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Alternative voices in building a local food policy: Forms of cooperation between civil society organizations and public authorities in and around Toulouse

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing debate in Europe on urban food supply is currently rescaling local food policies. New actors are now taking part in this debate, including urban public authorities and civil society organizations involved together in shaping local food governance. The objective of this paper is to describe their involvement and their cooperation.

This article presents and utilizes a relational framework to analyze the involvement of civil society organizations together with public authorities in the design of actions for urban and peri-urban food production and consumption. It considers the positions these organizations could adopt toward public authorities.

In the area of Toulouse, the fourth largest city in France, 18 people were interviewed from seven civil society and three public organizations. The data showed an enhanced participation of the civil society in urban food governance. Three types of civil society organizations were identified: community organizations, professional associations, and an advisory board. They develop several forms of cooperation to public policies. Considering also the relationships they adopt with one another, it was possible to highlight the interplay of proximity and distance that enable them to work with and for public organizations while preserving the specificities of their own project.

1. Rescaling and relocating the urban food system

Growing global urbanization introduced deep changes in the relationship of urban areas to their rural surroundings and resulted in the blurring of their limits. Food production, which was considered as a typical rural activity, now also concerns urban areas. On the one hand, urban sprawl encloses existing farmlands, i.e., peri-urban agriculture (Zasada et al., 2013; Busck et al., 2006; Opitz et al., 2016). As an example, 47% of French farms were located in areas considered as urban in 2010 (Giroux, 2015). On the other hand, there is a strong movement in favor of urban food production within the densest part of the cities. This urban agriculture is expected to respond to the diverse issues faced by growing urban populations (Zasada, 2011). These issues globally concern city sustainability (Aubry et al., 2012). Urban food production is considered to be a powerful tool to mitigate the vulnerability of city dwellers to economic and ecological crises (Yokohari et al., 2000; Page, 2002). The spatial proximity between production and consumption might be able to reduce “food miles” and help to enrich and balance the food diet and to improve the health of city dwellers. The intertwining of built and agricultural lands in cities could provide environmental and health benefits in terms of climate change mitigation, biodiversity conservation, etc. Finally, the maintenance of open lands in cities serves several social goals, including social inclusion via collective food production (Corcoran and Kettle, 2015) and environmental and food education.

Addressing this diversity of issues assumes a rescaling and relocation of the food system at the urban level. Indeed, cities worldwide are taking an interest in their agriculture (Cohen and Ilieva, 2015; Bonnefoy and Brandt, 2014; Stoms et al., 2009). Nevertheless, thinking and caring about food production have not been part of urban governments' mandates. Furthermore, the strong multifunctional demand toward agriculture or, more broadly, food production in cities exceeds more traditional finalities of the agricultural sector and the principles of its professional structuring. To address urban issues, food production should respond to new goals with new forms of support, developing new skills in venues other than the mere production of food products and commodities. To do this, scholars highlight the need for governance of urban agriculture at the local level, with the participation of different types of actors who will be able to collectively push for a transformation of agricultural goals (Poulot, 2014). Three types of actors are concerned: urban authorities, private agents such as farmers and other economic agents, and civil society organizations (CSO) (Prové et al.,

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2016). The literature particularly highlights the role of such organizations in promoting urban agriculture initiatives (Prové et al., 2015; Prové et al., 2016; Viljoen and Wiskerke, 2012; McClintock, 2014). However, these organizations lack the formality and legitimacy (Prové et al., 2016) necessary to institutionalize and sustain such initiatives. The cooperation between civil society organizations and urban governments is therefore crucial for implementation of the urban food system (Prové et al., 2016; Viljoen and Wiskerke, 2012).

However, the content of such partnerships has received little attention until now. The objective of this article is to depict such partnerships between CSOs and urban governments to promote and sustain urban agriculture and food supply initiatives. The following section considers how to analyze the participation of CSOs in local urban governance. Taking the case of the Toulouse urban area, presented in Chapter 3, the article first considers the involvement and the variety of voluntary organizations active in this field. A typology of the three types of CSOs identified is presented in Chapter 4. The following chapters describe two aspects of the cooperation between these organizations and local public authorities. Chapter 5 describes the content of this partnership: What resources are exchanged? Are such partnerships productive in terms of the introduction of new ideas or for the implementation of new public projects? Chapter 6 considers the three types of CSOs identified in order to understand how they relate to each other as well as to the public authorities.

2. Civil society support for urban food production and supply: new actors for a new local governance

The term “governance” has been defined by Graham et al. (2003, p. 1) as “*a process whereby societies or organizations make their important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process and how they render account.*” The term was introduced in the 1980s, alongside the more traditional term of “government,” for normative (Rotberg, 2014) and analytical reasons. In analytical discussions, one use of the term serves to contrast with the term “government” to designate new practices beyond state-based politics, with top-down, centralized, hierarchical interventions and regulations (Tollefson et al., 2012; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). In this sense, using the term “governance’ highlights the quantity and diversity of actors involved in public decision and policy implementation, as well as their relationships with more formal governmental actors. A large part of the literature concentrates on private–public partnerships to provide public goods. More complete definitions include the networking of three types of actors: public, private and civil society organizations (Jean and Bisson, 2008; Graham et al., 2003).

For Hajer and Wagenaar (2003), Figuière and Rocca (2012), governance practices are more developed within new public domains such as environment and food. Indeed, this concept of governance has been largely applied to the domain of environmental policies (Rumpala, 2008; Lane and Morrison, 2006; Tollefson et al., 2012). In France, for example, the notion of sustainable development has introduced less centralized and more transversal ways of coping with environmental issues than the traditional technical, top-down and sectorial organization of the government (Caillaux, 2013). This qualitative change was facilitated by the expansion of the government’s decentralization and the subsequent empowerment of local public authorities and the networks they formed with other types of actors to cope with locally defined issues. The participation of civil society in the definition of environmental public policies has been largely documented (Lane and Morrison, 2006). In the domain of food policies, Viljoen and Wiskerke (2012) identify a new food geography derived from urban food strategies built at the interface between urban government and civil society. The aim of this article is to study such an interface.

Civil society is defined as a third sector between the private sector and the state (Manjur Morshed and Asami, 2015). It encompasses different types of non-governmental and non-profit organizations built to focus on issues of collective interest: professional unions, voluntary associations, charities, lobbying groups, etc. Their involvement in public action at the local level can adopt different forms: claims and contestation, participation in public consultation, creation of forums for debate, projects of local change, etc. It is intended to enhance deliberative forms of democracy (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Borrás and Conzelmann, 2007) by helping to define new problems to be addressed, by opening new debates on the public goods to be provided, and by helping to formulate alternative local policies. According to Lane and Morrison (2006), the creation of such organizations seeks to compensate for the failure of the government, as well as of the market, to provide services or goods of value. Cooperation between government and non-government parties is even presented as a metric of smart government (Nam and Pardo, 2014).

The notions of input and output legitimacies of the governance system (Scharpf, 1999; Borrás and Conzelmann, 2007; Connelly et al., 2006) offer some insights into these discussions. Input legitimacy concerns the democratic dimension of the governance. According to deliberative theories (Borrás and Conzelmann, 2007), it will depend on the opening of public debates and, particularly, on the values to be collectively pursued. Civil society participation in decision-making processes can be a way to enlarge such debates by promoting forgotten or marginalized interests, proposing alternative ideas, etc. Output legitimacy concerns the capacity to deliver results, i.e., the efficiency of the governance. Civil society participation can add resources to the policy process by way of skills and workforce, but it can also ensure a better quality of the services provided by their proximity with their beneficiaries.

Nevertheless, some authors advocate a critical view of the effects of participation by non-governmental organizations in local governance (Rumpala, 2008; Lane and Morrison, 2006), notably on the input legitimacy side. Non-governmental organization involvement might not in itself increase public deliberation but, on the contrary, might create a privileged relationship between local authorities and a specific group of interest (Lane, 2003). Furthermore, community participation in local policies − through consultation, for example − does not necessarily translate into empowerment and an increasing ability to influence the decision-making process rather than merely ratifying it (Mathur et al., 2003). In the domain of urban agriculture, McClintock (2014) highlights the involvement of numerous CSOs as well as their funding difficulties. He notes that the latter limits the reach of their actions and their ability to define and carry out their own mission.

These critics plead for analyzing the relationships between the civil sector and the public authorities. For instance, Dubois (2015) supports a vision of the production of public policies in a relational arena (“*espace relationnel*”), including not only public actors but a variety of other actors as well such as experts, lobbies, private entrepreneurs, etc. In such an arena, the role of each type of public policy actor cannot be inferred solely from his or her status or resources, but is a function of the relationships that he or she shapes and maintains with the other actors. Focusing on CSOs, Vitali (2002) supports such a relational framework to describe these actors’ participation in public policies. He proposes to differentiate several relational positions they could adopt toward public actors. Building on Evers (1990), he defines three main types of positions: (a) assimilation to a bureaucratic logic (be it public or private); (b) exclusion, when not interacting with public actors or adopting a position of protestation or auto-organization; and (c) cooperation with public actors that favors their stabilization through access to public financing and/or through professionalization.

Such a relational framework allows for a description of a CSO in terms of its effective role in the construction of public policies. The three positions will differ according to their contribution to the input/output legitimacies of the local governance (Table 1). In (a), *assimilation,* in the words of Vitali (2002), seeks to enhance its efficiency by adding resources but does not make it possible to argue for its content or to propose alternative values around which to build the action. The