

Living territories to transform the world

P. Caron, E. Valette,
T. Wassenaar,
G. Coppens d'Eeckenbrugge,
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Agence française de développement
5 rue Roland Barthes, 75598 Paris Cedex 12, France
www.afd.fr

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Localized agrifood systems

Claire Cerdan, François Boucher, Denis Sautier and Stéphane Fournier

USING DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE FARM AND THE PLATE TO RETHINK AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MODEL IN CRISIS

The globalization of markets and the increasing mobility of populations have led in recent years to marked disconnects between the economic actor and his territory, and between the food consumer and his territory. As agricultural and food products become more and more standardized, the distances between their places of production and consumption are increasing. At the same time, efforts are being made to create new relationships between consumers and producers within the same territory, or to provide anchoring for new forms of agricultural production. The specialized literature on the spatial analysis of agrifood systems explores these alternatives and the modalities of supporting them. The concept of the localized agrifood system (LAS) forms part of this perspective, and is based on several empirical studies carried out in Latin America, Europe and Africa (Muchnik and de Sainte-Marie, 2010; Boucher, 2012; Fournier, 2002). This chapter reviews the interactions between territorial processes and food dynamics, exploring the extent to which they influence the evolution of rural societies, the distribution of added value between different actors in the value chains, and the deriving of value from local resources and food crops.

A RESEARCH GOAL AND APPROACH CENTRED ON ACTIVATING TERRITORIAL RESOURCES

The concept of the localized agrifood system originates from the coming together of efforts to leverage family farming products and the research conducted by economists and geographers on forms of local cooperation: districts, clusters, and local production systems. Localized agrifood systems have thus been defined as ‘concrete organizations of actors providing agrifood products and services (agricultural production units, agrifood enterprises, traders, service providers, restaurant services, etc.) associated with a specific territory by virtue of their characteristics and modes of functioning’ (Moity-Maïzi *et al.*, 2001).

Studies on localized agrifood systems characterize the forms of agrifood territorial organization by focusing on rural areas, where family farms and small-scale artisanal businesses engage in strategies to differentiate or qualify traditional products. They reveal very varied configurations 'according to their historical background, from very old systems to those created relatively recently; based on their ties to the market, from export-oriented ones to ones that target local markets; based on their range of activities, which could be dependent on a single activity, or on a diversified set of activities; based on their social organization, from those constituted by one or more networks of production units that are more or less analogous to those that are structured around a pivotal enterprise' (Muchnik, 2011). Their configuration can additionally depend on the forms of coordination between different actors, for example, a strict conformance to specifications of a collective label or a geographical indication (Fournier and Durand, 2015).

The originality of this approach is to recognize the way in which territorial resources are activated, whether they originate from humans, their histories and institutions; from ecosystems and landscapes; from products and associated qualification processes; or from consumers and their food habits. This approach is based on three stages: the identification of localized agrifood systems (context, actors, activities, institutions, relationship networks); the analysis of local resources and the processes of collective action (actual or potential); and the study and implementation of mechanisms to strengthen these systems (most often within the framework of a research-action project).

In Gloria, in the Northeast region of Brazil, a research project on dairy production revealed the economic and social importance of artisanal cheese dairies in the territory. The close geographical and social proximity of cheese makers to milk producers translates into a range of services specifically adapted to family milk production: higher procurement prices than from industrial dairies, weekly payments in cash, and the return of a portion of the whey for fattening the pigs of the producer. The actions resulting from this diagnosis propose innovations and adaptations to bring these units up to standards, in order to guarantee the health quality of these traditional products while preserve their organoleptic characteristics. A little further north, in Peru, the emergence of new coordination schemes that institutionalize existing networks have led to the activation of local resources. Codelac (Coordinadora de los derivados lácteos de Cajamarca), created in 2002, is a vertical coordination structure that brings together milk producers, cheese makers, traders, NGOs, public institutions and service providers. Other projects result, for example, in the establishment of a collective label or a geographical indication, market instruments that allow the institutionalization of the links between local resources, know-how and a territory.

TO UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT PROCESSES OF TERRITORIALIZATION OF FOOD SYSTEMS

Research on LAS has enriched reflections on territorial economics and development, primarily through three contributions.

The first is the study of the link between processes of territorialization of food systems and of dynamics of local innovation. The latter are often based on networks of professionals, family networks and the joint action of several support institutions

(Moity-Maïzi *et al.*, 2001; Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007). For example, to deal with a crisis of an overproduction of milk in north-eastern Brazil, milk producers decided to offer a new product, pre-cooked cheese, for local and regional markets. This process helped respond to an economic crisis and to keep cheese production local. Geographical indications are another form of organizational innovation that contribute to the anchoring of production in a territory. The recognition of Penja pepper and Oku honey in Cameroon and Kintamani coffee in Bali as geographical indications are also initiatives that have contributed to territorial development (Fournier and Durand, 2015).

A second contribution concerns the notion of territorial resources (Gumuchian and Pecqueur, 2007). Territories result from the construction or creation of territorial resources that are activated and revealed. These resources can be tangible or intangible: soil, climate, product, landscape, or know-how, socio-technical networks, relationships of trust, a shared culture, a food culture. All of them can be revealed by a collective process of activation, involving the identification and definition of the resource and the rules governing its use. For example, it is necessary to recognize a local race, its characteristics and its potentialities, and to define the modalities of its use and promotion.

The third contribution of work on LAS pertains to the processes of specifying these territorial resources. Indeed, it is not merely enough to have a resource in a territory for it to have an impact. The territories' actors must design strategies for the specification of their resources, such as labelled products. Work on LAS and geographical indications has described the processes of specifying territorial resources well. Since 2012, the recognition of the geographical indication for 'Vales da Uva Goethe', a wine from the Urussanga region of southern Brazil, has led to the promotion of a specific offering of the territory that combines a specific high-quality product (wine produced from a hybrid variety), the promotion of Italian culture and the introduction of new tourism-related activities (regional festivals, photography competitions, ecotourism).

However, this example gives rise to other concerns. Making an excessively specific product poses the risk of excluding some of the operators, while any relaxation in the requirements and specificity of the product (to avoid these exclusionary processes) threatens the concerned territory's competitiveness in the markets. Moreover, this tendency towards specialization leads to the reduction, or even the elimination, of productive options important for maintaining territorial equilibrium. For example, the development of a localized agrifood system based on argan oil has tended to hasten the elimination of goat farms that are part of the traditional activities in the same region in Morocco (Lacombe and Casabianca, 2015).

The challenge is to move from a development model based on the activation of specific territorial resources to a model based on the specific combination of territorial resources. It is no longer a single product (a geographical indication, for example) but the total offering from the territory that guarantees the market integration of regions (Vieira and Cerdan, 2013). In Urussanga, Brazil, the Vales da Uva Goethe wine – accorded geographical indication – is but one of many other products (artisanal grape juice, ice cream, Italian gastronomy) and services (rural tourism) there.

ORIENTING RESEARCH TO BETTER CONSIDER THE INTERSECTORAL NATURE OF AGRIFOOD DYNAMICS

Localized agrifood systems provide an appropriate framework for action to consolidate the emergence of a new professional legitimacy of family farms and small-scale speciality food producers. They examine the relationship between local space and development more broadly, and affirm the central role of actors in the territorial development.

The field of research on localized agrifood systems is evolving. A new line of research is based on a criticism, often expressed, of the focus of certain studies on sectoral dynamics, for example, around a geographical indication. It must be admitted that research on localized agrifood systems has not always integrated wider dynamics. At a given scale, the food systems associated with these territories have, however, to be considered as a combination of chains or channels built on specific production and exchange models (agro-industrial, proximity, differentiated quality). This combination has an undeniable sectoral dimension, but also relies on territorial dynamics and co-ordination. Research on localized agrifood systems now proposes changes aimed specifically at taking advantage of the interactions between these processes of qualification and innovation and the territories in which they take place. It is thus a matter of revisiting concrete examples of innovative mechanisms for the marketing of agricultural products (a geographical indication, a territorial label) and to verify the effects of the chains and the territory on the development of the mechanism in question and, inversely, the effect of this mechanism on the chains and territories (better distribution of added value, strengthening of collective dynamics, emergence of new territorial governance). This retrospective analysis highlights the driving role of consumers, in the search for new forms of protest (against mass and conventional production), and of intermediary actors (traders, catering operators).

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