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The Civic and Social Dimensions of Food Production and Distribution in Alternative Food Networks in France and Southern Brazil

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Abstract. This article offers comparative insight into alternative food networks, based on French and Brazilian case studies. Looking at a series of initiatives, such as producer–consumer networks (Ecovida in Southern Brazil, AMAP in France), collective producer shops, farmers’ markets, and school provisioning schemes, we analyse the modes of coordination and decision-making that are articulated and the roles of the different actors involved. We show that the growing role of consumers and producers in these food networks, not only as individuals but also as citizens often involved in civil society organizations, can directly influence changes in public policy and the forms of agriculture practised, thereby leading to a better integration of the civic and social dimensions of food production and distribution. In both countries alternative food networks have strongly contributed to the legitimization of agro-ecology, although this is framed significantly by national specificities surrounding the institutionalization of ecological agriculture. In France this process focuses on organic agriculture, while it is more diverse in Brazil. Finally, we show that civic food networks’ influence on public policy partly relies on the alliances these networks are able to develop amongst themselves and with more institutional actors. We conclude with a discussion about food democracy.

Introduction

In the social sciences, alternative food networks have given rise to a growing literature in which countries of the South are still under-represented, despite historical evidence of such initiatives over many decades. In Brazil since the early 1980s, ‘family farmers’ have developed marketing systems, often with the support of religious and civil organizations, agricultural extension agents and NGOs, linking producers and consumers, based on principles of trust and equity (Brandenburg, 2002). In 2010, these alternative food networks (farmers’ markets, box schemes or direct delivery systems) channeled half of the certified organic production within the Bra-

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zilian domestic market (Blanc and Kledal, 2012). In France, some forms of direct sales have been maintained over time, such as open markets and roadside stalls, despite a sharp increase in the market share for food by supermarkets (75%). Meanwhile, in the wake of growing concern about food provenance and modes of production, partly induced by various food safety crises in the 1990s, other types of food networks have developed, such as box schemes run by producers and consumers, collective producer shops, and farmers' markets. As in Brazil, even though they are not restricted to organic products and farmers, these alternative food networks now channel a significant share of organic production, of which 'only' about 45% is sold through supermarkets against the 75% mentioned above regarding food in general (Agence Bio, 2010).

In both countries, one of the specificities of these 'new' or developing alternative food networks is that most of them directly involve producers, consumers and sometimes other actors, whereas more 'conventional'¹ food chains are dominated generally by downstream economic actors (wholesalers, processors, retailers). Therefore, not only do these alternative food networks establish direct links between producers and consumers, in contrast with the distance that characterizes the 'conventional' food system, they may also facilitate the redistribution of power across the food chain.

This is one of the main issues addressed by a large part of the English-speaking literature so far: apart from the changes they allow on a local scale and through direct interactions between producers and consumers, how can these alternative food networks (AFNs) induce structural change on a larger scale (Goodman and Watts, 1997; Allen et al., 2003; Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Feagan, 2007)? These authors have also highlighted AFNs' limits in overcoming social inequalities among farmers and consumers or between them. More recently, some analysts have suggested moving past the notion of *alternative* food networks, defined by their opposition to mainstream criteria, regulations and values, and are proposing instead the concept of *civic* food networks (Renting et al., this issue). This notion, and others such as 'food democracy' (Hassanein, 2003; Wilkins, 2005) or 'civic agriculture' (Lyson, 2004), highlights the crucial role of civil society. The diversity of work within the English-speaking literature also reflects the diversity of theoretical angles adopted to investigate these issues: political economy, ecological modernization, actor-network theory, and transition theories (Lockie and Kitto, 2000; Ploeg et al., 2000; also for a review, see Deverre and Lamine, 2010).

In France, part of the literature devoted to alternative food networks has studied their impact on farmers' and consumers' economic and social well-being. More specifically, it has considered the way these networks address both producers' and consumers' uncertainties (Lamine, 2005), as well as the links they develop not only between producers and consumers but also among producers (Chiffolleau, 2009). The possibility of structural change on a wider scale has also been investigated, through the analysis of the ways in which alternative food movements use consumption to make citizens more active in the negotiation of economic regulation. This is orchestrated through consumer education, through engagement in forms of trade that offer alternatives to the conventional market and, finally, through mobilization in protest campaigns (Dubuisson-Quellier et al., 2011). It has also been demonstrated that at the local level of 'territorial agri-food systems,'² the broader ecologization of agri-food practices requires an exploration of the possible complementarities of alternative and conventional systems (Lamine et al., 2012). Finally, other authors have

considered how AFNs might constitute a means for civil society to influence public policy through different modes of action (Cardona, 2012), some of which we also identify in our case studies.

In Brazil, social movements opposing agricultural intensification and modernization have been described as playing a major role in the initial phase of the development of organic and agro-ecological agriculture (Brandenburg, 2002). Recently, AFNs have mainly been studied in association with the notions of food sovereignty and food security, two concepts that emerged against the backdrop of a food crisis from 2008 onwards. The notion of food sovereignty involves the right to food and the autonomy of social actors in their strategies and politics of production, distribution and consumption, respecting cultural diversity and emphasizing the importance of family (or peasant) farming (Maluf, 2004; Ploeg, 2008; Wilkinson, 2008; Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2012).

In this article, we analyse the consequences of the growing role of consumers and producers in these food networks not only as individuals, but also as citizens often involved in civil society organizations. How does this influence 'the' broader agri-food system? Does it lead to a better integration of the civic and social dimensions of food production and distribution?

In the first section, we present a series of Brazilian and French initiatives such as producer–consumer networks (Ecovida in Southern Brazil, AMAPs in France), collective producer shops, farmers' markets, and school provisioning schemes, and explain why and to what extent we can consider them as not only *alternative* but also *civic* food networks.

In the second section, we analyse the modes of coordination and decision-making articulated, and the roles of the different actors involved.

In the third section, we investigate how these civic food networks influence public policy at different levels and show that this influence partly relies on the alliances that these food networks are able to develop among themselves and with more institutional actors. Finally, we conclude with a discussion about food democracy.

Case Studies

In each country, four main types of initiative have been taken into consideration: producer–consumer networks, collective producer shops, farmers' markets, and school provisioning schemes. We chose them from a range of diverse initiatives in the regions under study in such a way as to provide a contrast and insight into this diversity.

The data we gathered over a 10-year period during previous research projects on these different initiatives in the South of France (Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur and Rhône Alpes regions) and Southern Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Parana states) consist of qualitative interviews and direct observation as well as the documentation that had been issued by these networks since their emergence. Based on these data, we studied the characteristics and trajectories of these initiatives (see Table 1), as well as the modes of coordination they use (see the next section). In both countries, these AFNs emerged or developed in a context of institutionalization of organic agriculture and differentiation within this sector (Bellon et al., 2011). Therefore, we specify in Table 1 whether they involve only organic producers or 'family farmers' or 'peasants' as well.

Table 1. Main characteristics of the four types of initiatives.

	Short description	Date of emergence	Initiators	Number of producers and consumers involved	References
Farmers' markets	France Weekly farmers' market in Marseille and Aubenas <i>Organic farmers (Aubenas) and/or 'peasants' (Marseille)</i>	2002 and 2010	Partnership between the farmers and the municipality through Confédération paysanne (farmers' union) in Marseille	Marseille: about 30 Aubenas: about 10	Lamine, 2012
	Brazil Weekly farmers' market in Curitiba-Paraná <i>Organic and family farms</i>	1995	Partnership between the AOPA (Organic Producers Association of Paraná) and the municipality of Curitiba + with ACOPA (Organic Consumers Association) from 2000 on	Curitiba: about 45 producers, 3 farmers' markets About 1500 consumers/week	IPARDES/IAPAR, 2007; < http://www.ecovida.org.br >
Collective producer shops	France Producer-run shop La Musette, Aubenas Compulsory presence e.g., ½ day per week <i>Organic farmers and/or 'peasants'</i>	1997	Producers with a teacher in an alternative agricultural training programme		Lamine, 2012; < http://www.terredenvies.fr >
	Brazil Consumer cooperatives (Rio Grande Sul-RS) <i>Organic and family farms</i>	1999	Consumers and producers	Producers (30) Consumers (200/cooperative)	Souza, 2008
Box schemes	France AMAP CSA type box scheme <i>Organic farmers (with a recent trend towards agro-ecology)</i>	2001	Consumers, sometimes producers	About 300 in PACA + Rhône Alpes regions About 30 families and 3–10 producers in each	Lamine, 2005; < http://miramap.org >
	Brazil Isolated initiatives spurred by individual producers, producer or consumer organizations, and private businesses	2000	Producers	About 20 producers, 400 consumers (Curitiba-Paraná)	IPARDES/IAPAR, 2007

The comparative analysis was performed as part of the Franco-Brazilian research project AEFB (Agro-Ecology in France and Brazil) aimed at studying the trajectories of agro-ecology. During a post-doctoral stay, 20 interviews with key French actors involved in alternative food networks were held by the Brazilian researchers, which

Table 1 (continued)

	Short description	Date of emergence	Initiators	Number of producers and consumers involved	References
School provisioning	Producer meetings organized by a local canteen in order to plan production and deliveries	2008	School central kitchen	About 10 producers, approximately 3,800 pupils in Aubenas	Lamine, 2012
France	<i>Organic and local farmers</i>				
Brazil	PNAE – (National School Feeding Programme): 30% of the budget for food bought directly from <i>family farmers</i> Food Acquisition Programme (PAA) <i>Family farming</i>	2009/2003	Ministry of Social Development (MDS) and Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA)	6 million students in Southern Brazil (potential) 30 000 family farmers in Southern Brazil (deliveries for PAA and PNAE)	Souza and Chmielewska, 2011

afforded us a symmetrical point of view. These interviews were analysed by the three authors together.³

In France, the four types of initiative are led by different networks, even though we will see later that these networks form alliances to support a broader 'alternative system', whereas in Brazil they were initiated by a large network, Ecovida.

Ecovida emerged in 1998 as a network of organizations, farmers and consumers involved in ecological agriculture in Southern Brazil. The basic unit of the Ecovida Network is the 'nucleos', i.e. a group of ecological family farmers (either formally or informally organized), consumer cooperatives and organizations, NGOs, small processors and ecological product retailers (farm shops, farmers' markets, box schemes), as well as advisors and institutions involved in agro-ecology.

In Southern Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and Parana states), the Ecovida Network is composed of 23 regional 'nucleos', counting 300 farmers' groups (nearly 3,500 families), 170 municipalities, 145 local markets, 30 NGOs, 10 consumer organizations and 24 rural institutions (Perez-Cassarino, 2012). The network functions with defined principles and aims to generally strengthen agro-ecology; to generate and share information with its participants; to support legal mechanisms of credibility; and to create proper mechanisms of guarantee (Santos and Fonseca, 2004).

In France, open air *markets* have always existed in large and small towns alike, and have remained an important outlet for local fresh products, as well as a significant social tradition in local communities. Over time, they began to involve fewer producers and more retailers, fewer local products and more processed and/or non-local ones. More recently, different alternative farmers' organizations (both organic and not) have started to launch farmers' markets where generally only farmers can sell their products and where traceability as well as direct links are enhanced (Chiffoleau, 2009). The two weekly markets we refer to here are of very different significance: the first one takes place in a city of 850 000 inhabitants, Marseille, and

involves around 30 producers, both organic and not, while the second one counts about 10 producers and is a much smaller organic market in the small town of Aubenas (13 000 inhabitants).

In Southern Brazil, the ecological markets (*feiras ecológicas*) are weekly markets where family farmers sell their own products. Three kinds of market have been identified according to the mode of production and forms of certification involved: ecological markets with only certified producers, ecological markets with only agro-ecological farmers, part of whom are certified, and finally mixed markets with both ecological and conventional farmers.

The certified ecological markets are located in big cities like Curitiba (1.7 million inhabitants), where a large number of 'conscious' consumers can be found. However, from 2005 onwards, most of the producers shifted from third party certification towards participatory guarantee systems. In middle-sized cities (100 000–500 000 inhabitants) we found more mixed markets whereas smaller towns (fewer than 100 000 inhabitants) had more ecological markets with agro-ecological farmers who are not necessarily certified. This distribution suggests that in small towns the ties between producers and consumers are stronger, which reduces the need for certification.

The second type of initiative that we considered in both countries is *collective farm or consumer shops*. In the French Rhône-Alpes region, the first collective farm shops (Points de Vente Collectifs) emerged in the late 1970s, and today there are 56 of them. Farmers run these shops collectively: they bring in their products, they have to be present for about half a day every week (or every two weeks, depending on the number of producers), which affords them direct contact with customers, and a percentage of their sales goes towards collective costs (the shop itself, sometimes an employee, etc.). The shop we studied was created in the late 1990s by a few farmers and a local agricultural school teacher. Most of the initial farmers were neo-rural, even though there is now greater diversity in the social origin of the farmers involved (Lamine, 2012).

In Southern Brazil, similar initiatives were launched by ecological consumer cooperatives made up of producer and consumer organizations with strong support from religious and ecological social movements. The two cooperatives we studied, Coopet (Cooperativa dos Consumidores de Produtos Ecológicos de Três Cachoeiras) and Ecotorres (Cooperativa de Consumidores de Produtos Ecológicos de Torres), were created in 1999 in Rio Grande do Sul. Consumer members have to make a financial contribution in order to cover organizational costs (and receive a 10% discount on their purchases) and are expected to participate in their respective cooperative meetings. The shops display more than 100 ecological products from ecological farmers' groups (nearly 30 producers; see Souza, 2008). The products have to respect seasonality and most are certified through the Ecovida participative guarantee system and follow the principles of agro-ecology (see next section).

The third type of initiative we studied is *box schemes*. In both countries, box schemes have been developed for several decades by various food chain actors (cooperatives, wholesalers, Internet sellers) or by social organizations working towards social integration. In France, we studied a specific box scheme network, the Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne (AMAP), quite similar to the US community-supported agriculture model. It was started in the early 2000s and by 2012 comprised about 1,600 local consumer groups (roughly 270 000 consumers). These consumers enter into medium-term contracts (often 6 months) with one or more producers who undertake to supply them with a weekly box of fresh organic

farm produce. The aim of this reciprocal commitment is to ensure the viability of the farms concerned, and to establish an equitable relationship between producers and consumers. Consumers also commit to taking responsibility for certain tasks such as weekly deliveries. In other work, we have shown how this system allowed for a potential negotiation of the marketing as well as production systems, within certain limits of course (Lamine, 2005).

In Southern Brazil, box schemes (*cestas*) are mostly isolated initiatives taken by individual producers, producer or consumer organizations, and private businesses (through the Internet). There is a wide diversity of box schemes and most of them, in contrast with AMAPs in France, are home delivered and allow consumers to choose in advance what they want to get in their box (from a range of fruits and vegetables as well as other products, most of the time), even though some products might not be available due to seasonality. The producers are responsible for managing orders and deliveries. With these boxes, consumers usually get good prices and appreciate the ease of access through the Internet.

Finally the last type of alternative food network we will refer to is *school provisioning schemes*. In France, parents, consumers and civil society organizations as well as local authorities in charge of educational institutions are increasingly advocating for more organic and/or more local food in children's meals. Depending on the size of the school kitchens and their organizational and institutional characteristics, various types of initiatives have emerged, some initiated by mainstream food chain operators (who deliver ready meals to schools), others directly by the schools and their cooks, often with the help of organic or farmers' networks (Maréchal, 2008; Le Velly and Brechet, 2011). In the case that we studied, in Aubenais, the manager of the middle-size city's central school kitchen⁴ set up a partnership with a group of local organic producers, through which crops are collectively planned in order to guarantee sufficient quantities for the school kitchen and a satisfactory outlet for the farmers. At this stage of the planning, both parties' commitment is informal even though the orders and transactions are of course official.

In Brazil, the marketing of food products on the 'institutional market' began in 2003 with the Food Acquisition Programme (Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos, PAA) and was reinforced in 2009 by the National School Feeding Programme (Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar - PNAE). The PAA seeks to provide food for low-income families in situations of food and nutritional insecurity. It is also intended to protect local communities' traditional ways of life and the regional food culture, and to promote agro-ecology. Ecological food products are bought from family farmers or farmers' organizations by government social welfare agencies and public schools. Certified ecological products receive a 30% premium compared to conventional products, in order to promote nutritional quality as well as the environmentally friendly aspects of products. In order not to put small farms at a disadvantage, from 2012 onwards, each farm will be allowed to sell a maximum of USD12 000 per annum to these two programmes.

Even though we have presented these four types of initiative separately, our fieldwork experience shows that they tend to reinforce each other and that together they (in general) strengthen producer-consumer and rural-urban ties, as well as the links between the different social movements in a given region and its territorial agri-food system. It may seem striking to find such similar types of initiatives in such different historical and geographical contexts. The international circulation of alternative ideas and stakeholders might partly explain this (as well as the fact that some of

these stakeholders may participate in the same international movements, such as Via Campesina), although this would necessitate a specific analysis that was not our focus here. Nevertheless, these French and Brazilian cases present some differences that need to be taken into account. While these AFNs seem quite similar today – and might often fit into the same international trends or debates – they have very different historical roots. Many of the pioneer Brazilian alternatives emerged in the 1970s as part of the movement to counter the modernization process supported by the dictatorial regime (with its well-known effects of land concentration, family farmer exclusion and intensification of rural–urban migration) and were supported by religious or civil organizations. Recent movements, however, more similar to their French counterparts, were more often formed by consumer or farmer initiatives and are supported by NGOs as well as public institutions (e.g. Ministry of Agrarian Development, extension services).

While the sociological make-up of consumers in the French and Brazilian cases may be comparable (middle-class consumers, except of course regarding public programmes for low income families), the set-up is rather different with respect to the farmers involved in these initiatives. In France, AFNs are often launched by neo-peasants, most of whom have a higher level of education and/or an urban background. This might facilitate interaction with consumers (even though more rooted farmers may also initiate alternative networks or join in). In Brazil, on the other hand, although many initiatives were also launched by neo-peasants or urban professionals with rural origins, most of them concern family farms and landless farmers, the MST (landless people's movement) being one of the main actors within current alternative movements.

Despite these particularities, the different AFNs present common features, both between themselves and between the two countries. As shown in various studies, they afford farmers a better standard of living and strengthen the social ties between farmers and consumers as well as among farmers. They also lead to an acknowledgement of the interdependencies between producers and consumers and to a requalification of both producers and consumers, in contrast with the 'deskilling' induced by mainstream systems and operators (Jaffe and Gertler, 2006). These AFNs often offer original technical advice and knowledge acquisition methods, in the sense that they favour direct exchange between producers, and often have experienced producers acting as counselors for less experienced ones.

What we wish to highlight here is the political significance of the impact of these networks. First, they allow, to a varying extent, for the redefinition of the socio-productive organization: production, distribution, and partly food habits and diets are redefined together, especially in the cases of box schemes and school provisioning schemes (Brunori et al., 2011). Second, as we will see in more detail in the next section, they develop regulations (through certification rules, or charters) that take into consideration not only agricultural practices but also social practices and social issues, and leverage a different and broader understanding of quality than that used in the mainstream market (Noe and Alroe, 2011), one that is also the fruit of greater negotiation between stakeholders. They represent, in a way, a political proposal to strengthen the role of rural areas' social actors.

For these reasons, looking at these four types of initiative chosen to represent the diversity of AFNs in the regions under study, we consider it appropriate to talk of civic food networks, as suggested by Renting et al. (this issue). We use this notion to acknowledge the growing role of consumers and producers not only as *individu-*

als but also as *citizens* often involved in civil society organizations promoting the public interest. From this perspective, food production and consumption practices are redefined as expressions of citizenship – that is, activities that speak not only of individual preferences, but also of moral rights and responsibilities (Lockie, 2009).

In the following sections we explore the civic nature of AFNs from two angles. First, we analyse the modes of coordination and decision-making articulated in order to determine whether food democracy is in some way present *within* these systems through the distribution of decision-making power among the different stakeholders. We then investigate these AFNs' impact on a larger scale – that is, *beyond* their members and participants – by considering their influence on public policy at different levels.

Modes of Coordination and Decision-making *within* these Networks: Towards Food Democracy?

In order to explore how decision-making power is shared and how a form of food democracy may be experimented with in these different systems, we studied and compared the *modes of coordination and commitment* that all the AFNs adopt, by considering different factors, in both countries (see Table 2):

- Who are the different actors directly involved in the systems?
- How is quality understood and negotiated?
- How is farm production planned in order to adjust offer and demand?
- How are rules codified?

In conventional systems, downstream food-chain actors are dominant (Schermer et al., 2011), marketing rules are based on classical quality criteria, and there are generally no lasting contracts (which means part of the production may be lost when the market is saturated).

By contrast, in the four types of initiative studied here, producers are directly involved in the definition of quality and the codification of rules, sometimes with consumers and/or other organizations, and voluntary ways of adjusting offer and demand are established.

In all cases, there is a relative freedom from classical market quality criteria (aspect, size, etc.), while other criteria are promoted (localness, freshness, seasonality). In most cases producers have direct access to consumers' expectations through their presence at the markets or shops or box deliveries. In collective producer shops and school provisioning schemes, producers coordinate themselves by collectively planning production in order to adjust their offer. In the case of box schemes, this production planning also involves consumers with at least precise insight into consumers' demand through the long-term contracts established with each of them, and in some cases negotiations on this planning between producers and consumers. In these different AFNs, rules are codified in diverse ways: market charters or rules, AMAP written long-term contracts, etc. The construction of trust between producers and consumers as well as the requalification process mentioned above rely on these and other devices, such as weekly leaflets, visits to the farms, etc. These devices are crucial for creating not only norms but also symbols and identification to common values and ethics (Callon et al., 2007). These rules not only include marketing rules and quality criteria, as in the case of classical transactions, but might also encompass ethical and social dimensions such as equity, producers' wellbeing or income. Re-

Table 2. Modes of coordination in the four types of initiatives.

	Who is involved	Definition of quality	Production planning	Codification of rules
Farmers' markets	Producers Market organizers (civil society organizations, municipalities, farmers' organizations)	Direct access to consumers' expectations (and to producers' constraints) through the presence of producers	Individual production planning	France: Market rules or charters Brazil: Participatory certification
Collective producer shops	Producers	Direct access to consumers' expectations (and to producers' constraints) through the presence of producers (in turn) in the shop	Collective production planning among producers (e.g. for vegetables)	France: General guidelines at regional level, + shop rules Brazil: Rules of the cooperative
Box schemes	Producers and consumers	Direct access to consumer expectations (and to producer constraints) through weekly encounters, regular farm visits, meetings, weekly leaflets, etc.	Production planning with consumers and sometimes among producers	France: written long-term contract between each consumer and producer(s) Brazil: Participatory certification
School provisioning	Producers, school kitchen, public authorities	Links between producers and consumers (pupils) are mediated through schools' cooks and staff, and also through educational projects	Collective crop planning (producers + school), adjustment of the classical quality criteria	France: more or less formal agreements Brazil: PNAE (National School Feeding Programme) guidelines and contracts with farmers' groups

garding the mode of production, some systems rely on existing modes of qualification (such as official organic certification in the case of organic farmers' markets and of some of the AMAP networks in France) and so-called expert systems (Giddens, 1990), while most rely on or even establish original forms of qualification, which we will analyse below.

In the case of both the Brazilian Ecovida and the French AMAPs, the study of the dynamics underpinning these initiatives over a long period of time (about 10 years for each) shows how their protagonists have progressively adapted their modes of coordination in order to better integrate ethical concerns. This evolution has led to the elaboration or adoption of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), which imply that all stakeholders involved participate in and are jointly responsible for guaranteeing product quality (Zanasi et al., 2009).

Let us consider the case of the French AMAPs, where we can identify, over a 10-year period, a double dynamic leading from informally debated ethical issues towards ethical commissions and then, in some places, formalized PGS; from organic farming towards agro-ecology. In the PACA region, an agreement system was set up

at the start of the movement in order to determine which farms could or could not be part of the network, based on the values and principles developed in the network charter. This was based on a committee composed of consumers and experienced producers. The objective was to establish a 'road map' for each farm, in cooperation with the farmer, setting out the future stages towards organic certification.

From 2003 onwards, some of the producers and consumers began to contest this principle of compulsory conversion to certified organic agriculture, and advocated instead principles of trust, reciprocal commitment and transparency, afforded by the direct producer-to-consumer relationship. Some network leaders even conceded that producers could sometimes use chemical inputs where no other solution was available, if this was known to consumers. In these debates, which we analysed from 2003 to 2006 (Lamine, 2011), even those in favour of third-party organic certification recognized that it did not integrate social and human dimensions, regarding both farmers' and farm workers' well-being, and farmer-consumer relationships. Therefore, from 2007 onwards, many AMAPs and their networks began to shift towards another vision of certification, based on participative processes.

The analysis of the networks' debates also reveals another trend over the last decade: the shift from organic farming *sensu stricto* (as defined by the legislation) towards agro-ecology. Of course this shift is strongly linked to the shift towards participatory certification in the sense that the latter is an alternative to certified organic farming, partly motivated by the critique of the legal definition of organic farming. AMAP stakeholders, as in many other alternative food networks, claim to offer a better integration of the civic and social dimensions of food production and distribution. However, while some consider that these dimensions are not incompatible with the legal definition and certification – and indeed the historical trajectory of organic farming in France and other countries shows their importance – others prefer to turn to an alternative form of agriculture and of certification. This shift fits into a wider phenomenon at international level, whereby social movements are placing greater emphasis on agro-ecology and food sovereignty (Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2012).

This double trend towards participatory certification and agro-ecology over the last decade can also be identified in the case of Brazil, although in a very different institutional context.

While French organic legislation dates back to 1980 and has referred to third party certification since European harmonization (Council Regulation (EEC) 2092/91, OJ, L198, 22 July 1991, pp. 1–101), the Brazilian legislation is more recent (Dec. 6.323/2007 (Decreto do Executivo) 27.12.2007) and distinguishes between three kinds of certification: 1. third-party certification, as well as 2. participatory certification, and 3. certification through social control. The latter option concerns only direct sales from producers to consumers, where organic products can be sold without certification through a social control process on the basis of existing 'social control organizations' (Organização de Controle Social, OCS). This organization can be any formal or informal group of family farmers within which relationships of organization, commitment and trust are supposedly strong.

In Brazil, the Ecovida network has been a pioneer in experimentation with and the definition of participatory certification. Within the Ecovida network, each nucleus establishes an ethical council composed of producers, consumers and technicians. Its functions include inspection, monitoring, evaluation and advice to farmers. The certification process relies on the evaluation carried out by this ethical council, based on farm visits. A conversion plan towards ecological farming is defined by the farmer

and the regional nucleus considering the specific environmental and socio-economic characteristics of each farm. Each visit ends with a discussion with the farmer about the outcome, which makes farmers feel involved rather than only controlled (Zanasi et al., 2009).

In the case of Ecovida, agro-ecological principles have been advocated from the beginning of the movement, whereas in the French AMAPs, as we saw, they emerged later on in a context of differentiation within French organic agriculture networks (Bellon et al., 2011).

The comparison between the French AMAPs and Brazilian Ecovida networks reveals many commonalities. We have focused here on two aspects, i.e. the shift towards participative certification based on similar elements (ethical councils, farm conversion plans, farm visits that are more interactive than classical control, etc.), and the importance of agro-ecology. If we take a more thorough look at each network's charters or guidelines, we find generally quite similar values and principles: exclusion of chemical inputs (and GMOs), a focus on farm self-sufficiency and diversification, on farmers' and farm workers' working conditions and income, and on producer/consumer links and information and knowledge exchange through producer and consumer meetings. Of course, each network also presents its own specificities influenced by the cultural and social context. For example, in the case of Ecovida the importance of the involvement of the farmer's family (through food processing or other activities on the farm) is emphasized (Zanasi et al., 2009), while in the case of AMAPs consumer commitment and voluntary work are a greater focus (Lamine, 2005).

The discourses of the four types of initiative that we have studied in both countries (farmers' markets, collective shops, box schemes and school provisioning) convey a strong focus on the civic and social dimensions of food production and distribution. Here, we have focused on the way this is expressed in the specific modes of coordination they develop, but we could also mention other significant common features such as the notion of fair price, based on the objective of sustainable livelihood for producers and financial affordability for consumers, and more generally a common anchorage in economic solidarity.

Based on the analysis of the modes of coordination of these alternative networks, can we talk of *food democracy*? To answer this question, let us consider the definition suggested by Hassanein in her discussion about food democracy: 'Food democracy ideally means that all members of an agro-food system have equal and effective opportunities for participation in shaping that system, as well as knowledge about the relevant alternative ways of designing and operating the system' (Hassanein, 2003). Does this definition apply to our case studies?

If we consider these initiatives as specific agri-food systems, producers and consumers (directly in the case of box schemes, much more indirectly in other cases), as well as possible intermediaries (such as the kitchen manager in the school provisioning case), *participate in shaping the system* together. All these members of the agri-food system share the decision-making power, they gain more autonomy, and are less dependent on distant actors (market, certification, etc.). Participatory certification (as advocated and adopted by the Ecovida network and some of the AMAP networks) makes this possible as it implies that all stakeholders participate in and are jointly responsible for ensuring the quality of the final product and the integration of the production, distribution and consumption stages into the certification process (Zanasi et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, we would not argue that all the stakeholders have *equal and effective opportunities for participation*. Within these networks, we showed that consumer participation in shaping the system is often limited and, in the case of AMAPs, varies widely from one group to another. The exclusion of producers who would face too many technical or relational difficulties has also been noted (Dubuisson-Quellier et al., 2012). Moreover, not all consumers and producers can access these alternative networks; we can also talk of the exclusion of social groups as well as territories.

Finally, Hassanein's definition of food democracy highlights a significant feature that relates to actors' knowledge and learning, also studied by other authors (Stasart and Claeys, 2010; Brunori et al., 2011). The different initiatives studied here actually try to enhance and facilitate collective learning and capacity building (Marsden, 2012), by resorting to existing advisory systems such as rural extension in Brazil, to the creation of a proper system like in some of the French AMAPs networks, or to farmer-to-farmer horizontal sharing and learning processes (Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2012).

The Broader Impact of Civic Food Networks: Influence on Public Policy

In the previous section we considered the existence of some kind of food democracy *within* these systems through the distribution of decision-making power among the different stakeholders. At a broader level, what impact do they have on the agri-food system – that is, *beyond* their members and participants?

There are different ways in which AFNs and civil society organizations seek to influence the agri-food system. Looking at consumption, they can initiate forms of alternative trade to bypass the conventional market (as in the cases studied above), focus on consumers' education and, finally, call for mobilization in protest campaigns (Dubuisson-Quellier et al., 2011). Based on an ethnographic analysis in earlier work, of local projects linked to agricultural and food issues, we have highlighted how civil society may more or less directly influence the evolution of agricultural practices towards organic and low-input agriculture (mainly through local environmental and/or consumer organizations) (Cardona and Lamine, 2010). We have identified similar modes of action: in some cases, civil society organizations initiate their own projects and either develop marketing outlets facilitating farms' transitions towards organic farming, such as box schemes, or buy agricultural land in order to facilitate the establishment of organic farmers. In other cases, they directly take over a mission from public institutions, such as the implementation of agri-environmental measures or food catering in the case of school provisioning (food hubs or platforms centralizing local organic or low-input products). Finally, civil society organizations may also urge public authorities to address environmental and food issues (Cardona, 2012).

In other words, civic food networks can either build their own systems outside the 'mainstream' agri-food system or try to influence the dominant agri-food system through public policy, as well as by exerting pressure on economic actors.

In the Brazilian and French cases that we studied here, how do the stakeholders in civic food networks (consumers, producers or sometimes other actors) seek to get involved in public debates and influence public policy? In order to explore this issue, we have considered their impact at both local and national levels.

At the local level, first, studying the dynamics of AFNs over time, i.e. the trajectories of both the networks and their leaders and members, makes it possible to assess their involvement in local debates and policies. In the case of France, their involve-

ment is mainly centred around urbanization and land issues (preservation of agricultural land from urbanization, farmers' access to land), water quality, agricultural practices, and school food provisioning (Cardona and Lamine, 2010).

In Brazil, these different types of alternative food networks have also tried to get involved in public debates and influence public policy concerning rural development. They have advocated for environmentally sustainable production models, family farming and local economy, and mobilized around landscape issues, food access for people facing food insecurity, education for food and nutritional security and change in food habits.

Examples of municipalities in Brazil demonstrate the importance of local cohesion and social interaction for these policies to be successful. The results observed are: a change in the level of consumption spurred by students' acceptance of healthier and more appropriate food, a revitalization with new market prospects for family farming, and the fostering of production practices considered less harmful to the environment (Triches and Schneider, 2010).

At the national level, the growing success of AFNs in France reveals their influence on agricultural policies and institutions, as public institutions gradually come to recognize their role and devote more financial support to alternative producer-consumer networks, as well as more competencies within advisory services and agricultural institutions. We could even talk of an emerging process of institutionalization of alternative food networks, since although they stem from grass-roots initiatives, they are often considered by policymakers as a tool for rural development that could justify public support.

While there is also growing recognition of alternative producer-consumer networks and agro-ecology in Brazil, the main developments we wish to highlight are, first, the focus on family farming in the national food programme and, second, the influence of civic food networks on the construction of norms. The Food Acquisition Programme (PAA, established in 2003) is entirely devoted to family farming while the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE, 2009) devotes 30% of its budget to food bought directly from family farmers, involving a total of approximately 100 000s family farmers in Brazil. Brazil faces significant challenges for reconciling agricultural production practices and food and nutritional security concerns, particularly in relation to environmental matters and their impact on food safety. Regulating related practices and consolidating the incentives and support programmes for agro-ecological models are therefore important requirements. The food and nutritional security arena reinforces this process, since it is clearly oriented towards supporting family farming as the model for ensuring food sovereignty. This also highlights further aspects of food production systems, such as the promotion of agro-ecological production systems as a model for the development of the 2011 National Food and Nutritional Security Plan (Souza and Chmielewska, 2011).

In Brazil, civic food networks have also had a strong influence on the elaboration of organic law oriented towards the recognition of both agro-ecology and participatory certification, legally recognized as an alternative to third-party certification systems (Bertoncello et al., 2008). In France, while organic movements have also influenced the laws enforcing a stricter interpretation of certain organic principles (e.g. farm autonomy), agro-ecological principles are so far not legally recognized, even though they are increasingly present within agricultural institutions (Bellon et al., 2011).

Both in France and Brazil, civic food networks appear as sites and networks of experimentation and of political positioning to advocate a transition towards more sustainable forms of production and consumption. However, comparing the French and Brazilian cases shows that civil society's strong and growing demand for agro-ecology influences public policy in different ways depending on the country's history and its institutionalized forms of ecological agriculture. In France these have long focused on organic agriculture (since the 1980s), while in Brazil they are more diverse.

The influence that civic food networks have on public policy and the agri-food system is owed in part to the alliances they are able to develop. AFNs such as collective farmers' marketing initiatives attempt to counteract producers' loss of control over food supply chains by creating alliances and cooperation with other categories of societal and market actors (Schermer et al., 2012) and establishing new social networks of farmers that go beyond the agricultural sector (Cardona, 2012).

In her discussion on food democracy, Hassanein (2003) distinguished three kinds of alliances: within movements, among allied movements, and between movements and their opponents. In our case studies we observe such alliances with allied movements, environmentalists, consumer organizations, and, in Brazil, with women's or workers' movements.

In order to better assess not only the diversity of civic food networks but also the alliances that allow them to influence the agri-food system beyond their own stakeholders, we have suggested the notion of territorial agri-food systems (Lamine et al., 2012).⁵ However, these alliances are not only local, and we have to acknowledge the fact that civic food network stakeholders are often interested, if not involved, in debates and social movements at international level. The role played by the international circulation of concepts (such as food sovereignty or agro-ecology) and people, structured by formal networks and places of debates such as Via Campesina or FAO, and facilitated by informal debates especially on the Internet, deserves further investigation (Rosset and Martinez-Torres, 2012).

Finally, alliances with opponents are also decisive. In our cases, these 'opponents' – often not perceived as such by the stakeholders – might be institutional actors or private actors in the food chain, such as supermarkets or classical farmers' cooperatives. Based on the analysis of farmers' and AFNs' trajectories at local level, we have pointed out, against the classical dichotomy between conventional and alternative food systems, the possible complementarities between alternative and conventional systems (Lamine et al., 2012).

Conclusions

In this article, we have analysed the civic nature of a series of French and Brazilian alternative food networks and investigated the changes these *civic* food networks can induce both from within and further afield. In order to take into account the diversity of these networks, we chose four contrasting types ranging from the community-supported agriculture type box schemes (which are often presented as a kind of ideal and radical form of alternative food system but actually would reach a very limited part of the general population) to more institutional initiatives such as public food programmes (which can reach millions of pupils or families even though the requested volumes can make it difficult to involve small farms). We have also considered more 'classical' farmers' markets and collective producer shops (or

consumer cooperatives), two historical forms of food networks that are somewhat experiencing a revival in the current context.

We have shown that some kind of food democracy is at stake *within* these civic food networks through the modes of coordination and decision-making that are articulated and the way decision-making power is shared among the different participants. We then analysed the impact of these civic food networks on the scale of the agri-food system – that is, *beyond* their participants. We therefore focused on the analysis of their influence on public policy and regulations at different levels, in order to demonstrate the role they have been playing in the legitimization of both participatory certification and agro-ecology. This broader influence could also be investigated by focusing on the way these networks suggest concepts and ideas that progressively spread to debates on food and agricultural issues or even frame them.

Of course this does not mean that power relationships between the social actors of the food chain would disappear in such civic food networks. In some (although rare) box schemes we observed producers who felt like they were being strongly directed by consumers even though they still benefited from being less dependent on downstream actors, such as middlemen and retailers. Another significant limit pertains to the relocalization of food production and consumption. Not only is this relocalization not necessarily a guarantee of equity and fairness (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005), it can take place only where producers and consumers have the available social skills to initiate such networks, which might leave many urban and rural territories by the wayside. The risks of social and territorial inequity should probably be addressed through comparative studies in different types of contexts and regions. Moreover, arguing that food citizenship intrinsically has to be local circumscribes the scope and scale of active citizenship (Lockie, 2009). Finally, this relocalization is limited by the available food production within a given region – even though the most radical movements advocate the adaptation of diets. Ecovida suggests an interesting way of overcoming this limitation, through a system of food routes allowing for the exchange and circulation of products between producers (and the network's sale points such as farmers' markets, box schemes, cooperatives or school provisioning) of different small regions of Southern Brazil.

The last point we would like to raise relates to governance. We have shown that the effective influence of these civic food networks on the broader agri-food system depends on the alliances they are able to build with similar movements but also with institutions and even with mainstream economic actors in some cases. Original forms of governance can facilitate these alliances, as in the case of the French SCIC (Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif), a new legal status for cooperatives, which allows them to involve not only producers, consumers and employees but also local authorities and civil society organizations in their governance and management (Lamine, 2012). Further research should investigate how civic food networks adopt forms of 'reflexive governance' that encourage actors to scrutinize and reconsider their underlying assumptions, institutional arrangements and practices, and to acknowledge alternative understandings and framings of the problems at hand (Marsden, 2012).

Notes

1. The classical opposition between conventional and alternative actors and food systems has been contested by many authors (see Tovey, 2009). We show that it makes sense to distinguish them on the basis

- of the analysis of power and decision-making relationships, even though in our fieldwork we find many 'hybrid' forms of food networks (Lamine et al., 2012). More precisely, we define this alternative-ness through what these alternative food networks contest – that is, global deregulation, globalization and/or the degradation of agro-ecosystems – as well as through what they enhance and the values they defend: a redistribution of value through the network and a common construction of trust and decision-making by the different stakeholders, i.e., most often, producers and consumers (Lamine, 2005).
2. At the level of small regions, the territorial agri-food system encompasses all the social actors involved in producing, transforming, retailing and consuming food, i.e. farmers, intermediaries, agricultural institutions, local authorities, civil society organizations, etc. We suggested this notion in order to consider and assess the interdependencies between these different components and their evolution.
 3. 'L'agroécologie en France et au Brésil: entre réseaux scientifiques, mouvements sociaux et politiques publiques', research project supported by the Capes-Cofecub programme and coordinated by A. Brandenburg and JP. Billaud, 2011–2014.
 4. In France, elementary schools are under the remit of municipalities whereas secondary schools (collèges) are under the remit of the Départements, and high schools (lycées) under that of the Regions. In all cases, the meals can be prepared by the school's own kitchen, by a 'central kitchen' – publicly run, which delivers for example to all the schools in a given town, or, as is most often the case, by an external provider.
 5. See note 2.

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