

The commitment of local authorities to the logistics of short food supply chains: a diversity of perceptions of the issues depending on the territories and scales

Gonçalves Amélie (INRAE – UMR AGIR), Raton Gwenaëlle (Université Gustave Eiffel – SPLOTT),
Raimbert Céline (Université Gustave Eiffel – SPLOTT), Wallet Frédéric (INRAE – UMR AGIR)

Keywords: logistics, food, territories, policy, short food supply chains

Objectives:

Local food policies have proliferated in France in recent years, driven by the national policy in favour of local food plans (Projets alimentaires de territoire - PAT), initiated in 2014 (Maréchal et al., 2019). These policies aim to reterritorialise food and even to structure territorial food systems (PNA, 2022), which are most often understood as the linking at local level of different components of food supply chains, from production to consumption (Hospes, Brons, 2016; Van Berkum et al., 2018). Logistics, defined as "all the operations required to transfer flows from the place of design/preparation/production to the place of consumption" (Damien, 2010), is a key vector for making these linkages operational. Many public players recognise the need to take action in this area and are trying to implement strategies. However, this commitment is not self-evident, because 1) public players have few competences and levers for action; 2) this is a new field of action in which almost everything remains to be built; 3) the problems and responses to be provided as place-based and thus vary from one place to another.

This study therefore focuses on the way in which local authorities are dealing with the logistics of short food supply chains. More specifically, we are seeking to answer the following three questions: how are local authorities building their commitment to logistics? What issues and resources do they use to tackle it? Do they approach it differently depending on their scale of action and the degree of urbanisation of their area?

Contribution of the paper:

Our contribution is twofold.

First, regarding the topic. Although there is a wealth of literature on local food systems, the specific issue of logistics remains a blind spot in the field. There are articles on the performance of short food supply chains (SFSCs) and their logistics, others on collectives addressing logistics issues and on the analysis of certain sales channels (Raton et al., 2020), but to our knowledge, there have been no scientific publications to date on understanding the way in which public players are involved in the subject.

Then, from an analytical point of view, we propose to draw on the literature on local food policies, and more specifically their governance, to define a framework for analysing the way in which local authorities construct their action on this subject which, like food, is relatively new to them. This literature highlights four key points for characterising and understanding local authorities' commitment:

- the areas of competence and action that local authorities can mobilise (Bodiguel et al., 2021).
- the organisation's internal functioning and resources, which refer to their capacity for organisational innovation (Sibbing, Candel, 2021) and their capacity for expertise, i.e. for "translating strategic orientations into operational action plans" (Pahun, 2022).

- the players on which public authorities rely to define and implement their actions. They enable us to understand how the public authority constructs its actions, particularly if, as is often the case in food policies, it positions itself primarily as a pivotal player (Darrot et al., 2022) or as an assembler (Santo, Moragues-Faus, 2019), instigating/organising new collaborations between the players that are already present. Identifying these players also helps to explain the directions taken by public action (Michel et al., 2020).
- the scales of action and types of territory. The literature raises many questions about the most appropriate scale of action. It also shows that the instruments used vary according to the type of public authority and its scale of action.

Method:

An online survey was sent to French local authorities in September 2021, via the RMT Alimentation Locale website (a French exchange network on short food supply chains and local food systems). As an exploratory survey, it had two aims: 1.) to generate knowledge about local authorities' involvement in SFSC logistics; 2.) to identify local authorities involved in the subject, or even ready to take part in a working group within the RMT. The questionnaire consists of closed questions with response options and open questions, with various amounts of narratives.

After removing duplicates, the responses to the closed questions from 48 local authorities were analysed using a statistical analysis of the responses. As the quality of the narratives varied from one local authority to another, it was treated separately and analysed using NVivo software for 46 of these local authorities. The narratives reports provided us with information about the players involved, the actions taken and the logistical problems encountered by the local authorities.

Main results:

First, our work shows that the resources of local authorities on logistics issues are still largely to be acquired. For the moment, they are confined mainly to human resources, with varied levels of knowledge of logistics issues and logistics initiatives in their area. The presence of human resources for logistics in the SFSCs does not seem to depend on the scale of the local authorities' action, nor on their size. These resources are often very limited. The vast majority of local authorities also feel that they lack knowledge on the subject, particularly on points that they feel to be key, such as feedback or the flows of food circulating in their area.

However, local authorities are taking action. To do so, they rely on a variety of players. The nature of the links with these players and the nature of the players themselves vary according to the type of local authority. However, actual partnerships are still rare. They are mainly forged with public bodies: chambers of agriculture, other local authorities, universities and chambers of commerce and industry. References to non-public players are rarer, but do exist (companies or social inclusion structures, public catering, professional associations). The metropolitan areas and « project territories » never mention partnerships, but do mention inter-territorial cooperations. There are two types of inter-territorial cooperation: consultation, which tends to be informal between neighbouring local authorities; and joint actions, usually within the framework of a Local food plan.

The types of action vary according to the food policy (degree of formalisation and more or less systemic nature of the policy) and the type of area. They reflect the variety of logistics issues encountered or perceived in different areas, and notably according to their degree of urbanisation. For example, the attention paid to logistics facilities varies according to the territorial level, as does the type of link in the logistics chain that the actions focus on. A rural/urban gradient seems to be emerging as regards the attention paid to the matching of supply and demand (see table 1).

Table 1: A rural/urban gradient in the attention paid to the matching of supply and demand

Type of authority	Communes (2)	Territoires de projet (3)	Communautés de communes (10)	Communautés d'agglomération (20)	Communautés urbaines et Métropoles (4)	Départements (6)	Régions (1)
Supply/demand matching	Only on public catering	Mainly focused on public catering		Other outlets than public catering Difficulties experienced by consumers (increased number of trips)		Never mentioned	
Supply		Insufficient volumes		Supply organisation issues	Never mentioned		
			Lack of diversity because of the specialisation of agriculture in the area	Low diversity because of the lack of processing facilities in the area			
Territorial constraints		Geographical dispersion of farms and delivery points		Isolation of farms and distances between production and consumption areas		Geographical dispersion of farms and delivery points	
		Dispersion of public catering establishments					
			Accessibility and traffic problems linked to the topography and climate		Accessibility and traffic problems linked to the congestion and the creation of a ZEF		
		Logistics costs and time spent on logistic activities					

In conclusion, although different ways of tackling the issue are emerging, we note that it is being tackled by a wide variety of administrative levels. Nevertheless, it is always part of actions on food or agriculture. For example, the local authorities surveyed are building up their expertise in SFSCs logistics by first incorporating the subject into their food policies, whether formalised via a Local food plan or not, by making their human resources available on the subject, and then by carrying out actions to produce knowledge, promote consultation and experimentation. Taking logistics into account therefore seems to be a vehicle for operationalising the actions already undertaken by food policies or strategies. So, there are strong links between the actions of the Local food plans and the subject of SFSCs logistics and the way it is addressed.

References:

BODIGUEL L., T. BREGER, G. MARECHAL, C. ROCHARD, (2021), L'action publique en matière d'alimentation locale. Les compétences accordées par la loi et les règlements aux collectivités locales (régions, départements, communes) dans le domaine de la production, la transformation et la consommation d'aliments locaux,
 DARROT C., MARIE M., HOCHEDÉZ C., GUILLEMIN, 2022, Chronologie de la transition vers l'alimentation locale dans quatre villes de l'Ouest : quels enseignements ? Economie Rurale, 382 : 111-131.

HOSPES, O., BRONS, A. (2016). Food system governance: A systematic review. In KENNEDY, A., LILJEBLAD, J., Food Systems Governance. Challenge for Justice, Equality and Human Rights. Routledge, London and New York, pp. 13-42.

MARECHAL G., NOEL J., WALLET F. (2019), Les projets alimentaires territoriaux (PAT), entre rupture, transition et immobilisme ? POUR, GREP, Agriculture : des ruptures à la transition

MICHEL L., FOUILLEUX E., BRICAS N., 2020, Politiser pour ne rien changer ? L'alimentation entre critiques et canalisation de la critique. In FOUILLEUX E., MICHEL L. (dir.) Quand l'alimentation se fait politique. Presses Universitaires de Rennes : 329-344.

PAHUN J. (2022), Gouverner l'agriculture localement ? La capacité politique des collectivités territoriales sur la régulation du secteur agricole. Géocarrefour,96/4

RATON G, A. GONCALVES, GAILLARD L., F. WALLET, (2020), Logistique des circuits courts alimentaires de proximité : état des lieux, nouveaux enjeux et pistes d'évolution, 69 p,

SANTO E., MORAGUES-FAUS A. (2019), Towards a trans-local food governance: Exploring the transformative capacity of food policy assemblages in the US and UK. Geoforum, 98 : 75-87.

SIBBING L.V., CANDEL J.J.L. (2021), Realizing urban food policy: a discursive institutionalist analysis of Ede municipality. Food Security, 13 : 571–582.

VAN BERKUM, S., DINGERINK, J., RUBEN, R. (2018), The food systems approach: sustainable solutions for a sufficient supply of healthy food. (Wageningen Economic Research memorandum; No. 2018-064). Wageningen Economic Research.