference (Yin, 2018). Thus, we proceed with the mapping of Piedmontese cultural values in the next section.

#### ***4.3 Mapping Piedmontese Cultural Values onto Slow Food Principles***

The case evidence shows a pattern, and it indicates a systematic alignment between historically embedded cultural values in Piedmont and the normative architecture of the Slow Food. Mostly important, these values are supported by independent academic scholarship and are herein treated as shared epistemic resources rather than folkloric traits. Appendix 3 summarises the most salient Piedmontese traditional values.

A first value typical of Piedmontese culture consists of (i) work ethic and craftsmanship, documented through ethnographic studies of food production in Northern Italy as a moral and cognitive framework guiding practice (Grasseni, 2013; Delpero and Volpato, 2022). The Slow Food explicitly codifies this orientation through its emphasis on artisanal quality and taste education (see Table 1).

A second value lies in (ii) sobriety and respect for ecological limits. Research on alternative food networks in Italy demonstrates that producers frequently emphasise restraint, seasonality, and ecological care as core principles of legitimacy (Fonte, 2008; Renting et al., 2003). These orientations are congruent with the Slow Food's principle of 'clean' production.

A third value is (iii) territorial embeddedness and attachment to place. Food practices in Piedmont are strongly shaped by the relationship between landscape, knowledge, and identity. Delpero and Volpato (2022) show how specific food products are inseparable from place-based ecological knowledge. This territorial anchoring is institutionalised by the Slow Food through Presidia and geographical narratives.

A fourth value is (iv) mutualism and reciprocity. Fontefrancesco and Volpato (2022) demonstrate that collective food practices such as community ovens function as infrastructures for reciprocity and cooperation. These practices reflect broader patterns of community-oriented coordination rather than purely market-based interaction. Slow Food reproduces this logic through *convivia*, community governance, and collaborative practices.

Two further values of the Piedmontese tradition are particularly important for the present study. The first is (v) food as heritage and social bond. Food practices in Piedmont are widely documented as vehicles for transmitting memory, identity, and collective belonging. Delpero and Volpato (2022) describe food-related knowledge as cultural heritage embedded in everyday practice, while Fontefrancesco and Volpato (2022) explicitly frame food practices as instruments of social regeneration. Conviviality therefore operates not only as a social ritual but as a mechanism for knowledge circulation and reproduction. Slow Food codifies this dimension through its educational initiatives and emphasis on conviviality.

The last value is (vi) cultural plurality and borderland identity. Piedmont is historically characterised by linguistic and cultural plurality, including Italian, French,

Piedmontese, Waldensian, Occitan, Walser, Jewish, and Franco-Provençal traditions. Sociolinguistic research shows that such plurality remains an active cultural marker rather than a residual one (Cerruti & Regis, 2020).

Piedmont's regional culture is the outcome of a long-running borderland dynamic in which minority traditions and court-linked transnational influences have coexisted with a strong local vernacular core. Linguistic and cultural plurality is historically entrenched, with Occitan and Franco-Provençal varieties present in northwestern Alpine areas, and Piedmontese operating as a durable interclass language in the region, which together reinforce the everyday visibility of difference and the legitimacy of multiple cultural repertoires (Cerruti & Regis, 2020; Regis, 2017). In the Western Alps, Occitan communities exhibit well-documented food-related traditional ecological knowledge, including gastronomic plant uses, anchoring identity and practice in place-based ecological expertise (Pieroni, 2009). In parallel, Waldensian valleys in Piedmont have been studied as distinctive socio-cultural settings where food and medicinal plant knowledge is simultaneously local and transnational, reflecting both community cohesion and outward linkages, a pattern consistent with reciprocity-based coordination (Bellia & Pieroni, 2015). Further north, Walser communities in Piedmont and adjacent North-Western Alpine zones provide evidence of how food heritage is actively reconstructed and mobilised as biocultural identity, strengthening the role of heritage practices as vehicles for knowledge transmission (Fontefrancesco & Mello, 2022). Piedmont's Jewish presence, especially in Turin and historically across smaller towns, adds another layer of cultural memory and institutional life, contributing to the region's plural heritage landscape through distinct community practices and historically situated urban spaces such as the ghetto (Cassen, 2017). These traditions have contributed to a Piedmontese cultural ecology in which craftsmanship, place attachment, convivial heritage, and respect for diversity are not residual traits but durable knowledge infrastructures that can be codified into movement principles, such as those articulated by Slow Food.

Scholarship on alternative food networks also suggests that epistemic diversity and hybridity often enhance experimentation and recombination of knowledge (Goodman et al., 2012). The Slow Food's celebration of cultural and biological diversity reflects and institutionalises this pluralistic epistemic orientation. Thus, altogether these values form a coherent knowledge substrate that precedes formal organisation yet shapes the principles and practices that the Slow Food later codifies.

Table 2: Mapping of the Piedmontese values informing the Slow Food principles and the cultural traditions underpinning traditional practices in Piedmont.

| Piedmontese cultural values                            | Slow Food principles                                                                                                                   | Cultural traditions underpinning traditional practice in Piedmont                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Source                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (i) Work ethic and craftsmanship                       | 'Good' (sensory quality, craft skill, taste education); safeguarding artisanal know-how; opposition to standardisation                 | Piedmontese and Italian artisanal quality regimes in AFNs and solidarity purchasing logics highlight craftsmanship as moral and cognitive framework. In borderland Piedmont, elite and court cultures have historically been exposed to French cultural repertoires (especially in Turin and Savoy domains), reinforcing symbolic association between refinement, technique, and quality.                                                                       | Grasseni (2013); Goodman et al. (2012); Bianchi and Wolfe (2017)                                                                 |
| (ii) Sobriety and respect for ecological limits        | 'Clean' (ecological care, seasonality, biodiversity, health); stewardship and limits to extraction                                     | Italian AFN scholarship documents ecological restraint and seasonality as legitimacy criteria. In Alpine Piedmont, minorities such as Occitan communities show food-related traditional ecological knowledge, which is compatible with 'clean' principles; similar subsistence and stewardship logics are documented in minority Alpine settings.                                                                                                               | Fonte (2008); Renting et al. (2003); Pieroni (2009); Alrhoun et al. (2025)                                                       |
| (iii) Territorial embeddedness and attachment to place | Place-based quality; biodiversity protection; Presidia logic; linking product, landscape, and culture                                  | Empirical ethnobiology in Piedmont shows food products embedded in local ecological knowledge and regional identity. Borderland multilingual settings (including Franco-Provençal and Occitan areas) reinforce place-linked cultural distinction and knowledge retention.                                                                                                                                                                                       | Delpero and Volpato (2022); Fonte (2008); Regis (2017); Zulato et al. (2018)                                                     |
| (iv) Mutualism and reciprocity                         | 'Fair' (dignity, equity); community governance; convivia as social infrastructure; solidarity                                          | Commoning practices are documented in Western Alpine Piedmont link collective infrastructures (for example, ovens) to reciprocity and cooperation. Waldensian valleys show a documented 'glocal' knowledge tradition in food and medicinal plant uses, consistent with community-based reciprocity and external linkages.                                                                                                                                       | Fontefrancesco and Volpato (2022); Ostrom (1990); Bellia and Pieroni (2015)                                                      |
| (v) Food as heritage and social bond                   | Conviviality; taste education; safeguarding food cultures; intergenerational transmission; narrative and memory as heritage protection | The Piedmont case evidence supports food as social regeneration and heritage. Walser communities in North-Western Italy show explicit food-heritage reconstruction processes (gastronomic heritage as biocultural diversity). Jewish communities in Piedmont (especially Turin and smaller centres) have a long documented history in the region, with institutional life and distinct cultural practices that contribute to the region's plural food heritage. | Fontefrancesco and Mello (2022); Delpero and Volpato (2022); Lerner (2008); Cassen (2017)                                        |
| (vi) Cultural plurality and borderland identity        | Respect for cultural diversity; biocultural diversity; translocal learning (Terra Madre logic); plurality as epistemic variety         | Piedmont is empirically characterised as a multilingual borderland, with sustained minority identities including Piedmontese, Occitan, and Franco-Provençal in NW Italy. Walser food-heritage work documents minority biocultural diversity. Waldensian valleys are empirically studied as distinct cultural settings. Piedmont's Jewish history and institutional presence in Turin and other towns adds to this plurality.                                    | Cerruti and Regis (2020); Regis (2017); Fontefrancesco and Mello (2022); Bellia and Pieroni (2015); Lerner (2008); Cassen (2017) |

#### ***4.4 Analysis of Ecosystem Practices: Kauss Brewery Piedmontese Values and the Slow Food Principles Alignment with the Piedmontese Traditional Values***

Kauss Brewery<sup>1</sup> provides an illustrative organisational example of how ecosystem-level knowledge assets are enacted in practice. Located in Piedmont, the brewery is recognised for its engagement with heritage cereal varieties, its reliance on local supply

<sup>1</sup> <https://kauss.it>

chains, and its embeddedness within community and territorial networks (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2025). These characteristics are consistent with patterns documented across artisanal food producers in Northern Italy, where production is framed as stewardship of heritage rather than as purely commercial activity (Grasseni, 2013; Delpero & Volpato, 2022).

Kauss's use of ancient grain varieties exemplifies food as heritage and knowledge preservation. Such practices mobilise tacit agricultural knowledge, local memory, and collaborative relationships with farmers. Its strong reliance on regional suppliers reflects territorial embeddedness and reinvestment in the local ecosystem.

Of particular relevance for circular intellectual capital are practices of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. Research on alternative food systems documents that open exchange of techniques, collaborative experimentation, and informal mentoring are widespread and contribute to collective capability building (Marsden, 2013). These dynamics are also visible in the Slow Food Presidia, where producers collectively define standards, share practices, and articulate quality narratives (Renting et al., 2003).

Terra Madre communities, similarly, function as translocal spaces for the exchange of practices, narratives, and techniques across cultural boundaries. Such interactions illustrate how cultural plurality is not a coordination problem but a source of epistemic diversity that supports learning and recombination (Goodman et al., 2012). The operability of Kauss on the territory and these broader ecosystem practices illustrate that the relevant unit of analysis is not the firm but the distributed knowledge system constituted by producers, communities, institutions, and cultural practices: we maintain it is the whole ecosystem.

The case analysis offers empirical grounding for the conceptual framework developed in Section 3. Appendix 2 shows the alignment of Kauss Brewery practices rooted in the Piedmontese traditional values and how they align with the Slow Food principles, which embed a Piedmontese mindset. The analysis thus supports the claim that cultural values operate as ecosystem-level knowledge assets. The literature on Piedmont demonstrates that practices related to food, production, conviviality, and community are structured by shared understandings that shape coordination, legitimacy, and identity. These understandings function as epistemic infrastructures rather than merely symbolic traditions.

Second, the case illustrates how Slow Food operates as a codification and translation mechanism. The values and practices by the local community (in our analysis illustrated by Kauss Brewery) are embedded in the Slow Food principles, because its original mindset is rooted in the Piedmontese cultural tradition. The principles of 'good, clean, and fair', the organisational devices of Presidia and Terra Madre, and the emphasis on education and

conviviality transform territorially embedded knowledge into stabilised, communicable frameworks. This process does not invent new values but formalises and scales existing cultural knowledge.

Third, the case provides evidence for circular regeneration of intellectual capital. Knowledge is reproduced through everyday practices such as storytelling, apprenticeship, collective events, collaborative experimentation, and intergenerational transmission. These practices increase rather than deplete the ecosystem's knowledge resources. Sharing does not erode value but enhances collective competence and resilience.

While the Kauss Brewery provides the most detailed organisational illustration available within this ecosystem, it is important to note that the mechanisms we identify are not idiosyncratic to a single firm. Two further ecosystem-level instances support the same theoretical claims.

First, the Slow Food Presidia provide documented evidence of circular intellectual capital at scale: producers collectively define quality standards, share technical practices, and co-author the narratives that articulate their products' territorial and cultural significance (Renting et al., 2003; Marsden, 2013). This standard-setting process does not draw on proprietary knowledge extraction; it increases collective competence across participating producers through precisely the practices of sharing and reciprocal stewardship that Proposition 3 theorises.

Second, the Terra Madre network functions as a translocal space in which shared epistemic frameworks are reproduced across geographically dispersed communities (Goodman et al., 2012). Producers, educators, and food activists from different cultural contexts engage in the exchange of practices, narratives, and techniques, reinforcing the evaluative frameworks around quality, fairness, and ecological care that Proposition 5 identifies as the foundation of durable stakeholder engagement.

It should be noted that the Kauss case and these two ecosystem-level instances demonstrate that the proposed mechanisms are systemic features of the Piedmont-Slow Food ecosystem rather than the characteristics of any one actor. The case, therefore, supports the theoretical claim that cultural knowledge can function as foundational intellectual capital and that movements such as Slow Food can transform this capital into a regenerative, ecosystem-level resource.

Table 3: Summary of Propositions and their theoretical support rooted in empirical observation.

| Proposition | Core claim                                                                                                                                            | Empirical grounding                                                                                                                                               | Theoretical support                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1          | <i>Territorial cultural values function as ecosystem-level knowledge assets that enable coordination before formal organisation</i>                   | Piedmontese values such as craftsmanship, reciprocity, heritage and place attachment structure coordination across producers, communities and Slow Food practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Knowledge as embedded in shared meanings and routines (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996);</li> <li>o Values as epistemic infrastructures in AFNs (Fonte, 2008; Grasseni, 2013; Goodman et al., 2012)</li> </ul> |
| P2          | <i>Social movements such as Slow Food act as knowledge codification mechanisms that translate territorial knowledge into transferable frameworks</i>  | Slow Food principles, Presidia, Terra Madre networks and education initiatives stabilise and diffuse Piedmontese knowledge globally                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Movements as carriers and producers of knowledge (Della Porta &amp; Pavan, 2017);</li> <li>o Codification of practices in food movements (Goodman et al., 2012; Marsden, 2013)</li> </ul>                 |
| P3          | <i>Circular intellectual capital emerges when knowledge circulates through reciprocity, intergenerational transmission and collective stewardship</i> | Knowledge sharing among producers, community practices, social farming, conviviality and open exchange illustrated in Kauss and wider ecosystem                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Commons governance and stewardship (Ostrom, 1990);</li> <li>o Knowledge strengthened through use and sharing (Adler &amp; Kwon, 2002; Renting et al., 2003)</li> </ul>                                    |
| P4          | <i>Ecosystems grounded in cultural knowledge and codification mechanisms exhibit greater regenerative capacity and long-term innovation potential</i> | The Piedmont–Slow Food ecosystem shows resilience, adaptive experimentation, biodiversity protection and continuous renewal of practices                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Regenerative and systemic intellectual capital (Dumay, 2016; Guthrie et al., 2012);</li> <li>o Learning through diversity and embeddedness (Marsden, 2013; Cerruti &amp; Regis, 2020)</li> </ul>          |
| P5          | <i>Stakeholder engagement becomes durable and generative when actors share epistemic frameworks reinforced through everyday practice</i>              | Long-term collaboration among producers, associations, institutions and communities sustained by shared meanings rather than formal governance                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Engagement as grounded in shared frames and legitimacy (Greenwood, 2007; Harrison et al., 2010; Dentoni et al., 2016);</li> <li>o Moral economy in AFNs (Fonte, 2008)</li> </ul>                          |

## 5 Discussion

In our study, we relocate the locus of knowledge from the firm to the ecosystem. Classical KBT conceptualises firms as the primary sites of knowledge integration and coordination (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996). Our findings challenge this assumption by demonstrating that coordination in the Piedmontese agri-food ecosystem is structured by culturally embedded evaluative frameworks that pre-exist formal organisation. In doing so, we provide strong support for Proposition 1, which states that territorial cultural values constitute ecosystem-level knowledge assets that enable coordination prior to formal structures. Empirical research on alternative food networks already highlights the role of shared meanings around authenticity, care, and responsibility (Fonte, 2008; Grasseni, 2013; Goodman et al., 2012). We extend this work by theorising these values as epistemic infrastructures rather than contextual features. Thus, territorial attachment, craftsmanship, reciprocity and food as heritage actively guide judgement and legitimacy across actors, thereby extending our understanding of KBT towards an ecosystem-level theory of knowledge.

Our study also advances stakeholder theory by demonstrating that durable engagement is grounded in epistemic alignment rather than only in interests, power, or governance arrangements (Mitchell et al., 1997; Greenwood, 2007). This provides empirical and conceptual support for Proposition 5, which maintains that stakeholder engagement becomes sustained and generative when actors share culturally embedded epistemic frameworks reinforced through practice. Extant work in this field highlights co-creation and democratic governance in food systems (Dentoni et al., 2016; Jarosz, 2014), yet does not fully explain why cooperation persists. The Kauss Brewery example, where proprietary knowledge on malt production is shared openly with potential competitors, illustrates behaviour that contradicts instrumental logic but aligns with reciprocity-based coordination. Convivial practices in the Slow Food *convivia*, *Presidia* governance, and community infrastructures further reproduce trust and shared meanings, supporting our claim that epistemic alignment is a critical mechanism for durable engagement.

Our analysis also supports Proposition 2, which conceptualises the Slow Food as a knowledge codification and translation mechanism. Social movement scholarship increasingly recognises movements as producers and carriers of knowledge (Della Porta & Pavan, 2017), although it could easily be assimilated to a community of practice (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2022). We extend this perspective by showing that the Slow Food operates as a structured infrastructure for stabilising and circulating cultural knowledge. Devices such as *Presidia*, Terra Madre networks, and the ‘good, clean and fair’ Slow Food framework translate territorially embedded knowledge into transferable principles while retaining contextual specificity (Marsden, 2013; Goodman et al., 2012). This challenges the assumption in KBT that firms are the primary locus of knowledge governance and highlights movements and communities of practice as alternative organisational forms for knowledge coordination, both for analogue and digital environments (Cacciolatti et al., 2025).

Our study further supports Propositions 3 and 4 as they reconceptualise circular intellectual capital as a culturally embedded regenerative system. While recent work links intellectual capital to sustainability and circular economy dynamics (Minoja & Romano, 2021; Farrukh et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2024) and emerging frameworks explicitly theorise circular intellectual capital (Raimo et al., 2025; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2025), much of this literature remains organisationally bounded. Our analysis extends these debates and shows that intellectual capital in the Piedmont ecosystem is reproduced through everyday practices such as intergenerational transmission, storytelling, apprenticeship, conviviality, and social farming. These mechanisms resonate with work on collective resource governance, which

shows that shared resources are strengthened through stewardship and reciprocity (Ostrom, 1990). The ecosystem thus exhibits regenerative capacity and long-term innovative potential precisely because knowledge circulates through culturally rooted practices rather than being enclosed. That said, we entertain that the contributions of our framework and analysis are contextually bounded. They are most likely to apply in ecosystems characterised by cultural cohesion and dense civil society infrastructures. Where such substrates are absent, epistemic alignment and regenerative knowledge dynamics may be more difficult to sustain or may manifest in different forms. Nevertheless, there are several practical that derive from our study. We deal with those in the next section.

Altogether, these findings allow us to articulate more precisely how the proposed framework extends the conceptual boundaries of each of the three theoretical traditions it draws on. For KBT, the extension is scalar and pre-organisational as the framework moves the locus of knowledge from the firm to the territorial ecosystem and introduces cultural values as a form of collective knowledge that precedes and shapes organisational formation, a category that KBT has no current means of theorising. For Stakeholder theory, the extension is epistemic because the framework introduces epistemic alignment, the degree of shared evaluative frameworks among ecosystem actors, as a mechanism that precedes and enables engagement, complementing the existing emphasis on interests, power, and governance with a culturally grounded account of why cooperation persists. For circular intellectual capital theory, the extension is processual and scalar as the framework shifts the unit of analysis from the firm's asset configuration to the ecosystem's knowledge regeneration dynamics, theorising regeneration as a social and cultural process rather than a managerial one. These three extensions are mutually reinforcing: it is precisely because cultural values operate as pre-organisational epistemic infrastructure (the KBT extension) that they can sustain epistemic alignment across actors (the Stakeholder theory extension) and generate knowledge reproduction through circulation rather than enclosure (the circular intellectual capital extension).

## **6 Implications**

***Theoretical implications.*** Our study makes three interrelated theoretical contributions. First, it extends KBT by conceptualising cultural values as ecosystem-level knowledge assets. Prior KBT scholarship has focused on firms as the primary locus of knowledge integration (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996). Our analysis demonstrates that

coordination, legitimacy and collective learning can be structured by territorially embedded epistemic infrastructures that precede organisational formation. This advances KBT towards a multilevel theory of knowledge where ecosystems, not only firms, can possess and reproduce intellectual capital.

Second, the study advances stakeholder theory by theorising epistemic alignment as a central mechanism of durable engagement. Existing stakeholder models emphasise power, interests and governance structures (Mitchell et al., 1997; Greenwood, 2007), while empirical work in food systems highlights participation and co-creation (Dentoni et al., 2016; Jarosz, 2014). Notwithstanding their theoretical importance, our findings extend this literature stream by demonstrating that cooperation persists because actors share evaluative frameworks regarding quality, responsibility, and care. This contributes to a culturally grounded explanation for stakeholder engagement that complements dominant structural accounts.

Lastly, the paper reconceptualises circular intellectual capital as a culturally embedded regenerative system rather than a managerial stock of assets. Recent work increasingly links intellectual capital to sustainability and circular economy outcomes (Minoja & Romano, 2021; Farrukh et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2024) and formalises the concept of circular intellectual capital (Raimo et al., 2025; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2025). Our contribution extends these debates by theorising regeneration as a social and cultural process, sustained through conviviality, reciprocity, intergenerational transmission and collective stewardship. This shifts the intellectual capital conversation from optimisation towards cultural reproduction and long-term resilience.

***Practical implications.*** Our findings suggest that practitioners and policymakers can actively design for circular intellectual capital, understood as the capacity of knowledge resources to grow through circulation, reciprocity, and collective stewardship rather than through enclosure. (A) For policymaking, this implies shifting from firm-centred innovation support towards investments in the social and cultural infrastructures that enable knowledge circulation. Funding convivia, community food initiatives, producer networks, social farming projects, and participatory governance arrangements strengthens the conditions through which knowledge is shared and regenerated rather than fragmented. Evidence from food system governance shows that such participatory infrastructures enhance collective learning and coordination capacity (Dentoni et al., 2016). Policies that recognise knowledge sharing, cultural practices, and community coordination as productive assets can therefore actively cultivate ecosystem-level intellectual capital. This might also involve an element of inter-generational knowledge cross-fertilisation, to preserve local territorial culture and practice.

In this regard, for territorial culture preservation, the analysis suggests that cultural heritage policies should be reframed as knowledge regeneration strategies. Safeguarding local food traditions, narratives, practices, and biodiversity not only protects identity but also reinforces the epistemic resources that underpin long-term adaptive capacity. Slow Food devices such as Presidia, taste education, the University of Gastronomic Sciences (in Pollenzo, Cuneo Province, in Piedmont), and place-based storytelling exemplify how cultural practices can be institutionalised into infrastructures that stabilise and circulate knowledge across generations (Marsden, 2013; Goodman et al., 2012). Supporting such initiatives enhances the circular reproduction of territorial knowledge rather than fossilising heritage.

(B) For socio-economic and environmental sustainability, the evidence suggests that practices such as local sourcing, social farming, collaborative experimentation, and open knowledge sharing generate cumulative benefits (Cacciolatti et al., 2024) precisely because they reinforce circular intellectual capital. These practices build trust, reduce dependency on external actors, and promote environmentally responsible production. This is in line with wider evidence that intellectual capital contributes to sustainability transitions when embedded in collective practices and governance rather than isolated organisational strategies (Minoja & Romano, 2021; Farrukh et al., 2023). Policymakers and practitioners should therefore prioritise interventions that reward collaboration, reciprocity, and long-term stewardship over short-term efficiency.

Lastly, there are also some implications for (C) food sovereignty. Our study highlights that communities strengthen autonomy when they retain control over both material resources and knowledge resources. Circular intellectual capital manifests in the capacity of local actors to reproduce skills, meanings, and practices internally rather than relying on externally imposed standards. Embeddedness, social capital, and network-based coordination are critical infrastructures for resilient food governance (Sporleder & Moss, 2002). Strengthening local knowledge ecosystems thus becomes a concrete pathway to enhancing community control over food systems and reducing vulnerability to external corporate or institutional pressures.

***Managerial and organisational implications.*** Beyond the policy domain, the analysis generates three concrete implications for practitioners operating within or seeking to develop culturally embedded knowledge ecosystems.

First, firms operating in territorially embedded agri-food and creative ecosystems should treat knowledge sharing with peers and potential competitors as a strategic investment in ecosystem-level intellectual capital rather than as a loss of competitive advantage. The

Kauss Brewery example demonstrates that open sharing of technical expertise, formalised through a chamber-of-commerce-registered network, strengthens collective resilience and generates reciprocal returns over time. Managers can actively design such sharing protocols as part of their stakeholder engagement strategy, understanding that the circular reproduction of knowledge increases rather than diminishes the long-term value of their own expertise. In practice, this means establishing regular peer-exchange forums, documenting shared technical procedures in accessible formats, and building reciprocity norms into supplier and partner agreements, so that knowledge sharing becomes a structured organisational practice rather than an occasional informal gesture.

Second, food system organisations and social enterprises seeking to codify and diffuse tacit knowledge should study the Slow Food's institutional architecture as a practical template. The Presidia format, which enables producers to collectively define standards, share practices, and articulate quality narratives without erasing contextual specificity, illustrates how knowledge governance can be designed at the ecosystem level. Community events, producer networks, taste education initiatives, and collective quality certification are not peripheral cultural activities but active mechanisms for the regeneration of intellectual capital. Concretely, organisations can audit which of their current activities already function as knowledge circulation mechanisms, map the actors who participate in them, and invest in their continuity and reach rather than treating them as cost items peripheral to commercial operations.

Third, regional development agencies, chambers of commerce, and local governments should extend formal institutional recognition to peer knowledge networks as productive economic infrastructure. As the Kauss brewery network illustrates, giving collective knowledge-sharing arrangements legal and institutional status, through registration, public reporting, or light-touch governance frameworks, amplifies their legitimacy and longevity. Policymakers who recognise such arrangements as ecosystem assets, rather than as informal practices, can direct proportionate resourcing towards sustaining them. Fourth, ecosystem coordinators, including intermediary organisations, food hubs, regional development bodies, and cultural foundations, occupy a particularly critical position in the framework because they sit at the intersection of knowledge codification and stakeholder engagement. They can function as the institutional equivalent of the Slow Food's Presidia logic at the local level. Convening actors who hold tacit knowledge, facilitating the articulation of shared quality and legitimacy standards, and managing the interfaces through which knowledge flows across organisational and territorial boundaries. Ecosystem coordinators who invest in these

facilitation roles, rather than limiting themselves to project management or funding administration, actively contribute to the regeneration of ecosystem-level intellectual capital.

## **7 Conclusions**

Our study demonstrates that cultural values can function as ecosystem-level knowledge assets that shape coordination, legitimacy, and learning before formal organisational structures emerge. We used the context of the Italian region of Piedmont and showed how the Slow Food ecosystem reproduces knowledge through practices such as conviviality, reciprocity, intergenerational transmission, and collective stewardship rooted in regional collective knowledge and territorial culture. Thus, our paper extends KBT, shifting our understanding of intellectual capital from a firm-centred model to an ecosystem-level theory of epistemic coordination. Our study also advances stakeholder theory by theorising epistemic alignment as a key mechanism explaining durable engagement and reconceptualises circular intellectual capital as a culturally embedded regenerative system rather than a managerial stock of assets. The conceptualisation of the Slow Food Movement as a knowledge codification and circulation infrastructure further contributes to understanding social movements as organisational forms of knowledge governance.

However, our study has its limitations. It relies on an in-depth qualitative case rooted in a specific territorial and cultural context, which constrains statistical generalisability. The analysis is also focused on the agri-food domain, where cultural embeddedness is particularly salient. A further limitation concerns the scalability of the Slow Food model to cultural contexts in which territorial identity is weak, contested, or instrumentalised. Where cultural knowledge is strongly tied to a specific place-based identity, there is a risk that knowledge governance mechanisms become protective and exclusionary rather than generative and open, reinforcing cultural insularity rather than enabling translocal learning and recombination. Future research should therefore examine the conditions under which territorially embedded knowledge ecosystems maintain openness and adaptability, and those under which they become rigid or resistant to external epistemic diversity.

Yet, future research can test the propositions through comparative quantitative designs, for instance, by measuring the relationship among cultural cohesion, knowledge sharing practices, and ecosystem resilience across regions and industries or sectors of the economy. Survey-based studies, could otherwise operationalise constructs such as epistemic alignment and circular intellectual capital, while longitudinal research could examine whether

ecosystems with stronger knowledge regeneration exhibit higher long-term innovation and sustainability outcomes.

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## Appendix 1: List of key studies supporting the conceptual model.

| Role                                 | Construct                                    | Sub-construct                       | Themes                                                                                                           | Contribution to the Model                                                                                                                                                                | Authors                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ecosystem-level knowledge asset      | Collective knowledge                         | Cultural values                     | Shared evaluative knowledge; moral commitment; legitimacy frames; authenticity; quality conventions; care; trust | Supports treating cultural values as epistemic infrastructures that coordinate behaviour prior to formal organisation and justify the shift from firm-level to ecosystem-level knowledge | Fonte (2008); Grasseni (2013); Goodman et al. (2012); Thornton et al. (2012)            |
|                                      |                                              | Territorial cultural values         | Place-based ecological knowledge; attachment to landscape; territorial responsibility; biocultural diversity     | Grounds knowledge in territory and supports the argument that ecosystems function as knowledge substrates rather than only organisational fields                                         | Fonte (2008); Marsden (2013); Delpero & Volpato (2022)                                  |
| Knowledge codification mechanism     | Communities of practice                      | Social movements                    | Codification of meanings; narrative stabilisation; diffusion of practices; translation across contexts           | Supports conceptualising movements such as Slow Food as infrastructures that transform tacit cultural knowledge into transferable frameworks                                             | Della Porta & Pavan (2017); Goodman et al. (2012); Marsden (2013)                       |
|                                      | Stakeholder engagement                       | Cross-sectoral cooperation          | Legitimacy building; co-creation; shared frames; engagement durability; trust                                    | Explains how shared epistemic foundations enable sustained multi-actor collaboration beyond interests and power alone                                                                    | Greenwood (2007); Harrison et al. (2010); Dentoni et al. (2016); Mitchell et al. (1997) |
|                                      |                                              |                                     | Moral economy; reciprocity; collective responsibility; community-oriented coordination                           | Shows that cooperation in food systems is frequently sustained through shared meanings and norms rather than contractual governance                                                      | Fonte (2008); Grasseni (2013); Renting et al. (2003)                                    |
| Ecosystem-level intellectual capital | Circular intellectual capital                | Regenerative knowledge dynamics     | Knowledge as dynamic resource; relational IC; systemic IC; renewal through circulation                           | Provides the theoretical grounding for shifting intellectual capital from stock-based to regenerative, ecosystem-embedded and relational                                                 | Dumay (2016); Guthrie et al. (2012); Rosli & Cacciolatti (2022)                         |
|                                      |                                              |                                     | Knowledge sharing; stewardship; reciprocity; intergenerational transmission                                      | Explains why knowledge resources grow through use and sharing, supporting the circular logic of the model                                                                                | Ostrom (1990); Adler & Kwon (2002); Renting et al. (2003)                               |
|                                      | Regenerative capacity & innovation potential | Learning through diversity          | Epistemic variety; hybridity; multilingual contact settings; recombination of practices                          | Supports the claim that plurality and diversity enhance ecosystem learning and innovation potential rather than fragment coordination                                                    | Cerruti & Regis (2020); Zulato et al. (2018); Goodman et al. (2012)                     |
|                                      |                                              | Collective learning infrastructures | Community practices; apprenticeship; conviviality; narrative transmission                                        | Anchors regeneration in everyday practices through which knowledge is reproduced and reinforced across generations                                                                       | Delpero & Volpato (2022); Fontefrancesco & Volpato (2022); Marsden (2013)               |

Appendix 2: Alignment of Kauss Brewery practices with Piedmontese traditional values and the Slow Food principles, embedding a Piedmontese mindset.

| <b>Kauss practice (evidence based)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Piedmontese traditional values</b>                                                                                                      | <b>Slow Food principles <sup>2</sup></b>                                                                                                                   | <b>Piedmontese mindset (micro-level mechanism)</b>                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Operates as an ‘agricultural brewery’, requiring at least 51% of raw materials to come from its own land, and following the whole process ‘from soil preparation to bottled sales’. <sup>1</sup>                                                                  | (i) work ethic and craftsmanship; (iii) territorial embeddedness and attachment to place                                                   | ‘Clean’ (production rooted in ecological processes, reduced supply-chain distance); ‘Good’ (process integrity supporting quality)                          | Craft identity and pride in end-to-end making, with responsibility for materials and outcomes, not just outputs                           |
| Positions its taproom as ‘an authentic corner... where beer meets Piedmontese hospitality’, explicitly oriented to conviviality, discovery, and place narrative, and pairs beer with selected local foods (e.g., cheeses, cured meats, giardiniera). <sup>1</sup> | (v) food as heritage and social bond; (iii) territorial embeddedness; (iv) mutualism and reciprocity                                       | ‘Good’ (taste, conviviality, education through experience); cultural diversity as a movement priority                                                      | Food and drink as social infrastructure that reproduces shared meanings and local identity through repeated rituals                       |
| Runs a public-facing model of transparency and stakeholder openness: ‘we open our doors to all our stakeholders... a brewery that was born with a shop window... we want to show what we do’. <sup>3</sup>                                                        | (iv) mutualism and reciprocity; (i) work ethic and craftsmanship                                                                           | ‘Fair’ (trust and accountability as preconditions of fairness); ‘Good’ (quality signalled via transparency)                                                | Reputation and honour logic: legitimacy comes from being visibly accountable to the community                                             |
| Uses only renewable electricity and heats/boils wort with a wood-fired boiler, sourcing wood from local sawmill waste and local farming relationships. <sup>3</sup>                                                                                               | (ii) sobriety and respect for ecological limits; (iii) territorial embeddedness                                                            | ‘Clean’ (renewable energy, circular use of local by-products)                                                                                              | Practical frugality plus ecological stewardship: ‘doing well’ by reducing harm, not by maximising throughput                              |
| Builds local sourcing and short-chain orientation into commercial strategy: local raw materials and a ‘beer supply chain that uses local produce’, plus local logistics where feasible. <sup>3</sup>                                                              | (iii) territorial embeddedness; (i) craftsmanship; (ii) ecological limits                                                                  | ‘Clean’ (shorter chains, reduced transport intensity); ‘Fair’ (local value retention)                                                                      | Place-first market orientation: value is judged by territorial reciprocity, not only margin                                               |
| Creates a formally registered network (Chamber of Commerce) with other Piedmont breweries to share malt production, coordinates the process, and makes its know-how available for free to the wider brewery community. <sup>3</sup>                               | (iv) mutualism and reciprocity; (vi) cultural plurality and borderland identity (as openness to exchange and hybridity); (i) craftsmanship | ‘Fair’ (collective capability-building, reduced dependency asymmetries); ‘Clean’ (diffusing circular practices); movement priority of cultural cooperation | ‘Cooperate to compete’ logic rooted in reciprocity: knowledge circulation increases collective resilience (circular intellectual capital) |
| Frames circularity as ‘least possible impact on local society’, supported by renewable energy, minimised resource consumption, and using local stakeholders across processes where possible. <sup>3</sup>                                                         | (ii) sobriety and ecological limits; (iv) reciprocity; (iii) attachment to place                                                           | ‘Clean’ (reduced impact); ‘Fair’ (stakeholder inclusion through local sourcing and process design)                                                         | Stewardship rather than optimisation: balancing firm needs with territorial needs                                                         |
| Runs structured social inclusion in work (APES with Centro Federica Pelissero, Associazione L’Airona): hosting people with disabilities in brewery work tasks weekly, aiming for autonomy and social inclusion. <sup>1</sup>                                      | (iv) mutualism and reciprocity; (v) food as heritage and social bond                                                                       | ‘Fair’ (social justice, dignity, inclusion in livelihoods)                                                                                                 | Community responsibility enacted through routine workplace practices, even at a cost to efficiency                                        |
| Builds social farming capability and legitimacy (owner got a Master’s in Social Agriculture; inclusion in the Piedmont regional register certifying social farming activities). <sup>3</sup>                                                                      | (iv) mutualism and reciprocity; (v) heritage and social bond                                                                               | ‘Fair’ (institutionalised social mission and accountability)                                                                                               | Turning values into durable capabilities via formal recognition and routine organisational practice                                       |
| Biodiversity and heritage work on cereals: experimentation with varieties, and collaboration to recover an ‘ancient barley seed of Piedmontese origin’ linked to Walser histories, as part of research focused on local history and territory. <sup>3</sup>       | (vi) cultural plurality and borderland identity; (iii) attachment to place; (v) heritage and social bond                                   | Slow Food priority: ‘defend biological and cultural diversity’; ‘Good’ (taste and heritage narratives); ‘Clean’ (agro-biodiversity) (Slow Food)            | Recombination logic: using plural heritage as an innovation resource (diverse knowledge inputs, experimentation)                          |

Sources: <sup>1</sup> <https://kauss.it>; <sup>2</sup> <https://www.slowfood.com>; <sup>3</sup> Cacciolatti & Lee, 2025

### Appendix 3: Piedmontese traditional values.

| Piedmontese Traditional Values                     | Piedmontese Words/Idioms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Values Expression in Society                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (i) Work ethic and craftsmanship                   | <i>travaj</i> (work)*; <i>fé bin</i> (to do well); <i>parloma nen, travajoma</i> (we do not talk, we work); <i>mach ij còj a son cheuit e bon ampressa</i> (only cabbage is good when cooked fast)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Quality over speed, care, reputation, 'do it properly'                      |
| (ii) Sobriety, measure, parsimony                  | <i>misurà</i> (measured); <i>basta ël necessari</i> (enough is what is necessary); <i>nen fé 'l ric</i> or <i>fè nen tant ël blagheur</i> (do not show off); <i>a l'é mej sté citu, che di d'fularià</i> (better to keep silent than talking like a foolish)                                                                                                                                                                                        | Frugality, no waste, restraint, simplicity                                  |
| (iii) Territorial attachment                       | <i>paìs</i> (village, home place); <i>le mè radis</i> (my roots); <i>a l'é la mia tèrra</i> (this is my land); <i>bogianèn</i> (rooted, determined not to move)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Local pride, short chains, place identity, being determined in enterprising |
| (iv) Mutualism and reciprocity                     | <i>dé na man</i> (give a hand); <i>agiutesse</i> (to help each other); <i>ci i soma për giuté</i> or <i>a-i son për fé na man</i> (we are here to help/give a helping hand); <i>basta ciamé</i> (you only need to call); <i>avei l'amel su i laver e 'l cutel an sacòcia</i> (to have the honey on the lips and the knife in the pocket); <i>a l'é bin avèj d'amis fin' a ca dël diau</i> (it's good to have friends even inside the devil's house) | Mutual help, exchange of favours, trust networks                            |
| (v) Food as heritage and social bond, conviviality | <i>piòla</i> (tavern, convivial place); <i>mangé an compagnia</i> (eat together); <i>la cusina dla nona</i> (grandmother's cooking); <i>cerèa</i> (good evening! with a connotation of elegance and cordiality); <i>a taula s'ven nen vec</i> (you cannot age when you sit for a meal); <i>ël vin pi bun al'è cul ch'as bev cun ij amis</i> (the most delicious wine is the one you drink with friends)                                             | Conviviality, memory, transmission, rituals                                 |
| (vi) Cultural plurality and borderland identity    | <i>lenga nòstra</i> (our language); <i>parlé a nòstra manera</i> (speak our way); <i>montagna e pianura a son mond diferent</i> (mountain and plain are different worlds); <i>ij fieuj a son come ij dij dla man: a nasso da l'istess pare e da l'istessa mare ma a i na j'è nen un midem</i> (children are like the fingers of the hand, they come from the same father and mother but there's no one the same as another)                         | Plural identities, dialect use, micro-local belonging                       |

Sources: Brero (2001); Cerruti & Regis (2020)

\* Laziness is traditionally dreaded upon in Piedmont and someone with no strong work ethic and craftsmanship is defined by the ironic sentence: *scapa travaj che mi i rivo!* (work, run away, because I am coming!)