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The contributions of short food supply chains to territorial development: A study of three Quebec territories

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ABSTRACT

Short food supply chains (SFSCs) have undergone significant developments for roughly a decade, spurring the interest of producers, consumers and governments. A thorough review of the literature shows the various economic, social and environmental benefits associated with SFSCs across much of Europe and North America. However, these benefits have generally been analyzed in isolation from each other, with very few studies attempting to characterize them as a whole in a systemic fashion.

This article aims to evaluate the contributions of SFSCs to territorial development in three contrasting Quebec territories. For this, we developed a model that is organized around four dimensions that are interlinked through systemic relations: farmers' welfare, local development, welfare of the community, and environmental protection. For each of these dimensions, we determined criteria and indicators in order to compare, whenever possible, the results obtained in this research with the available provincial data.

Overall, our results show that, when considering the indicators chosen for this research, SFSCs mostly have a positive effect on the three territories targeted by our research. The most positive aspects of these systems are job creation, skills development for farmers, job satisfaction, and the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. The most neutral elements relate to revenues for farmers engaged in SFSCs, the economic weight of SFSCs within the local economy, the influence of SFSCs on the access to fresh and healthy food, and their effects on social cohesion.

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1. Introduction

The development of short food supply chains (SFSCs) has, in recent years, given rise to a significant body of research, most of which attributes numerous benefits to this type of marketing system. A review of the literature hence suggests that SFSCs have all the qualities to improve the sustainability of the food system. These benefits are often presented as responses to the negative externalities of the conventional food system on rural development, employment or the sustainable management of natural resources (Goodman and Watts, 1997; Altieri, 1998; Trobe et al., 2000; Van Der Ploeg and Renting, 2000; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002; Allen et al., 2003; Renting et al., 2003; Maye et al., 2007; Wiskerke, 2009).

Various examinations of SFSCs benefits have, however, led to nuanced conclusions and even, in some cases, to their questioning. For instance, marketing systems that bring consumers and producers closer together are not free from power relations. Indeed, not all farmers are equal before consumers in these systems, who are generally well-educated and middle class (Hinrichs, 2000; Mundler, 2007). SFSCs are thus more accessible to producers who speak the same language as their consumers and who share similar social, economic and environmental values (Jarosz, 2011). Moreover, the viability of these marketing systems is hardly ensured due to the rather precarious loyalty of a clientele that tends to idealize farming as "repeasantized" (Goodman, 2004). Finally, various studies show that farmers determine their prices based on their estimate of the consumers' willingness to pay (Cooley and Lass, 1998; Tegtmeier and Duffy, 2005; Brown and Miller, 2008; Mundler, 2013). However, this price fixing method does not necessarily lead to an improvement of their remuneration. Several authors even use the term *self-exploitation* to emphasize that these

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prices do not adequately compensate the efforts invested by these farmers into the production, processing and selling of their products (Hinrichs, 2000; Galt, 2013).

A thorough review of the literature, shows a problem of access to data that prevent a comprehensive assessment, both qualitative and quantitative, of the benefits assigned to SFSCs (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Martinez et al., 2010; Kneafsey et al., 2013; O'Hara and Pirog, 2013). Most studies on SFSCs are based on case studies that are restricted to a particular region. Moreover, these works are usually dedicated to a particular type of SFSCs from the nine possible types identified by Pretty (2001), with the box scheme[1] being the most studied, followed by farmers markets. In short, findings usually apply only to a specific type of SFSCs in one given context.

Our goal with this research was to build a systemic analysis model of the benefits attributed to SFSCs in order to measure their contribution to territorial development. The model was applied to three contrasting regions in Quebec. In this Canadian province, SFSCs have been proliferating continuously over the past ten years. Identified as promising means to diversify agricultural activities in a recent report on the future of agriculture and agri-food in Quebec (CAAAQ, 2008), SFSCs have since then been the subject of support programs of Quebec's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ). SFSCs exist in various modes ranging from farm stands, U-pick farms, box schemes and online sales to farmers' markets, direct sales to supermarkets and food hubs (Colombani-Lachapelle and Pouliot, 2012; Lemay, 2012). According to data from MAPAQ, direct sales—where farmers sell directly to consumers—concern more than one producer out of two for certain products (beekeeping, greenhouse crops, fruits, etc.) but it is also prevalent in larger industries such as maple syrup and table eggs (13% of producers). In total, 3500 (12% of) Quebec producers engage in direct sales, accounting for just over 3% of Quebec's agricultural gross revenues ($270 million annually). That said, given that SFSCs have only (re)emerged recently, knowledge about them is still fragmented.

The next section presents the analysis model constructed for this research. The subsequent section explains how this model has been operationalized and thus presents the criteria and indicators selected for assessing the contribution of SFSCs to territorial development. The results obtained are then presented in the third section. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for territorial development.

2. Concepts and analysis model

Our definition of SFSCs follows the French school of proximity (Torre and Gilly, 1999; Carrincazeaux et al., 2008; Kebir and Torre, 2013), which considers both relational and geographical proximity. Specifically, these supply chains combine different dimensions: a spatial dimension, aiming toward a geographical rapprochement between consumption and production; a functional dimension, aiming toward the proper delivery of the product from the producer to consumers through the various participants in the system; a dimension of interconnectedness between the actors; and an economic dimension allowing for economically viable market exchanges for the stakeholders (Praly et al., 2014). In other words, if direct sales are part of SFSCs, the latter encompass a larger number of initiatives that capitalize on a relational or spatial proximity between farmers and consumers, regardless of the number of intermediaries. These marketing channels cannot be clearly separated from more conventional ones, since they interact and farmers view them as complementary and often engage in both simultaneously (Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006).

Various authors use the classical sustainable development framework, organized around the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social, environmental), in order to examine the benefits of SFSCs (Schönhart et al., 2009; Darrot and Durand, 2010). However, this framework fails to properly link the supposed benefits to the different categories of actors. For example, how might economic sustainability be assessed? By the benefits they provide for farmers or by the low cost paid by consumers? Thus, based on the literature review performed, we constructed a model that classifies the contributions of SFSCs into four interacting dimensions: farmers welfare, local development, welfare of the community, and environmental protection.

2.1. Farmers welfare

For farmers, the anticipated benefits are both economic and social. Economically, SFSCs would allow for a better redistribution of the value added and they would make farmers less sensitive to market risks, through a reduction in the number of intermediaries, through diversification, and through better control of prices, guaranteeing less asymmetrical relations with customers (Govindasamy et al., 1999; Hardesty and Leff, 2010; Uematsu and Mishra, 2011; Chiffoleau and Prevost, 2013; Richard et al., 2014). Synergy effects and network externalities are another type of economic benefit identified in the literature (Knickel and Renting, 2000; Marsden et al., 2000; Van der Ploeg and Renting, 2004; Beckie et al., 2012).

In social terms, the mentioned benefits are just as numerous. SFSCs would promote social and professional recognition of farmers (Dufour et al., 2010) and even allow for a form of social and professional reintegration for vulnerable or marginalized farmers (Chiffoleau, 2013). They would offer development opportunities to small farms (Feenstra et al., 2003), including through market relations oriented toward fair trade principles (Vogt and Kaiser, 2008). SFSCs are also seen to favor the development of new skills (Dowler et al., 2004), with many authors noting a higher level of education among farmers engaged in this type of food system (Martinez et al., 2010; Aubert, 2013). Finally, other authors highlight the active role played by women farmers (Wells and Gradwell, 2001; Trauger et al., 2010) in the development of SFSCs. From that perspective, SFSCs could be seen as promoting women's independence and professional development, unlike industrial agriculture, which has tended, thus far, to exclude women from agricultural activities (Barthez, 1982; Salmona, 1994). In France, Giraud and Rémy (2013) were able to validate, through a statistical analysis of the agricultural census data, the strong presence of women in marketing-related activities in SFSCs.

2.2. Local development

For this dimension, the dynamics of valorization, development and mobilization of local resources are observed. For local economies, the benefits are linked to the creation of jobs, both wage and family labor (Pretty, 2001; Capt and Dussol, 2004; Saltmarsh et al., 2011), to land use and occupancy by small farms (Martinez et al., 2010), to the revitalization of rural areas (Wiskerke, 2009), and to the promotion of local food production (Brown and Miller, 2008). SFSCs would also stimulate the creation of new farms (Vogt and Kaiser, 2008; Blouin et al., 2009; Dufour et al., 2010), particularly

[1] With this we mean box scheme based on a contract and prepaid subscription: Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the United States, Teikei in Japan, Associations pour le Maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne (AMAP) in France, Agriculture soutenue par la communauté (ASC) in Quebec, etc.

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