

FELLOWSHIP SUMMARY REPORTS

Hélène Gerard-Simonin

“Environmental and nutritional sustainability of urban value chains: case studies
in France and Switzerland”

theme 1 “Managing natural capital”

Host Institution: Institut de Géographie et de Durabilité, UNIL, Switzerland

Host collaborator: Dominique Barjolle

Dates of the fellowship: 18 March to 30 July 2022

I, Hélène Gerard-Simonin, consent to the following report being posted on the Co-operative Research Programme’s website.

1. What were the objectives of the research project? Why is the research project important?

The initial objective of the research project was to work in a multidisciplinary way to define methods of system modeling and sustainability analysis specific to territorialized food chains. We had chosen to work on local food supply chains of collective restaurants in France and Switzerland to analyze the role of territorial proximities in terms of environmental and nutritional performance.

Significance: Collective catering is in a unique position to promote the sustainability of the food system on both the production and consumption sides. Its supply is now perceived in Europe and worldwide as an important lever for transforming the food system. In Switzerland and France, national and territorial public policies encourage public canteens to source locally, although the notion of 'local' is not perfectly defined.

The implementation of these policies requires a major transformation of the supply chains and practices of the actors. It is therefore essential to better quantify the environmental sustainability of supply chains by taking into account their organisational complexity and their mix of global and local aspects, as well as the actual practices of the actors. Indeed, all actors and stakeholders in food chains (farmers, processors, policy makers, retailers, consumers, investors) are involved in these production processes and their organization and constraints explain, at least in part, the performance of the system.

2. Were the objectives of the fellowship achieved?

Research objectives were almost totally achieved. A literature review was conducted about sustainability of the Swiss food system and Swiss food catering. Experts were interviewed to define the study areas. This made it possible to define the scope of the work and was the starting point for the field surveys of the actors in the value chain: farmers, wholesalers, processors and collective restaurants. Data collection and field surveys were carried out in Switzerland. The modelling and analysis method were discussed and worked on throughout the fellowship. Data is currently being analysed through this method. Primary results will be presented at Forum Origin, Diversity and Territories (ODT) in October 2022.

Data collection and field surveys in France will be carried out in the coming months. It was not possible to do it in parallel due to lack of time. Scientific valorization of the results will be done once the entire work is completed.

3. What were the major achievements of the fellowship?

- 1) A new international and multidisciplinary collaboration on the theme of agroecology between IGD, UNIL and Institut Agro Dijon.
- 2) Participation as an expert in prospective workshops for the food strategy of Grand Geneve by 2050.
- 3) Presentation accepted at Forum ODT in October 2022.

4. Will there be any follow-up work?

- Publication: A publication in a multidisciplinary scientific journal on food system is planned, as soon as the data collection and analyses are completed.
- Future collaboration with the Host: Swiss partners were invited to teach students of Institut Agro Dijon about the concept of "True Cost of Food" in November. And I was invited to participate to an action lab in the framework of the ongoing Swiss project "True Cost Accounting for Food" in October. IGD UNIL and Institut Agro Dijon will keep on collaborating on the present project in the future.

5. How might the results of your research project be important for helping develop regional, national or international agro-food, fisheries or forestry policies and, or practices, or be beneficial for society?

In Switzerland and France, national and territorial public policies encourage public canteens to source locally. The objectives of these policies are multiple: local economic development, maintaining agriculture on the territory, increasing the quality of products in collective restaurants and increasing the sustainability of food. The work carried out in Switzerland analyses 3 case studies of public policies aimed at increasing the local supply of collective restaurants. First of all, the field surveys highlights the potential and the pitfalls of these policies on the sustainability of supplies in the long term. Secondly, the work on a method of environmental and nutritional analysis of the case studies will make it possible to quantitatively objectify the results of these policies. In fact, according to the scientific literature, reducing the distances between actors in the agri-food value chain does not necessarily lead to better environmental performance. And there is still relatively little research that quantifies the environmental performance of collective catering and evaluates the result of strategies considered virtuous such as the purchase of local products. The present work will thus make it possible to take into account production, processing and transport practices, beyond the sole criterion of geographical proximity, in order to better guide public policies and stakeholder practices.

6. How was this research relevant to:

- The objectives of the CRP?

Today, the necessary profound transformation of the agri-food system faces many obstacles. Fieldwork on the scale of sub-national territories, such as that carried out in the present research, can help to identify the obstacles more precisely. In addition, research efforts are needed to integrate the whole food system into the concept of agroecology, including food processing, distribution and consumption. The results of this project can contribute helping society to move towards better practices to optimise agri-food systems from an environmental and human health perspective.

- The CRP research theme?

This research aligns with the theme ‘Managing Natural Capital’ as it deals with the organization and the environmental performance of local agri-food supply chains in France and Switzerland. The main issue of analyzing how cities are reconsidering their food supply in the face of growing demand for local products and the need to make food system more sustainable is in the global scope of the theme.

7. Satisfaction

I applied to the OECD program to pursue a thematic conversion in environmental analysis and to develop a new international collaboration on this topic. The fellowship gave me the opportunity to meet new collaborators and to make my work known. It definitely helps to expand my network and accelerate my thematic transition. Thus, the fellowship fully conformed to my expectations.

I did not encounter any practical problems but as a lecturer, I would suggest bringing forward the timetable for acceptance of the projects to the summer so as to make it easier for lecturers to apply to the programme while planning their courses.

8. Advertising the Co-operative Research Programme

I learnt about the Co-operative Research Programme through e-mailing of my institution. I had not heard of this programme before my thematic transition and my many interactions with colleagues in economics and social sciences. I would advise the OECD to disseminate its programme also to other scientific fields networks in food science in order to promote multidisciplinary research.