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Coexistence and Confrontation of Agricultural and Food Models

A New Paradigm of Territorial Development?

Foreword by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg
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Chapter 2

The Construction of Specialisation and Diversification Pathways in Selected Milksheds: Understanding the Plurality of Agricultural Development Models



Martine Napoléone, Marie Houdart, and Guillaume Duteurtre

Agriculture and food are at the core of current societal debates. For more than half a century, agricultural spaces have been—and continue to be—profoundly transformed by the combined evolution of agriculture and the agrifood sector. With the modernisation of agriculture and the rise of agrifood firms, a profit-oriented logic has gradually taken hold, profoundly changing our relationship with the land and living organisms, with local society, with work and with food (Hervieu & Purseigle, 2013). However, under certain conditions, traditional activities driven by other rationales based on social and territorial balances continue to persist (Rieutort, 2009). With peasant principles, as also the terroir and the local, once again finding recognition and generating value in alternative food systems (Tregear, 2011), new links between societies, rural activities and consumers are opening up. Are we going to witness the end of the peasant, as Mendras (1967) predicted, and the inexorable growth of corporate agriculture (Purseigle et al., 2017)? Is a new horizon opening up for peasant forms of farming in a fragile balance with other forms of farming within agricultural territories? Our aim in this chapter is to analyse the processes of specialisation and diversification at the territorial level in all their complexity. How and why does a diversity of models exist in some territories and not in others? How are these processes of specialisation and diversification constructed within the same territory? How do they evolve together? What are the factors and conditions that favour or hinder a plurality of development models within a territory?

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To find answers to these questions, we focus on the dairy sector, which is especially subject to the interplay of forces between territorialisation and globalisation (Napoléone et al., 2015). Dairy farming involves both powerful agro-industrial companies and dynamic local actors. It concerns a product, milk, which can be transported over long distances, processed into standard products or according to ancient know-how. Milk can be sold on generic-product markets, on ‘top-of-the-range’ niche markets or even through local channels for processing into traditional products.

By analysing the pathways of recomposition of dairy activities in five contrasting rural territories (Salto in Uruguay, Brasil Novo in Brazil, and Livradois-Forez, Cévennes and Drôme Provençale in France), we examine the underlying hypothesis of this part of the book: ‘Diversification and specialisation are part of the same process of adaptation of productive spaces to the global system.’ We first present the method we used to understand these processes in their complexity. We then describe three archetypal development pathways, identified from the analysis of recompositions in the five territories, in order to isolate the main factors influencing the dynamics of specialisation and/or diversification at the scale of these territories. In the discussion, we return to the links between development models and specialisation/diversification processes at the territorial level, as well as to the key factors favouring these processes.

1 Understanding the Processes of Specialisation and Diversification at a Territorial Scale by Analysing Development Models

Given that our interest is in studying specialisation and diversification at the territorial scale, we start by considering that it is the processes that take place over time as well as a state at a given moment that, taken together, characterise a situation of specialisation or diversification. We define a territory as specialised when a large majority of production and processing systems in it are part of the same development model. In contrast, a territory is considered diversified when it is host to a plurality of systems that are part of different development models. We consider that a development model is an aim, an orientation, and an ethic in which an individual or collective project is embedded. The development model thus mobilises not only conceptions and technical and economic solutions, but also political choices (Duteurtre, 2014). It brings into play a system’s rationality and coherence, which condition or orient the form of development, i.e. the strategic choices made, the way of determining what is a resource or not, and the methods used to mobilise them, set up governance modalities and evaluate the result. We characterise the form of development by the specific way in which attributes of the territory, the farming systems and the agri-chain are linked and translated into particular modes of production (Napoléone & Boutonnet, 2015b). In a territory, there may be a single or several forms of development, all of which may evolve. We will use the term ‘development pathway’ to describe, at the

territorial scale, the types of succession involving one or more forms of development over time.

The method we have implemented is intended to account for the processes of transformation of dairy activities within a territory and to identify underlying factors. Our analysis is based on the proposition that reconfigurations in milksheds are driven by two types of processes: one of globalisation, the other of territorialisation. We are interested in the forms of development of dairy activities, through the interrelations between the transformations of agri-chains, of animal husbandry systems and of the territory in question. Using this analytical framework, we represent the processes of globalisation and territorialisation through two ideal-types (Box 1). The changes in the milksheds were identified from comprehensive analyses, including of archival material, and then recorded on a historical timeline (50 years on average). This chronicle allowed us to analyse the forms of interrelations present in each territory at a given time (synchronic analysis) and their evolution (diachronic analysis) (Napoléone & Corniaux, 2015).

Box 1 Two contrasting ideal-types

Globalisation. Process ‘driven’ by an agro-industrial and sectoral dynamic: concentration of companies, lengthening of commercial supply chains, standardisation of products; concentration of activities in the most favourable geographical areas; in livestock farming, intensification, expansion.

Territorialisation. Process ‘driven’ by local and territorial dynamics: artisanal production and processing units, collective project(s) involving a diversity of local activities, local distribution channels, territorial anchoring of products, development of identity dynamics. Farmers adapt the size and scope of their activity and their practices to the resources available to them.

2 Construction of Specialisation and/or Diversification Pathways

Based on the analysis of the development pathways of the five rural territories, we identify three types of milksheds. In the first type, industrialised forms of development dominate, belonging to a globalised development model. The second type is one in which territorialised forms of development dominate, belonging to a territorialised development model. And, finally, the third type is one in which different forms of development can be found alongside each other, which can belong to either of the two development models.

2.1 An Agro-industrial Specialisation Pathway

The example of the Salto milkshed in Uruguay (Correa et al., 2015) helps us understand how a territorial specialisation pathway towards an ‘agro-industrial’ model develops. This milkshed developed in a landlocked region which did not have any dairy tradition. During a first period (from the 1930s to the 1980s), the State encouraged the production of milk, investing in constructing infrastructure and in the development of a cooperative dairy industry to supply the city of Salto with standard products. A second period was characterised by the extension of milk markets to neighbouring countries within the framework of protected trade agreements (Mercosur). Agro-industry modernised, benefiting from private foreign investment, production intensified and farms grew in size. Cereal farmers turned to dairy production. In the current period, the milkshed’s development is marked by the conquest of the (unprotected) world market. The largest dairy farms continue to grow. This growth is based on a mechanised, capital-intensive farming model. Recently, the increased demands of the dairy industry have led it to stop collections from farms smaller than 50 ha. Some of these farms, close to urban areas, have thus been compelled to reorient their system in a territorial logic by associating dairy farming and market gardening, with products being sold via short urban channels.

During this journey of development, this system expanded by adjusting the products produced to the chosen market (type and volume): primary production to meet industrial demand, and territorial development to suit the development of this production (increase in surface area, intensification of land, etc.). The aim and rationale have remained unchanged, oriented towards the increased productivity of production factors. They are shared by all the actors in the system, who manage their activities according to this logic at their own levels. The physical characteristics (large surface areas available, land suitable for intensification, etc.) have facilitated this process. This pathway is oriented by a development process driven by a globalisation model. However, while this is the current trend, the dynamics reveal an orientation towards two forms of development: a form of development articulated around a powerful agro-industry, collecting milk from large farms, oriented towards the export market and long urban supply chains, and localised forms, concerning small farms selling via niche channels oriented towards meeting local demand for diversified agricultural products.

To summarise, the process of a territory’s agro-industrial specialisation is characterised by a top-down pathway, with the dissemination of a State-approved development model in which each actor shares the same objective. The model’s development and success create sociotechnical barriers that reinforce its development. At the same time, this model leads to the exclusion of activities that do not correspond to its standards: new forms of development are then forced to be created, leading to a diversification of development models in this specialised territory.

2.2 A ‘Territorialised’ Specialisation Pathway

The case of the Brasil Novo milkshed in Brazil (Poccard & Carvalho, 2015) illustrates a development pathway towards a ‘territorialised’ model, based on the local ‘reinvention’ of know-how and products. The origins of this landlocked milkshed along the Trans-Amazonian highway date back to the time migrants from dairy regions settled on this agricultural frontier, bringing with them their dietary habits and their cheese processing know-how. Dairy activity in this territory developed on local bases (economic, social and cultural) in three main stages. First, dairy production with on-farm processing emerged from the migrants’ traditional know-how, as a complement to meat production. During a second period, artisanal dairies were created to meet the demand of Brasil Novo, a small town in this enclave. Production methods were similar to traditional ones. Finally, at present, dairy activity is consolidating to meet the growing demand of consumers in Brasil Novo. Regional investors are facilitating the modernisation of processing facilities. The State is relaxing cheese production standards so that artisanal processing becomes compliant.

This milkshed’s dynamics are tied to its territory in many ways: through its isolation, which has limited trade with the outside world and maintained a local urban demand; through its farmland, whose size and quality have allowed production to develop; through the presence of farmers who are ready to orient part of their activities towards dairy production; through the products and know-how originally brought by migrants and now adopted by artisanal dairies; and through the demand of local consumers for these artisanal products.

In summary, the pathway here is characterised by a bottom-up process, initiated by the pioneers, with the State intervening only at a later stage to ensure the sustainability of these activities by adapting the relevant standards. The milkshed’s development is based on processing know-how shared by producers and processors, shared dietary habits and knowledgeable consumers. All the resources necessary for this ‘territorialised’ pathway’s development are present within the territory (common culture, fodder resources, livestock farming, local demand).

2.3 Pathways that Lead to a Diversity of Models in a Territory

Three French milksheds have followed pathways that have led to a diversity of development models: Cévennes (Napoléone & Boutonnet, 2015a), Drôme (Napoléone & Boutonnet, 2011), Livradois-Forez (Houdart et al., 2015; Houdart, 2018). All three are mountain or semi-mountain territories (Box 2).

Box 2 The characteristics of these territories

These are semi-mountainous territories with a rich heritage value: landscapes recognised in the form of protected natural parks and traditional products rooted in the local food culture. They exhibit specific spatial characteristics: a core surrounded by a massif, with difficult land, and more open, cultivable parts of the territory, close to major roads. These milksheds border urbanised plains that represent major consumption basins (Montpellier, Clermont-Ferrand, Marseille, etc.).

Cow milk is produced in Livradois-Forez and almost all the farms in this territory are dairy farms. Most of the utilised agricultural area (UAA) is arable. In contrast, the farms in Cévennes and Drôme mainly undertake goat breeding. These territories are wooded and arable land is scarce. More than 80% of the farms are managed by tenant farmers.

These pathways were constructed in four main stages.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the peasant model of the household economy prevailed in all of these territories. Surplus production was sold locally. Artisanal dairies and maturing units were set up, relying on traditional know-how and selling the products locally.

After the Second World War, production models started diversifying under the impetus of public policies. The State encouraged agricultural modernisation, the creation of robust agri-chains, and the development of mass distribution channels. Consumption patterns began changing. In the three milkshed studied, a diversity of models, spatially distributed, emerged: intensification of production and industrialisation of processing in the areas most favourable to this type of development; and maintenance of territorialised activities in isolated areas, thanks to the continued demand for local products (Fourme d'Ambert, Bleu d'Auvergne, Pélardon, Picodon).

The 1980–2000 period was marked by major difficulties. The success of the productivist model led to overproduction, especially as major investments were required to bring dairies up to standard and increases in production followed to make these investments viable. The 'mad cow crisis' in 1986 undermined consumer confidence. In order to gain market share, agribusinesses segmented their product ranges with labels of differentiation (name of famous place or product, organic label, cheese with a 'terroir' identity), which created confusion between local cheeses and industrial cheeses that also claimed a 'terroir' identity. In order to differentiate their cheese from industrial cheeses and to protect the name and reputation of their products, the actors of traditional production sought the recognition of their cheeses as Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs).¹ Once PDOs were granted, companies could no longer produce cheeses outside the area bearing the name of traditional products. In the 1990s, mergers and commercial agreements between industrial groups from outside the area and local dairies multiplied. In this way, these industrial groups

¹ PDOs: Fourme d'Ambert, 1972; Bleu d'Auvergne, 1975; Picodon, 1983; Pélardon, 2000.

could maintain PDO products in their offerings, and the small dairies could reduce the logistical costs of accessing long supply chains. The diversity of models struggled to be maintained during this period. The coherence of the territorial model was undermined.

More recently, the diversification of food demands is encouraging the return to a diversity of models in these territories. The criteria pertaining to proximity are becoming more important for consumers. At the same time, demand from emerging countries is a growth opportunity for the dairy industry (Idèle, 2016). In the three milksheds studied, we are witnessing both a return to territorial dynamics for some of the actors and activities, and an increase in industrialisation for others. The increase in demand for direct sales and the diversification of marketing methods allow the artisanal dairies that have remained independent and the farmers who do on-farm processing (or farmer producers) to take advantage of their artisanal character and the product's local image. Most of them are refocusing on channels based on proximity (geographical or organisational) or on niche distribution. Political actors are supporting these changes. The industrial dairies continue on their path to concentration. Industrial groups can adopt one of two strategic orientations: to position themselves on the world market and maintain a place in the domestic market, or to remain the leader of a regional market by emphasising traditional products.

Ultimately, territorial and sectoral actors were able to mobilise the diversity of territorial resources according to the orientation of the development model to which they belonged. These developments were driven by forms of consumption. The strategies of processing companies also played an important role. While in some cases, artisanal enterprises were absorbed by industrial ones, in others cooperation between globalised industrial firms and artisanal enterprises enabled the latter to survive in difficult times. The protection of typical products by official designations of specific quality has favoured the diversity of forms of development, some focused on sectoral development (often mobilising a diversity ranging from standards to 'terroir' products), others anchored in a logic of territorialisation. Industry has adapted its processing chains to accommodate both generic products and more typical products in order to reach 'connoisseur' consumers who are accessible through long regional urban distribution channels. Artisans and farmer producers have taken advantage of their small-scale character via specialised distribution channels. Products have been delivered to consumers through a variety of channels (short or long, generic niche or local), which has helped to develop product awareness. It is certain that the current situation, with demand for generic products (export) and local products (short distribution channels), facilitates the deployment of distinct forms of development.

3 Discussion

Studying the processes of specialisation and diversification at the territorial level by analysing the development pathways being followed allows us to understand the ways in which these processes are tied to development models. This approach sheds

light on the main factors of diversification and specialisation at the territorial level: these processes are more than an adaptation to global changes, indeed they are driven by food demand and influenced by the territorial resources available.

3.1 Complex Linkages

Our analysis shows that specialisation can take place in both globalised and territorialised models. It is not always a process dependent on a single decision-making or power centre. In some cases, specialisation is the result of the predominance of agro-industrial models functioning in a context of globalisation. In such cases, the goal is oriented by public policies. Even though there are several decision-making and power centres, all the actors follow the same logic, at their different levels (policymaker, agro-industry manager, breeder and farmer). All the activities are organised—and segmented—along a value chain ranging from production to consumption. In other cases, the specialisation is that of activities in a territory-centric logic. The milkshed is then characterised by the predominance of horizontal relations between different actors who undertake their activities following a same logic of territorial anchoring.

As for processes of diversification, we highlight the fact that these processes challenge the coexistence, or the concomitancy, of different development models at the territorial scale. In some cases, as in the three French ones, the coexistence of models may result from the dynamics of specialisation under different models, spatially distributed over the territory or it may result from the adaptation of the models present to different territorial and global constraints and opportunities. In other cases, such as of the Salto milkshed in Uruguay, diversification results from the effects of the specialisation of the agro-industrial model, which leads to the exclusion of certain actors from the system, and thus to the emergence of a territorialised model that then coexists in the same territory.

3.2 Between Food Demands and Territorial Resources

Trajectories of diversification and specialisation can be analysed as the consequence of market dynamics and the actions of strategic actors (firms, the State, professional organisations or civil society) (van der Ploeg et al., 2008). In the case of animal husbandry agri-chains, researchers have highlighted the numerous economic advantages that accrue from specialisation through concentration, such as gains of productivity or economies of scale (Roguet et al., 2015). However, several authors are less convinced about the importance of the ‘global’ factor in specialisation and diversification processes, especially in the case of dairy production, and note the fact that specialisation or diversification is never solely an adaptation to the globalised market

(DuPuis & Block, 2008). This is what our work confirms by highlighting the influence of the diversity of food demands and territorial resources in both diversification and specialisation processes.

Food demand influences the orientation of development models. We note that four main types of demand have influenced, to varying degrees, the evolution of development models in the milksheds studied: the demand for commodities for international trade; the demand for generic products for distribution through national or regional long supply chains; the demand for products with a quality label and/or originating from a particular area for distribution in regional, or even national, long supply chains; and, finally, the demand by consumers for food produced in proximity (geographical or organisational).

Not all of these demands are compatible with all forms of production, processing and the 'milkshed role' of the territory. Territorial characteristics can lead to different developments in various parts of the milkshed: the conditions necessary to satisfy each type of demand require different resources (Houdart & Pocard, 2015). So while some territories are favourable to the expression of several forms of development, others are not.

Finally, combinations of food demand and territorial resources lead to three possible situations. In the first, agro-industrial development is geared towards the production of commodities (standard products) in order to gain market share in countries in which consumption is growing. This type of export-oriented industrial development takes place only in those geographical, social, technical and economic situations that meet its requirements. The second situation is characterised by dynamics that are conducive to the commercial positioning of agro-industrial processors in the long supply chains of national or regional mass distribution entities. This can apply both to generic products as well as to products sold under quality labels. In all cases, the supply of milk must be compatible with industrial processing and distribution via long supply chains (regularity and homogeneity of supply, high volumes, density of livestock in the territory). In this situation, the size of production systems tends to increase, relying, if necessary, on the purchase of inputs if the territory cannot satisfy the herd's food requirements. This agro-industrial process can accommodate certain requirements and constraints (e.g. specifications) if compliance with them will allow the industrial operator to differentiate itself in commercial segments. This is the case of the growth in collections by agro-industries in PDO territories. These products offer a competitive advantage, allowing the industry and distributor to segment their ranges. Finally, the third situation is that of processes tied to a territorial logic that is not very connected to world markets or to mass distribution, in which the territory's milk offer corresponds to a demand for geographical, relational or organisational proximity (Rallet and Torre, 2007). In these situations, supply is composite; it is driven by various exchanges and relationships at the territorial or agri-food system levels. These interpersonal relationships contribute to the construction of common norms and values between the people involved. The horizontal dynamics in play synergise elements other than purely commercial ones between the agri-chain's actors (Pecqueur, 2014).

4 Conclusion

The major issue concerning the future of milksheds is the tension between a selective evolution of corporate forms of agriculture and the diversification of models leaving room for forms that are very much rooted in their territories. The diversity of forms of agriculture are then strongly tied to the political regulations that are put in place and to the way in which each form fits in and weaves links with an economic, social and territorial environment. Ultimately, specialisation and diversification at a territorial scale are processes of adaptation controlled by actors with very different registers of legitimacy, which go beyond the sole productivist aspect. Some are strongly driven by policies and encouraged by the agro-industrial sector, while others are supported by a civil society in search of different values. The diversity of models in a territory allows for a diversity of market access and a plurality of forms of conducting farming activity. While diversification can be considered to be a richness that increases the capacity for initiative at the territorial scale, the sustainability of the coexistence of models cannot be taken for granted. For the sustainable development of territories and agri-chains, the challenge seems to us to be to recognise these forms of development, through a territorial approach, to analyse them with regard to their own interest and, if necessary, to put in place regulatory measures to encourage their coexistence.

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