



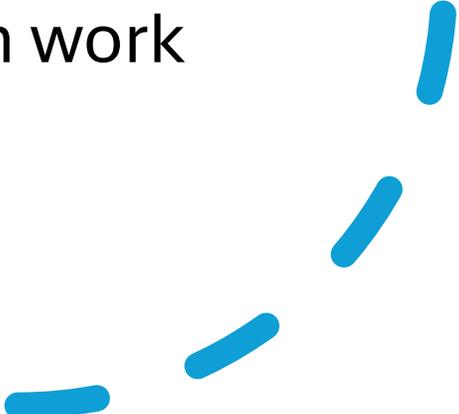
**“It’s a Tough Job, but Somebody’s Got to Do It”:  
Committed Consumers’ Voluntary Emotion Work  
in Alternative Market Systems**

Kristin Bentsen, Eileen Fischer and Per Egil Pedersen



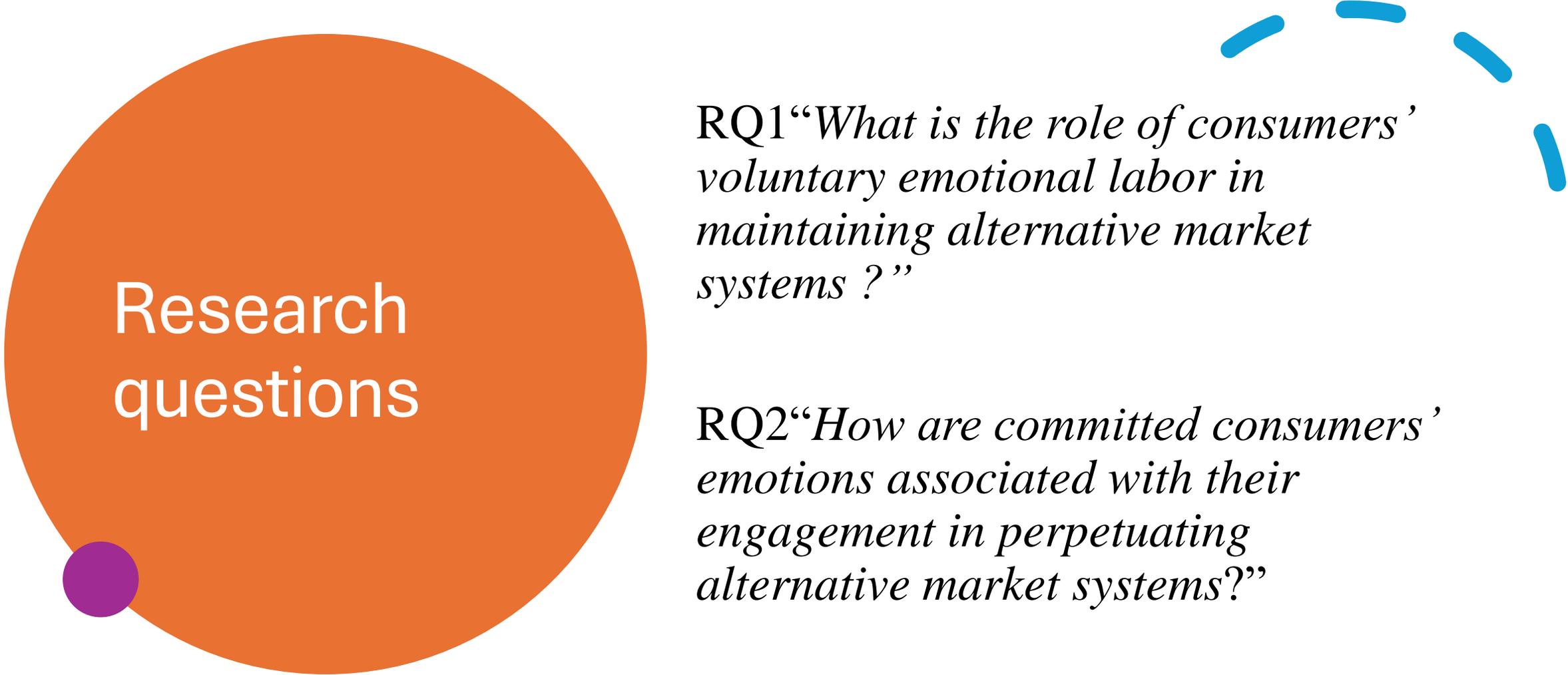


## Motivation/Background

- Concerns about the welfare of the planet and those who people it are mounting- alternative market systems can be important sources of innovation that make consumption more sustainable and equitable (Bentsen and Pedersen, 2020)
  - Complements prior research –focus on consumer effort to perpetuate alternative market systems as alternative markets
  - Focus on Consumers` emotion work (Hochschild, 1979)
- 

# The consumer psychology problem

- Focus on the role of “committed consumers”- consumers who provide extensive volunteer labor to support alternate market systems and their principles.
- These consumers can be regarded as a subset of the larger category of “prosumers” (Ritzer, 2014), in that they engage in inter-related processes of production and consumption.
- We develop theoretical insights related to this category of consumer participation in alternative market systems by addressing two research questions



## Research questions

RQ1 *“What is the role of consumers’ voluntary emotional labor in maintaining alternative market systems ?”*

RQ2 *“How are committed consumers’ emotions associated with their engagement in perpetuating alternative market systems?”*



## Research context- REKO markets in Norway:

- The first market in Norway 2017
- Participation has grown to +720 000 members across approximately 100 active REKO-markets by late 2022 (80, 2023)
- The estimated yearly sales of local food in these Norwegian markets (as of August 2022) was 216 million NOK (20 million US\$).

# Data collection within multiple REKO markets in Norway

Description	Source	Data set	Purpose of usage
Ethnographic participant-observation/informal interviews	Fieldwork in REKO markets between April 2018 and May 2024. Participant observation in REKO North, REKO West, REKO South, and REKO East (2018–2024)	Field notes, photos and video, 115 double-spaced pages Approximately 2–3 informal interviews per observation (ca 230)	Understanding motives and behavior of REKO participants
Formal interviews	Consumers, producers, and administrators (2018–2024)	30 interviews, 320 double spaced pages	In-depth understanding of the perspectives of the participants
Facebook data	Collected REKO group posts between April 2018 and May 2024: REKO producer group, REKO Norway, REKO national admin group, REKO admin groups for REKO North, West, South, and East	484 entries	First-hand experience of online practices of the participants
Facebook Group Analytics	24 REKO markets in Norway	163 downloaded files	Additional statistical insight into engagement participation



# Findings RQ1

- Perpetuating AMS through emotion work performed by committed consumers:
  - Assurance work- the emotional work that committed consumers undertake to provide their fellow consumers with a sense of trust in a market.
  - Principle promotion work-leverages emotions to persuade others of what precepts and actions are legitimate or illegitimate.
  - Practice policing work- emotion work in that it involves leveraging the emotion of shame in order to try to regulate the behaviour of someone who the committed consumer believes has transgressed normative prescriptions in the market.
  - Entrainment work- emotional labour committed consumers undertake to generate positive affect and a sense of collectively that can keep market participants engaged in the alternative market.

## Findings RQ2

- Emotions among committed consumers engaged in perpetuating AMS
  - Commitment-reinforcing emotional rewards- committed consumers experience primarily positive emotions, in particular, these include pride and satisfaction in doing something they believe is beneficial to their community and/or the environment.
  - Commitment-challenging emotional tolls- Many committed consumers who work unpaid to support an alternative market experience at least mild frustration when they find that their work is taken for granted.

# Contributions and implications

- This work contributes to our understanding of the nature and the implications of the emotion work entailed in performing volunteer labour within AMS.
- This study extends our understanding of consumers roles in alternative market systems.
- Our study compliments prior research on socially constituted emotions by indicating that volunteer work such as that performed by committed consumers in alternative markets is socially constituted by emotional dispositions of pride and satisfaction.
- However, these positive emotions that are socially constituted may give way to negative emotion work that is central to volunteering.



Author  
contact  
information

Corresponding author:

Dr Kristin Bentsen,

[Kristin.Bentsen@usn.no](mailto:Kristin.Bentsen@usn.no)

School of Business

University of South-Eastern Norway

