



Event Review

Alternative food networks in QuébecManon Boulianne^a and Patrick Mundler^b^a Department of Anthropology, Université Laval^b Department of Agroecology & Consumption Studies, Université Laval

In this review, we provide a synopsis of a two-day conference, *Réseaux alimentaires alternatifs au Québec: Perspectives comparatives*, held in Montréal on May 12 and 13, 2016, during the 84th Congress of ACFAS (Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences). The event was organized by Patrick Mundler and Manon Boulianne, both from Université Laval.

The theme of the conference was deliberately set in a relatively open fashion, around the idea of “alternative food systems”. In the call for contributions, these were loosely defined as productive or marketing initiatives that stand in contrast to those associated with the industrialized food system, such as short food supply chains, urban gardening and farming, or local food labeling. They would include initiatives that aspire to reconnect producers and consumers, contribute to a more equitable distribution of added value in specific food chains, or revitalize local economies.

The conference’s aim was to bring together students, faculty and other actors involved in alternative food systems initiatives and research in Québec, to engage in conversation about current actors, actions, locations, and new directions. We sought a comparative, international perspective, and received contributions from both Québec and France. Originally planned to be held on one day, the conference was extended to two days.

Overall, 17 papers were presented in six sessions. In *Food governance and territories*, Claudia Atomei, Valérie Fortin, Karim Hammouda, and Jules Laurent-Allard, all graduate students from the University of Montréal Planning School, shared lessons learned from a comparative analysis of five food policy councils (Toronto, Vancouver, Belo Horizonte, Portland, and London). Its origin was a 2015 public consultation held by the City of Montréal

around the possible creation of new structures of food governance for the metropolitan region. Issues of scale, political autonomy, and normativity were discussed. In the same session, Camille Billion, a doctoral student at AgroParisTech, presented the results of her comparative work on food governance initiatives from three cities: Nantes, Lyon, and Figeac. She emphasized the role that distributors and retailers can play in the development of territorial food governance systems.

The second session was entitled *Le terroir au Québec: définitions et appropriations*. Nathalie Lachance, a doctoral student in sociology at UQAM, explained the story of *terroir* in Quebec, mostly through the evolution of the *Loi sur les Appellations réservées et les termes valorisants*, from 1996 to the present. Stéphane Castonguay and Charles Audet, professor and graduate student from the Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises de l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR), provided examples of terroir products of farmers and other actors in various sectors of the agro-food system. Both highlighted the cultural politics of heritage. Next, Michel Morisset, professor at the Department of Agroecology & Consumption Studies at Laval University, used a diachronic approach to explore socio-cultural identities of Quebec's cuisine and gastronomy in tourist guides from 1970 to 2010. Interestingly, the discourse in American and French tourist guides evolved during this period, while documenting earlier visions of Québec cuisine and gastronomy. Each side insisted on capturing the heritage of historical proximity to France and the United States.

Innovations, action collective et dynamiques sociales was the topic of the next session. Ludovic Vaillant (Cerema), Amélie Gonçalves (University of Toulouse / INRA UMR AGIR), Corinne Blanquart and Gwenaëlle Raton (IFSTTAR-SPLOTT) shared the results of a qualitative study based on interviews with food producers, distributors, transport operators, and large food chain retailers in the region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Their research revealed that for different reasons related to socio-territorial contexts, logistical aspects of farm produce marketing, such as transportation, are often overlooked by individual farmers, who could benefit from acting more collaboratively. Possible innovations were contemplated. Farmers' motivations and attitudes, as well as the viability of collective initiatives of Québec farmers to develop short food supply chains, was the subject of a presentation by Sophie Laughrea (Research Assistant, M.Sc.), Patrick Mundler and Annie Royer, both professors at the Department of Agroecology & Consumption Studies, at Laval University. Empirical data showed that farmers will maintain their engagement under certain conditions, and will change according to the reasons (affective, normative, or instrumental) that motivate them to adhere to the project. Further, Gabriel Montrieux, a doctoral student at University of Lyon 2, reflected on how members of AMAP (Association pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne) schemes envision these initiatives. He identified different degrees of involvement and political stances, explained in relation to lifestyles and lifepaths. Claudia Laviolette (a doctoral student) and Manon Boulianne, professor at the Department of Anthropology at Laval University, concluded with an overview of contemporary alternative food marketing initiatives in Perth, Australia. The Australian political environment, as well as local, regional, and national food cultures, were considered obstacles to

further development of existing initiatives. Overall, this session pointed to historical, contextual, and individual drives and challenges of food collective action and initiatives.

At the end of Thursday afternoon, Jean-Baptiste Traversac, from the Institut national de la recherche agronomique (INRA), reviewed the recent evolution of territorial dynamics and regulations around food in France and, more generally, in Europe. He noted that conflicts emerge from discrepancies between territorial development policies and planning, privileging either large-scale agriculture or small-scale agriculture and peasant farms.

Friday started with a session entitled *Les produits de qualité spécifique au Québec: émergence et enjeux de reconnaissance*. Issues related to the creation of Protected Geographical Indications (GPI) were center stage. Three case studies were discussed. Anaïs Detolle, a doctoral student in Anthropology at Concordia University, commented on the process that led to the 2015 certification of Québec ice cider, and the sociopolitical roles of the actors involved in the process. Sabrina Doyon, professor in Anthropology (Laval University), used a political ecology approach to the case of the St-Lawrence eel and Atlantic sturgeon, two forgotten species that were recently rediscovered and which are candidates for the attribution of a GPI. Stéphanie Dubé (a Masters student), Mario Handfield, and Marie-José Fortin (professors, Département Sociétés, Territoires et Développement at Université du Québec à Rimouski) focused on the strategies of cheese entrepreneurs to create quality products without resorting to GPIs. The political aspects of food and specialty food production stood out strongly, once again.

The next session, *Acteurs des systèmes alimentaires alternatifs: perspectives urbaines* took us to the heart of Montréal. Béatrice Lefebvre, a doctoral student in sociology at UQAM, noted that food processing initiatives linking directly to food security have been ignored in the scientific literature, compared to food distribution schemes and urban agriculture. She underscored the importance of including collective kitchens in alternative food system planning. Alexandre Maltais, a PhD student at the Centre Urbanisation Culture Société, INRS, focused on small retail stores and their actual and potential contribution to alternative food distribution. He described interviews with food shops and restaurants owners from two inner-city districts of Montréal, showing how they were instrumental for networks of producers, activists, and consumers. Hugo Martorell, a Masters student in Urban Food Governance at Concordia University, along with David Marshall and Marie-Eve Voghel-Robert, from Revitalisation St-Pierre, drew a picture of Montréal's ongoing alternative food provisioning initiatives.

The final session was *Les systèmes alimentaires territorialisés en actes*. Éliane Brisebois (Masters student, Environmental Studies), René Audet and Sylvain Lefebvre (professors at the Department of Strategy, Social & Environmental Responsibility, UQAM) further broadened the description of the alternative food system in Montréal. They considered different functions (production, provision, food waste recovering, etc.), and types of initiatives (brokerage, food sharing, gleaning, etc.). Geneviève Parent (Law professor, Chaire de recherche en droit sur la diversité et la sécurité alimentaires, Université Laval) and Jean-Louis Rastoin (Montpellier SupAgro & Chaire UNESCO Alimentations du monde), with the collaboration of Marlen León (University of Costa Rica) and Henri Rouillé D'Orfeuil (Resolis, Paris), discussed the concept of

Territorialized Food Systems and introduced their research project “100 initiatives d’alimentation responsable en France, au Québec et au Costa Rica”.

The last event of the day was a roundtable that involved Elisabeth Sénéchal, from MAPAQ (Ministère de l’agriculture, des pêcheries et de l’alimentation du Québec), Ghaliya Chahine (Concertation Montréal and Système alimentaire montréalais), and Gaëlle Zwicky (Équiterre). Each presenter identified issues and challenges faced by their organization on the road to implementing alternative food systems.

Clearly interdisciplinary, and involving participants from various regions of Québec and France, we felt that this conference reached its goal of sharing methods, ideas, and knowledge. Faculty, students, and organizations—all interested in the transition to territorialized and sustainable food systems—were engaged in exploring and debating new issues and cases.

Most of the presentations can be found at <https://www.mangerlocalQuébec.info/en-savoir-plus>. Two of the studies, by Sabrina Doyon and Alexandre Maltais, are published in this issue of the journal.