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FARMLAND MANAGEMENT STYLES AND LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY: A CASE-STUDY IN THE LARZAC REGION (FRANCE)

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Introduction

Few studies focus on local food supply in the Global North from a spatial point of view. In this paper, we aim at participating in filling the knowledge gap between land law and tenure management issues and local food issue, by questioning to what extent the allocation and repartition of land property rights can affect the use of land for local food supply. To this purpose, we propose to coin the notion of "farmland management style", as the local-scale institutional arrangement encompassing 1° the organization of the access to the land for farmers, 2° the formalized relationships between land owners and users and 3° a preferred agri-food model. We chose to focus on a French Mediterranean highland, the Larzac, known for its variety of management styles and its high-density of local-selling farmers.

Can land management policies be drivers to develop local food supply? Do public and collective stakeholders play the same role? To what extent is the local scale suited to tackle the food issue with land tools? Is creating an alternative land management style the best-suited measure?

Materials and Methods

We carried out a qualitative fieldwork in 2016, consisting mainly in semi-structured in-depth interviews, with farmers and persons in charge of alternative and mainstream land management styles. We also compiled a set of documents (lease agreement models, ownership's statements, reports of Councils' deliberations, local newspapers and institutional magazines articles) and maps. We analyzed our data thanks to land rights' repartition tables, featuring for every management style the stakeholders, their types, their bundles of rights, the way they obtained the rights and the duration of the rights. This approach is based on Lavigne Delville's (2010) understanding of Schlager and Ostrom's (1992) framework.

Results and Discussion

In the Larzac region, three generations of alternative styles were shaped by the land management regimes (Rudbeck-Jepsen et al., 2015) and the political visions of land ruling at those times. During the 19th century, some commons resisted to the allotment trend, but were afterwards mostly assimilated by the mainstream style. During the 1970s, a land struggle against a military project ended up at creating collective management styles ran by farmers on 8 000 ha (one of them is presented in figure 1). When farmers retire, cooptation processes to choose successors promote small-scale and peasant farming, which can include local food supply chains. Since the 2000s, an urban local authority is developing and running a small

public estate in the valley floors surrounding the Larzac plateau with several tenure styles, to provision the city of Millau with organic vegetables.

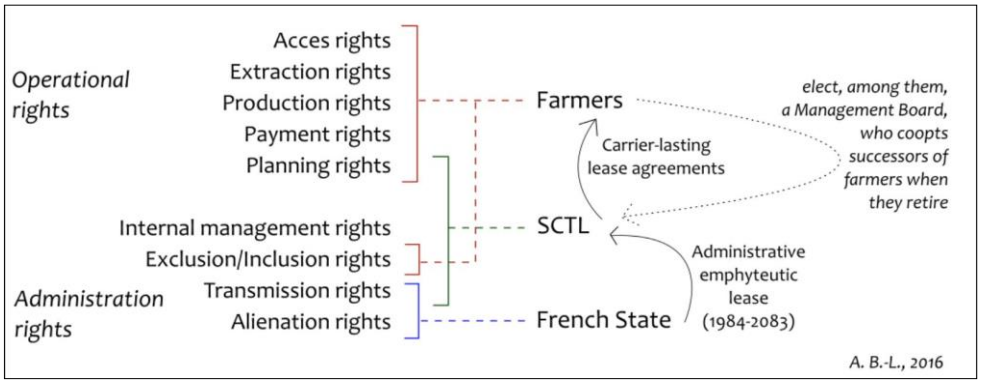


Figure 1. Organization of the SCTL-ran collective management style. (SCTL stands for Civil Society of the Larzac Lands)

Among the factors making up the farmland management style, the preferred agri-food model is most-determining for the development of local food supply, followed by the organization of the access to the land. So, the tenure itself appears less important than its meaning and the projects benefiting from it. Land management styles are tools, created or reinterpreted to answer the current social demand for local food. In this setting, creating a land management style is one of two possible strategies: dividing the territory among autonomous land management styles or coaching alternative farmers to help them farming lands being on the behalf of the mainstream style.

Conclusions

In this paper, we downscaled the analysis of intertwined relations between land management and food supply, from the national to the local scale. We applied the notion of “farmland management style” to the Larzac region during the past decades. Several collective and public alternative management styles coexist: they can be efficient tools to develop local food supply chains, as they allow to target a specific agri-food model or to secure the tenure of a specific group. Though, to answer the contemporary demand for local food, land-related policies could be implemented: opening of the mainstream management style to civil society, taking back control on the commons, acquisition of lands by local authorities defending projects of local food supply.

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