

« Does collective catering in rural territories activate geographic proximity with its suppliers ? »

D. Gallaud (CESAER-UMR 1051AgroSup Dijon- INRAE).

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After the food crisis in 2008, various large urban areas became aware of the lack of resilience of their food systems, which depend on long geographical import circuits and numerous intermediaries, leading to risks of shortages (Bricas, 2019, Rastouin 2018). They have therefore taken up the challenge of food and are seeking to reconnect with their nearest hinterland, especially as more than half of the world's population already resides there and their population will continue to grow (Moreno-Monroy & al, 2021). This awareness of a lack of economic organisation of food system is in line with previous analyses on the development of obesity linked to the lack of nutritional quality of food, which led some pioneering cities to start modifying their food systems in the 1990s. It is also in line with the awareness of the lack of environmental sustainability of systems based on large distances between actors (Rastoin, 2018).

Faced with the challenges linked to food, public actors also will seek to encourage a transition towards reterritorialised food systems by using the lever of collective catering (Morgan & Sonino, 2010). The number of meals served each day is thus conceived as a lever for a change of scale favouring a transition towards alternative food systems. In France, the Egalim law attempts to reinforce reterritorialisation by imposing that local and organic products represent 50% of purchases by value from 2022, which aims to develop catering purchases from agricultural producers but also from local businesses. Reterritorialisation is seen as having positive economic effects (maintaining local agriculture) but also environmental effects (encouraging changes in agricultural production methods and reducing transport) and social effects by improving the nutritional quality of food by encouraging an increase in the consumption of fresh produce (particularly fruit and vegetables).

The public Procurement code prevents writing a call for tenders specifying a local preference, which is anti-competitive. So the main suppliers to the catering industry : the wholesalers are generally located at a distance from the purchasers, except for those who belong to a group and who may have establishments closer to the purchasers. Purchasers do not activate often geographic proximity with wholesalers. On the other hand, they manage to activate some kind of organized proximity with these players. But recently, public policies have tried to impulse the reterritorialization of food system involving transactions with local actors and encouraging to activate latent geographical proximity with them especially with local farmers. These new suppliers are not used to working with the catering industry, so the organised proximity is often very weak with these actors. Thus, reterritorialisation implies a reconfiguration of the articulation of proximities in supply chains.

This reterritorialisation of food has mainly been studied for the moment in urban territories. The goal of public policies is to reconnect them to their close hinterland. This is all the more true as urban territories have seized the food issue to redevelop a new food governance.

However, rural areas suffer from specific problems and in many cases inequalities in access to food. Moreover, they also suffer from invisibilisation, as potential initiatives are little studied. Small-scale food retailing is less present in rural than in urban areas (Trevien, 2017), even though supermarkets have continued to cover the territory and have become the main local shop for people living in rural areas (Massal, 2018,). However, the inequalities between territories are also inequalities of access in terms of travel time. Thus 72% of rural people have to travel to the outskirts of towns to access a supermarket (Lsa 2018). In addition to the number of shops present in the different types of territory, many studies also highlight qualitative differences with a lesser variety of food on offer in rural areas and less access to fresh produce, with local shops offering mainly processed products (Smith & al 2011). In the United States, even though the number of food deserts seems to be decreasing between 2010 and 2019, through the installation of supermarkets in rural areas, the offer proposed in these territories is more often centred on hard discount and highly processed products (Karpyn & al, 2019). The offer of healthy products or alternative channels (in particular organic product) is still not very present in these territories (Smith & al, 2011).

To face this lack of supply from the market circuit, inhabitants of rural areas maintain self-produced food practices such as gardening, hunting and fishing, as well as the donation of food products. These paractices are traditional forms of access to food products in rural areas. Indeed, some inhabitants are also starting home processing practices, making preserves and charcuterie products (Vandebroucke & al, 2019). In the USA, these food production cultures are also very present in the native American communities studied in Minnesota by Smith & al (2011).

Collective catering is generally less present in rural areas than in urban areas, but it is not totally absent. The use of this lever for reterritorialisation can still be mobilised, but catering in these areas may be faced with specific issues, mainly a lack of local supply due to the decrease in the number of farmers and the orientation of their production. In France, there is a strong specialisation of farms, for example the north east is strongly specialised in field crops.

We will use the approach of the economy of proximity (Gilly & Torre, 2000, Torre, 2009) to analyse the (potential) activation of geographical proximity by rural and urban collective catering buyers with their suppliers? Geographical proximity is not only a question of distance between actors but also implies accessibility to rapid means of transport as well as temporal and financial resources. These points can be problematic in the context of proximity circuits involving transactions with agricultural producers. The development of producer-restaurant transactions implies new tasks for producers (sometimes repackaging of products or initial processing (washing or even trimming and cutting of vegetables) who do not necessarily have the time resources to carry them out. On the other hand, proximities are activated if the actors value them and find a positive meaning in them. For the time being, the geographical proximity between restaurants and producers is not valued very highly, as collective restaurants are not the main outlet for producers, nor necessarily the most valued.

Does this activation lead to the reconnection of urban territories with the nearby hinterland or, on the contrary, is a new activation between rural buyers and rural suppliers emerging? Do rural territories continue to suffer from a lack of local supply or, on the contrary, does the lack of organised proximity lead to a lack of activation of local food systems?

To analyse the network of suppliers to the collective catering sector, we will use the Agrilocal database. This is a directory-type tool set up by the départements to put buyers and suppliers of local products in touch with each other. We will use the urban catchment area database (Insee, 2020) to qualify the location of collective restaurants and their suppliers. Finally, we will use the social network method to analyse the network of suppliers to the collective catering sector. The objective is to identify a profile of buyers located in rural areas to be compared with that of urban areas according to their potential activation of geographical proximity. Our study area is the Côte d'Or department, which is part of the BFC region, one of the most rural regions in France. This department is one of the most rural in the region.

In terms of expected results, we seek to build the global network of suppliers to the collective catering sector in the Côte d'Or. We expect a probable impact of the two major urban centres of Dijon and Beaune in terms of the location of buyers and the diversity of suppliers. The objective will then be to identify typical profiles of establishments in rural areas, in particular among the large buyers of local products, so that they can be compared with the profiles of establishments located in urban areas.

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