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Social inclusion in an alternative food network: values, practices and tensions

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JEL Classifications: Q18, Q01, M1, O35.

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Abstract:

This paper explores challenges a consumer food cooperative must address to combine social inclusion and embeddedness in its urban environment with the food quality standards it targets. While the difficulty in making alternative food networks (AFNs) socially accessible is well documented, little is known about organizational practices that foster inclusion in AFNs. Our research—based on over 100 participant observations of meetings held at the cooperative and on food activities with members of community organizations—has generated insight on how a participative process—through collective decisions, knowledge exchanges and workslot commitments—could facilitate or restrain social inclusion. Our results suggest that promotion of the value of equality for the largest number is hindered by differences in food, material and consumer cultures between cooperative members and non-members. The value of equality for the largest number is pragmatically applied through social inclusion regarding food supply and voluntary work participation.

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1. Introduction

Alternative food networks (AFNs) are generally characterized by short food supply chains (Aubry and Kebir 2013), close spatial proximity between farmers and consumers, specific retail venues and a sustainable food commitment (Jarosz 2008). Those emerging food supply chains often aim to offer alternative food markets to standardised industrial food supply systems (Murdoch et al. 2000; Renting et al. 2003; Warner et al. 2017). AFNs are hinged on new forms of political association and market governance and are embedded in local social networks (Wathmore et al. 2003).

AFNs—as part of a necessary food transition trend—foster social values such as conviviality, knowledge sharing (Chiffolleau et al 2017), ethical relationships with producers (Forssell and Lankoski 2015), and solidarity with the poorest (Paturel 2015). However, like any project that strives to deal with sustainability in a global way, AFNs are often hampered by substantial tensions between economic, environmental and social dimensions, especially with regard to social inclusion.

Few publications to date have focused on these tensions within AFNs and their ability to promote social inclusion. We decided to study this issue in a consumer food cooperative being set up in Brussels (Belgium) and for which solidarity is paramount amongst the five founding values [1]. For the cooperative, ‘solidarity’ generally means the inclusion of neighbourhood residents (very socioeconomically and culturally heterogeneous) and accessibility to sustainable food [2] for all [3]. It thus adopted a participatory not-for-profit model supposedly ensuring affordable selling prices and equity for all involved in the project. The cooperative also benefits from a group of volunteers responsible for ‘social diversity’, and it became a partner in a participatory action research project focused on the issue of social inclusion in AFNs.

The present paper addresses challenges faced by this urban food cooperative trying to combine social inclusiveness and embeddedness in its local environment with an offer of high quality sustainable food. Based on more than 100 participant observations of food activities and meetings and on around 15 comprehensive interviews, we analyze the main difficulties and conditions to make AFNs more socially inclusive and how values and new forms of governance could foster this social inclusion (or not)? What are the difficulties encountered when combining solidarity, and more specifically social inclusiveness, within AFNs with a participatory model? These are all questions that will fuel discussions on the approach to sustainability and transition within these networks.

Our results suggest that two practices and decision-making processes are crucial to ensure social inclusion. The first is related to the match between the cooperative’s food supply and the neighbourhood demand, as well as the choice of food products. The second addresses the participation in cooperative activities. What could be considered as a fair distribution of tasks and responsibilities between members could vary according to their profiles and values.

The next section reviews literature findings with regard to commitments of AFNs to sustainability, to eventually raise questions on their social accessibility and inclusion. The third section presents the qualitative methodology and hypothesis that had guided the fieldwork. A fourth section discusses the results, values around social inclusion displayed by members of the cooperative, practises and decision-making regarding the ability of the cooperative to facilitate social inclusion, vis-à-vis the two specific components the most relevant to answer our research question, i.e. the food supply and participation in the cooperative. The conclusions are discussed in a last section.

2. Context and theoretical background

What characterises alternative food networks?

A substantial body of the social science food literature produced since the early 2000s has been focused on investigating ‘alternative’ food networks (AFN). Useful reviews (Venn et al 2006; Deverre and Lamine 2010; Maye and Kirwan 2010; Forssell and Lankoski 2015) have stressed the diversity of ‘alternative’ production and distribution practices, although such schemes or initiatives have a few aspects in common, including, “*social embeddedness, premised upon a principle of trust, community and often linked to a specific geography, and based on a notion of ‘quality’*” (Venn et al. 2006, p. 253). Expression of combinations of those recurrent aspects has led to a broad range of types. Some authors have described their diversity. Slocum (2007) described four types of AFN in the North American context. The first category pools organizations that support local farmers, such as farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture. The second are non-profit organizations that work on food education, cooking demonstrations and disease prevention. The third are environmental groups advocating organic, free-range hormone- or antibiotic-free meat and open areas for raising livestock. And the fourth type represents organizations that advocate workers’ and producers’ rights and/or social justice and food security for oppressed groups, like urban gardening for community building.

The wide range of alternatives eventually leads to an allusive notion of their ‘alternativeness’ that is mostly characterised in opposition to ‘conventional’ food systems. Scholars draw particular attention to their social, ethical and geographical characteristics—briefly, AFNs seek to create more social interactions between producers and consumers, combined with a strong emphasis on localisation and product quality. Other similarities between AFNs have also been highlighted, such as being an archetypal case of the ‘economy of qualities’ [4](Whatermore, Stassart and Renting 2003).

The notion of ‘proximity’ could also embody the essence of AFNs (Barbera and Dagnes 2016; Marechal and Holzemer et al. 2015; Paturel 2010), i.e. short physical distances and direct and close relations between producers and consumers in the sense of trust and fairness. Finally, the ecological dimension of AFNs appears to be pivotal to the networks (Morris and Kirwan 2011; Seyfang 2006), in addition to the notion of ‘ecological embeddedness’, which has also been implemented as a conceptual tool to explore AFN development (Morris and Kirwan 2011).

Alternative food networks through the lens of sustainability

Sustainability [5] is paramount for AFNs and is deployed for many reasons according to a study involving 125 participants (Kloppenburger et al 2000), which revealed that sustainable food system attributes are similar to those of AFNs: ‘tasting sustainability’, ‘ecologically sustainable’, ‘knowledge/communicative’, ‘proximate’, ‘economically sustaining’, ‘participatory’, ‘just/ethical’, ‘sustainably regulated’, ‘sacred’, ‘healthful’, ‘diverse’, ‘culturally nourishing’, ‘seasonal/temporal’, ‘value-oriented’, and finally ‘relational’.

AFNs effectively contribute to food system sustainability in different ways, but they are hard to implement harmoniously. Forssell and Lankoski (2015) identified some key contributions of AFNs to environmental sustainability (e.g. through the reduced physical distance in AFNs or the organic requirements for production), to economic sustainability (through production methods or new forms of governance and strong relationships meant to improve producers’ livelihoods and of those involved in the network), and finally to social sustainability (through reduced distances in AFNs, and strong relationships between producers and consumers). Moreover, so-called ‘natural’ foods (unprocessed, free of additives, organic, etc.) and so-called ‘local’ fresh foods could contribute to consumer health (thought to ensure ‘freshness’, thus retaining more nutrients than food transported over long distances). Lastly, AFNs are believed to have positive effects on food cultures thanks to the focus on territorial embeddedness, which contributes to the preservation of regional and traditional food cultures and their diversity. All of these direct linkages indicate that AFN sustainability expectations are well grounded.

However, AFN sustainability is the focus of greater criticism in a number of articles. First, AFN sustainability dimensions could be contradictory, e.g. the nutritional appropriateness with respect to the economic and environment dimensions, because a balanced diet requires a higher quantity of more expensive foods (Darmon and Drewnowsky 2015; Jones et al. 2016; Reynolds et al. 2016). Some authors further argue that some other sustainability dimensions are not yet present in AFNs, such as labour rights, food waste and reducing meat consumption. AFNs might also have debateable impacts or not yet verified linkages with respect to several of their benefits, such as higher incomes for producers, affordable foods due to the reduced value chain distance (Guthman et al. 2006; Hinrichs 2000), or high-quality relations and information exchanges (Tregear 2011). There can be contradictions with their sustainable objectives, such as producing a high environmental impact by cumulating local transportation (Bruce, Born and Purcell 2006), or they may involve labour-intensive activities carried out by the actors (Bruce, Rebecca and Castellano 2016). Some authors have also denounced the social construction of some fundamental notions of AFNs, such as ‘local’ anchorage (Born and Purcell, 2006; Barbera and Dagnes 2016) or the fact that AFNs could be based on a romanticized view of the countryside and nature (Maye 2013: 384). Therefore, by creating adaptive responses to such criticism, the sustainability potential of AFNs could be better and even greater than that of conventional supply chains.

From social embeddedness to accessibility

A review conducted by Deverre and Lamine (2010) suggests that a large part of the academic literature on AFNs concerns rural sociology and the sociology of consumption, while reflecting social relations between the actors involved. Maye (2013) discussed three theoretical concepts dominating an ‘early phase of AFN scholarship’: *short food supply chains* (SFSCs), stressing the proximity between producers and consumers; *conventions* [6] associated with specific norms, values and organisational forms of each food network, such as tradition, trust and place, ecology, price and value for money; and finally the *social embeddedness* notion inspired from the seminal contribution of Polanyi, which recognizes that AFNs are economic models embedded in a complex hub of social relations. *Social embeddedness* conveys the idea that economic and social spheres are interconnected via individuals through cooperative or competitive relations, with the exchange of information and knowledge (Granovetter 1985). Within the AFN context, *social embeddedness* assumes that social relations are part and parcel of the genesis of all food alternatives (Dubuisson-Quellier 2009), and imply participation, reciprocity and trust values. AFNs thus represent collectives for community-building and social cohesion in which the practice of producing or distributing ‘sustainable food’ enables the expression of alternative values about society, environment and economy.

Social cohesion was examined by Paturel (2015) through three criteria: *social links* which focus on interconnection and cooperation and induces trust, *social networks* which depend on human and territorial resources, and finally *participation* involving individual commitment. A comparison of over 100 collective food buying groups revealed that the main social network activities are sharing of resources with other AFNs and the dissemination of information about sustainable foods (Dedeurwaerdere et al 2017). Another research study documented how social relations, as fostered by a participatory context, has stimulated the evolution of practices and knowledge, and notably the creation of a labelling system for local food markets (Chiffolleau et al 2017).

Nonetheless, the emphasis on social cohesion does not prevent social inequality within AFNs. Actually, individuals involved in AFNs tend to have medium and higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Dupuis and Goodman 2005; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Mundler 2013; Richard et al. 2014; Slocum 2007). These individuals have often inherited, from their social circles, knowledge regarding nutrition, health and environmental issues, and they are generally wealthy enough to buy organic food. Moreover, there

is a dominant gender driver to such collectives, i.e. gardening, cooking and distributing food for others are the reflection of women's care practices (Jarosz 2006). AFNs are places where alternative food practices are implemented and are socio-physical clusters that are often referred to as 'white food spaces' (Slocum 2007). Food politics are at play, so AFNs contribute to the separation of food provisioning practices and in turn of people with consumption habits that differ from those of the usual customers.

Conversely, quite early, AFNs stood for locally-based and bottom up solutions to improve food security for vulnerable people living in areas lacking food stores offering a wide variety of food at affordable price for them. The American civil society developed a strong interest for food security issues organized around the community food security coalition (CFSC), defined as "*all persons having access to culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate food through local non-emergency sources all the time*". Therefore, new production and distribution approaches such as community gardening or community supported agriculture (CSA) schemes were initiated to solve issues of access to food for vulnerable populations (Allen 1999; Hinrichs 2000; Short et al. 2007; Wrigley et al. 2003).

Researchers had evaluated that small full-service food retailers were contributing to accessibility via four criteria (Short et al 2007): *location* of small retailers within walking distance, *affordability*, *nutritional adequacy* and *cultural acceptability*, e.g. the presence of foods specific to the needs of a particular cultural group, including the shopping experience as well by the language spoken to customers. These initiatives are places of socializing and potentially provide fresh vegetables and fruits for deprived people at lower prices or even sometimes free of charge, yet they also involve social inequality when "*struggling farmers and poor consumers must weigh concerns with income and price against the supposed benefits of direct social ties*" (Hinrichs, 2000, p. 301).

According to Paturel (2015), a short food supply chain is accessible to all under three conditions: it must not be designed specifically for deprived populations in order to guarantee its economic and social viability; a broad range of social actors and networks are involved; and the participation of all the actors is crucial. Barbera and Dagnes (2016: 325) claim that accessibility refers to the sales point and its convenience, for instance in terms of opening hours and location, and also to the agrifoods, which must be available for everyday consumption at affordable prices.

The implementation of these initiatives in the most popular neighbourhoods in collaboration with social, nutrition and health education services, appears to be a food-access 'democratization' response (Noel and Darrot 2016). It is well known that income and education influence food choice (Ver Ploeg and Wilde, 2018). Deprived populations tend to have less access to quality food because animal proteins, fresh vegetables and fruits are the most expensive foods (Darmon & Drewnoski 2015). Consequently, AFN accessibility to the most deprived people requires solidarity mechanisms such as staggered payments, differentiated basket prices, subsidized baskets, as implemented in the French community supported agriculture network (Amap) or in social grocery stores (Mundler 2013; Paturel 2010). The desire for democratization and the need to move beyond a niche is symbolised by the shift from 'alternative' to 'localized' food networks (Maye 2013), which helps examine their ability to generate equitable community-level food security. Considering that sustainable food systems with equitable environmental reliability, social justice and economic viability concerns can generate conflicts over values and counter-effects, the 'food democracy' concept helps examine whether pragmatic solutions could reduce social inequality and create sustainable food systems (Hassanein 2003; Lacy 2000). This concept implies that every citizen has an equitable contribution to make through participation.

Accessibility, diversity, inclusion and inclusiveness

Several concepts have emerged from the quest for more democratic access to food. A recent review revealed that they are non-exclusive and linked: "*Diversity is described as a community resource.*

Inclusion is highlighted as a community process, and inclusiveness is described as a community outcome.” (Talmage and Knopf 2017). Different indicators are required for their measurement. Diversity can be viewed in terms of demographics, while inclusion is defined in terms of processes to reach diversity through greater access and pathways to community. Access thus appears to be a key indicator of social inclusion and is made possible through members’ voting rights, decision-making, democratic processes, volunteering, voting, collaborations, etc. Finally, inclusiveness as an outcome is tied with high democratic values and social empowerment and measured in terms of equity, equality, eligibility, employment, etc. Therefore, as a policy concept, *social inclusiveness* expresses the willingness to acknowledge the diversity of needs and abilities of people (Van Herzele 2001). Consequently, *participation*¹ is necessary for short supply chains to be accessible to all (Paturel, 2010) and it has become a ‘practical route’ to implement social inclusion, as defined by Hinrichs and Kremer[7] (2002) who studied alternative food networks in the United States.

While the difficulty of making AFN socially accessible is well documented, little is known about the organizational practices to reduce inequalities in access to AFNs and their ability to cope with pragmatic difficulties. What conditions are required to make AFNs more accessible and what difficulties may be encountered? Can democratic values and new forms of governance guarantee or foster it? What difficulties must be overcome to be able to combine social diversity, accessibility to all, and more generally solidarity within AFNs with a participatory model?

Here we explore how a consumer food cooperative displays its values of providing quality food to all, while highlighting the difficulties of putting these values into practice with regard to two main organizational dimensions: the range of products offered and workslot participation.

3. Materials and Methods

Through our case study, we analyze how and to what extent a consumer food cooperative tends to offer accessibility to the largest number and the various organizational solutions implemented to be able to combine accessibility and the supply of high quality sustainable food. The case study focuses on a consumer food cooperative located in northern Brussels, in the multicultural community of Schaerbeek[8]. The consumer food cooperative in its current format opened officially in September 2017 after 4 years of development after the initial founders met to discuss the project. As a food cooperative, only ‘member-owners’ (who hold a share in the cooperative) can shop (including his/her household) and take part in decisions, while non-members are welcome to visit the store but may only shop for a 1-month test period.

Since the outset, the cooperative has been flaunting five core values in its statutes and communications to stakeholders—these five values encompass the recurring features of AFNs (see above). The first value is ‘*sustainability*’, whereby local producers, seasonal and bulk food, and a high proportion of organic and/or fairtrade products are prioritised. The second value is the *participation* of its members through voluntary work (monthly workslots of 2.45 h). During each workslot, members perform a variety of grocery store duties such taking payments from customers and stocking goods on shelves, while also helping with invoice checking, etc. The third value is ‘*cooperation*’ since it is a social, not-for-profit cooperative that also promotes cooperation between consumers and producers and the exchange of tools through open licences. The fourth value is *transparency* with regard to management and prices to producers. And last but not least, the fifth value is ‘*solidarity*’, whereby sustainable food is made accessible to the largest number and the cooperative serves as a hub where social relations and cohesion are fostered. The Social Diversity Committee brings together members concerned about

‘solidarity’ and are involved in awareness-raising activities, ranging from overseeing food store visits by schools and local community organizations, to workshops in the food store kitchen, etc.

This paper is based on the results of a 3-year (2015-2018) *participatory action research* (PAR) project that led to the development of a specific methodological approach and production of qualitative material. The specific PAR approach was first initiated by Lewin (1946) who, by studying group dynamics, determined that change is stimulated by the collective. Then *action research* became *participatory* once democratic processes were involved and notion of shared knowledge was embedded (Freire 1974). The PAR approach is therefore designed to favour action plans addressing social issues through collective experience (Paturel 2014; Chiffolleau et al. 2016). Researchers took part in the food cooperative governance either as members of the Social Diversity Committee or by attending meetings. In any case, and especially in action research, researchers must necessarily maintain the right distance, and reveal the cooperative members’ objectives and rationales (Friedberg 2001). The researchers managed to maintain this distance remaining observers, not leaders, while eventually sharing views and proposing actions during meetings. The research programme also included participant observations of activities on food with several groups (6 to 14 people) made up of members of community organizations active in the neighbourhood and involved in medical care, literacy, continuing education, etc. Food activities were co-created by researchers, members of the Social Diversity Committee and groups of community organizations. The latter mostly included 25 to 55 year-old immigrant women, often unemployed, sometimes widowed or single parents, and not familiar with such buying practices. This did not constitute a research bias since women are generally more involved in food and care practices than men and therefore have a lot to share, notably on the difficulties they face regarding changing food habits at home. Once the decision of partnership between the cooperative and the social partners was taken, then an operational activity framework was set up with each organization [9]. These activities included group discussions using tools (photo language, packaging decryption, blind tasting, etc) to raise awareness on the conventional food system and issues encountered by people, cooking workshops, excursions to farms, gardens or markets, and finally discussions, visits and shifts at the food cooperative.

Overall, the fieldwork included over 100 participant observations covering 79 such activities with groups, along with 22 activities associated with the alternative food network practices (general meetings, Social Diversity Committee meetings, etc.). Ultimately, it is hoped that these food activities will foster mutual exchange of knowledge, reflect the ability to transform food practices and help the food cooperative increase social inclusion. The analysis was also enhanced by additional interviews conducted with members of the cooperative [10] and of community organizations who had participated to food activities [11]. The aim of these interviews was to grasp the meaning they gave to their food purchasing, storing and cooking practices, and to get their opinions regarding the capacity of alternative food networks to be accessible to all. All of the discursive material was coded in the NVivo software package. The researchers implemented a rather inductive coding method even though they built generic categories. The tool allowed sequencing and organization of the analytical work coordinated by three researchers, while the researchers were responsible for being rigorous in the interpretation.

4. Results

In this section, we present our findings on organizational practices to foster inclusiveness in AFNs. In the first section, we discuss the values and meanings attached to the cooperative through justifications by members regarding their commitment, and the status of accessibility, diversity and social inclusion

in the cooperative. The other sections highlight practices and decision-making processes regarding the ability of a consumer food cooperative to facilitate social inclusion vis-à-vis the two specific components most relevant to address our research question, i.e. food supply (items sold, labelling, prices) and workslot participation (2.45 h of work monthly).

a) Multifaceted expression of the social inclusion value

We thus explore in this section how the participative model is embedded in strong values and whether values associated with social inclusion are shared by various actors and displayed or put in action.

The social dimension was part of the genesis of the consumer food cooperative project. One founder claimed that the cooperative was imagined as an alternative that would be able to “break walls” between communities. He used the metaphor of an organic food shop in any popular area where the clients inside the shop are totally different from the people outside. That specific metaphor underlies the egalitarian model deployed by the cooperative since the founders made it imperative that it should not reproduce society’s inequalities. Yet each member has his/her own way of justifying affiliation because it: is an “alternative to the capitalist system”, a “collective and participative system”, embodies “solidarity and social cohesion”, “social and cultural diversity”, “accessibility to all”, is an “encounter with others”; and finally it sells “sustainable good quality food”. Some stressed that it is a place to encounter others, to procure quality food, while others highlighted that volunteering as an alternative to the dominant system.

To interpret this ostensible diversity of values and characteristics attributed to the cooperative, we embraced Vermeersch’s (2004) ‘set of values’ notion (translated from the French *‘répertoire de valeurs’*) that she developed while studying contemporary volunteer action as an identity mechanism framework. A set of values is symptomatic of modern societies in which religious value is laicised and self-realization is hypervalued. In a consumer food cooperative, the set of values enables individuals to express/find meaning in compliance with their own individual viewpoints on their action. Nevertheless, collective action remains fundamental because it jointly permits social participation and individualisation in new values and forms of action. *Equality* represents the set of values that unites all of those mentioned previously. In the coop context, equality implies the possibility for individuals of different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds to participate, along with a desire to encounter/see everyone united for the sake of building an alternative model to the unsatisfactory dominant one, while offering accessibility to all and solidarity by providing a safe and more transparent food environment.

The modalities of promoting the value of social inclusiveness started with the ‘information sessions’, which were (and still are) aimed at boosting overall awareness of the cooperative and attracting new members. During these sessions, members—not only the founders—convey information about the values and practical organization of the cooperative. Besides, very early in the development of the food cooperative, a Social Diversity Committee (SDC) was created by some members in charge of promoting the cooperative among neighbourhood residents and of creating links by organising food activities as mentioned in the Methods section. Note that participant observations on their meetings and food activities revealed that each SDC member embraced a different meaning for his/her action when defining social diversity. Hereafter is an example of the words expressed during a recent meeting devoted to informing other cooperative members about the Committee’s actions—they reveal the diverse range of expressions of the set of values and views of social diversity: “a real exchange between cultures”, “propose a price policy according to purchasing power of each cooperative member”, “harmonious diversity favouring elevation for all”, “reveal beauty of the neighbourhood’s diversity”, “our practices and speeches questioned”, “open the door to those who want to open it” and “make the society more egalitarian”. The same members were then asked to express their own fears regarding their actions: “moralisation of individuals regarding their own choices and livelihoods”, “reproduction of a

dominant social system”, “tiredness, depletion and discouragement”, “impossible practical implementation” and “diversity in a restricted group of people”.

The diversity of values and justifications of the cooperative members’ actions could be a trickle-down effect of the constituted collaborative process, while also enhancing different views and representations regarding ‘others’. The participative process induces continuous adaptation and change: *“In fact, it is a continual collective dream based on shared values. Feedbacks are permanent. There are negative feedbacks but also a lot of very positive ones that encourage us. When there is a negative one, we think we may reorientate ourselves. And when it’s positive, we think we’re going in the right direction. There is a general direction which is this set of values.”* (A founder). It is at once a strength and a complication. The model inevitably generates variation between the ideal of implementing social inclusion within the cooperative and its practical aspects. The founders acknowledged that actions regarding social inclusion were not a priority at the outset despite strong adhesion to this value. This temporal gap might have played a role in some difficulties encountered nowadays.

Beyond the differences noted with regard to the set of values, our results echo those of Vermeersch (2004) who found that volunteers agreed on a ‘pragmatic ethic’ in adapting their actions to the conditions of their feasibility, efficiency and satisfaction and that all gave priority to action while rejecting public discourse. In addition to sharing the same values, different kinds of alternative prosumers are infusing a new material culture involving experimentation and challenges along the road to empowerment (Guien and Ramirez 2017). These two processes (adaptation and material infusion) were observed throughout the cooperative’s operations, from transversal dimensions, including governance and communication, as well its specific activities. The following paragraphs detail two of these main activities [12]: the choice of the food items sold, and participation in cooperative activities including workslots. We explore how the participative model—through collective actions and discussions, proposals and decisions—facilitates its adaptation and produces social inclusion, while also creating tensions and revealing and/or inducing the model’s shortcomings.

b) Cooperative’s food supply vis-à-vis neighbourhood demand

Some members of the cooperative project may be motivated to participate primarily by its values and alternative nature. However, the supermarket’s attractiveness, as for any food retailer, is still mainly dependent on the goods it sells and the prices it charges. The number of items offered for sale has increased in phases—a few hundred were tested under a group buy formula before the store opened, but since then, the product range has regularly expanded to the extent that the supermarket now offers around 2,000 items on its 350 m² sales floor. These include most of the departments usually found in a mid-sized shop: fresh produce, grocery products, beverages, ready-to-eat dishes, cleaning products and cosmetics. With a good selection of fruit and vegetables, much of it local, and bulk goods (legumes, cereals, etc.), and more than 80% of its products organic and/or fair trade certified, the food quality is closer to that of grocery stores and specialty shops, including those marketing organic produce. That reflects the values championed by the cooperative, which relies mainly on local farmers, producers’ cooperatives and specialized wholesalers.

In seeking to make its inclusion ideal a reality, the founders’ group from the outset realized the importance of charging reasonable prices and offering a wide range of goods to satisfy the neighbourhood’s many different consumer profiles. Accordingly, the cooperative adopted principles reflecting those of its New York reference model: mandatory volunteer work for all members, no dividends and no marketing or advertising expenses. Because these principles significantly reduce the cooperative’s expenses, it is able to apply a single, relatively low profit margin on food [11], thus ensuring a highly advantageous quality/price ratio. These founding principles stem from the cooperative’s alignment with the alternative movement and embody several project values: *“With the*

single margin, from a philosophical standpoint, it's great to be non-profit: we don't play the capitalist game, with loss leaders etc. (...) Another benefit of the single margin is transparency, which is one of the cooperative's key values; it ensures that people know how much goes to the producer or the wholesaler." (a permanent staff member of the cooperative, interview). Note that the single margin is also very simple to implement—a significant practical advantage for the supermarket's team of non-professionals.

A year after its grand opening, however, despite these proactive choices, the shop is not that affordable for nearby residents. Upon investigation, we found a number of reasons for this quandary. First, as explained above, the coop's core values are rather contradictory: while strongly committed to locally-sourced, fair-trade, sustainable food, it is equally keen on solidarity and inclusion. In a competition between a supply chain that relies on local producers—farmers and cottage industries—and one sourced by agrifood multinationals from conventional channels, the playing field is very far from level so long as negative externalities, health and environment, particularly, are not factored into prices (IPES Food, 2017). In shop visits held as part of the action research project, many participants were taken aback at the price of eggs, asking *"Is that for one or six?"* and remarking that they could buy them for a third or a quarter of the price at their usual sales outlets. If you discount the difference in quality (in this case, organic farm eggs vs. battery eggs), such a price differential is prohibitive. Visitors repeatedly pointed out significant price differences for various categories of consumer products (tomatoes, yoghurt, etc.). Apart from the mode of production, the notion of a fair price for producers is also hard to reconcile with consumer affordability—at times, to be true to its convictions, the cooperative buys local products also stocked by some competitors but sells them at a higher price than the latter, who are less concerned about the pressure that puts on the producer. Second, conventional market mechanisms partially negate the impact of the founding principles discussed above on price competitiveness. For one thing, with its two thousand members, the cooperative is a low-volume distributor compared to mainstream outlets but also alternative food retailers (organic food chains, farmer's markets etc.), and hence cannot obtain the same cost prices and discounts from its suppliers. Moreover, in keeping with the principle of equality between cooperators, the cooperative has chosen not to hire distribution sector professionals for its permanent staff. Supply and trade negotiations are therefore in the hands of novices, who are gradually initiated into the mysteries of the craft but have yet to master all the requisite bargaining moves.

While the cooperative's permanent staff are aware of these pitfalls, their effects are not quantified or made clear. The supermarket does not do complete regular price comparisons with the competition. However, consumers' views on price competitiveness have been established in the qualitative research data, which therefore shed light on the economic aspect of accessibility. On the whole, members and neighbourhood residents who visited the food cooperative found that it was competitive only with respect to two competing supply sources: other small-scale food alternatives (organic baskets, group buys, cooperative grocery stores, etc.) and sustainable foodstuffs (organic, fair trade, etc.) distributed by mainstream retailers, whose margins on certified products are notoriously high. Meanwhile, the cooperative's prices are considered uncompetitive, or only marginally so, in three competing food categories: large-scale food alternatives, large-scale retailers' mainstream offerings, and everything sold by big-box stores, including certified products. Besides, some action research participants mentioned changes in their purchasing practices but they began to opt for organic food among the products offered by their usual supermarket: *"I've noticed that there isn't a big difference for carrots and lemons. Lemons are only a few cents more. Organic carrots are 1 euro and change while regular ones are 99 cents. That's encouraging. (...). The 'green' things are labelled organic. So that's one habit I've adopted."* (a group discussion participant)

Up to now, the cooperative's principles have clearly not sufficed to make it affordable for the majority of neighbourhood residents, whose food budgets are often tight. However, while prices are seen as a major obstacle, research has shown that there is more to it—the inclusion objective is harder to achieve because of the way the price gap interacts with other obstacles. First, the outreach done with area groups showed that societal issues related to the food system (impacts on health, the environment, etc.)—and hence the sustainable food values advocated by the cooperative—were poorly understood, if at all. A visit to the cooperative by a literacy group that had not yet been sensitized to any food system issues was particularly telling in that regard: “*How can people come and shop here?! Don't they know about Aldi? [big-box stores]?*”, (a participant, group activity). Though broadly very distrustful of industrial food, much concerned with health, and insistent that they wanted to eat organic foods, a majority of participants in the activities were unaware of the key differences between conventional and high-grade production chains. However, for people to be willing to pay higher prices it is imperative that they understand the nutritional, ecological and social food issues. Secondly, the cooperative looked as foreign to some participants as an Asian or African shop to a European who is faced with illegible packaging or unusual foods like dried fish or cassava. It so happens that the cooperative opted to set up shop in a very multicultural neighbourhood with a number of highly visible immigrant communities (primarily Turkish, Moroccan and Guinean). Asked to suggest a recipe to be made with products from the shop, a young African woman said she was at a loss, as she knew only four vegetables (sweet potato, ginger, garlic and onions) out of the many products on display. Here again the cooperative's values are somewhat contradictory: how can it reconcile the promotion of local products with respect for the food cultures of a highly multicultural metropolis? (Martiniello, 2013)

On the supply issue, to summarize: for many neighbourhood people, shopping at the cooperative means paying more and being obliged to change their eating habits, without any clear idea about what individual or collective value is thereby furthered. Studies have moreover shown that the lower the income, the greater is the resistance to change (Cavaillet et al. 2006), thus complicating the inclusion challenge. The cooperative's founders were of course aware from the outset that the challenge was a daunting one. That is indeed why they sought help by joining our participatory action research project, whose goal was to support the cooperative in the meetings it held with neighbourhood residents to find out about their expectations and dietary customs so as help improve the store's product range in terms of its accessibility. For example, purchasing agents introduced foods that were found to be staples for certain cultures (e.g. wheat semolina) and cheaper organic foods. They are also preparing to introduce some two hundred branded non-organic products on an experimental basis. By carrying a broader range of products, in terms of quality and price, the cooperative is pursuing two goals, to: encourage one-stop shopping, increase members' expenditures and enhance the cooperative's inclusiveness. However, these changes are not proceeding smoothly, as they are somewhat at odds with the cooperative's founding values: how can the requirements of sustainable food supply and fair prices for producers be fulfilled while the product range is being expanded and tailored to the expectations, food habits and budgets of as many local residents as possible?

c) Labour participation issues

While these changes are a pivotal development for members, who are given a chance to participate in the cooperative's activities, they may also be a serious hindrance to accessibility. All members are required to buy a share in the cooperative, which provides them with a membership card and access to the shop as well as a choice of workslot. People who are just looking to shop are apt to find these administrative requirements rather surprising. Once a household is registered, a maximum of three

adults (no limit for persons under 18) can be ‘eaters’ and shop. There are different types of workslot. Regular workslots, where members work every 28 days, account for around 60% of the total workslots, while those who choose an irregular schedule (30%) have to plan their workslots and juggle shifts in advance. The latter category includes members organized in committees that work on specific issues. A third type of unpaid workers, representing around 5% of the total, are ‘super-cooperators’ who are responsible for monthly workslot coordination. The founders wanted an egalitarian system that would not simply replicate socioeconomic inequalities, with wealthy cooperators paying full price and the most vulnerable members forced to do volunteer work to get access to better prices. Participation in the work was therefore made compulsory for all, with a monitoring system set up to enforce this, including penalties ranging from extra shifts to expulsion. The work obligation is twofold: there must be equal investment of time (2¾ hours a month) and skills (interchangeability of workers).

The word ‘work’ can lead to misunderstandings. Disadvantaged people may see it as a source of income: “*If there are jobs going, I’m in!*” (a participant, group activity) Members will of course stress that they should be willing to take on the job simply out of solidarity and not expect remuneration but, as noted in the previous point, that is a tough sell for people who already find the shop too expensive.

During the interviews, however, some (often unemployed) neighbourhood residents expressed an interest in volunteer work for a variety of reasons: to get out and see friends, to have something to do on days that can be very long, to meet other people, to practise their French on the job, to see a store from the inside, to learn about the food industry, to make themselves useful, etc. “*We do get paid, but in a different way! Between having money and being happy, which would you choose? (...) Money can’t buy happiness, honey...*” (a participant, group activity). In some cases, the hesitation arises out of a certain confusion caused by the term ‘work’ rather than any real reluctance to do volunteer work.

Apart from that attitude toward work, for most interviewees the main constraint is time. On the supermarket’s shift exchange board, one member humorously promised to be “*eternally grateful to whoever’s willing to swap shifts during the upcoming holidays*”—a sign of how big a place the cooperative occupies in members’ lives. Everyone must accept an additional workload of 2¾ hours a month working in food supply, which can mean that accommodations have to be made within households (babysitting, trip chaining, etc.). In practical terms, it is not about “*just coming in for three hours if you feel like it*”, but accepting the commitment and being ready to make changes to one’s personal routines and sometimes to collective arrangements as well. Bruce et al. (2016) showed that many alternative food networks have the same difficulties: participants often experience a physical, mental and emotional overload that keeps them from fully committing to these systems, especially low-income working women with children. Non-members visiting the supermarket are surprised: “*Some people really have a lot of free time! I liked the shop a lot, I like being a member, but with the little one I can’t do it. (...) Why don’t you make allowances for those who can’t work (in the shop)?*” (group activities, participant observations)

And even within the cooperative itself, the choice of equality with respect to work creates tensions and frustrations: “*To me this is unfair. I’m on my own and I’m supposed to do as much as a family.*” (a cooperative member) Some members do actually consider this equal treatment unfair. The investment and workload required of those working shifts is considerable, and equal for all, but some individuals are less able to muster the energy or find the time. There are a variety of competing activities and obligations within households, and the resulting tension is harder to manage for economically and/or socially vulnerable households. For example, many mothers without access to childcare told us how little time they have for anything. Activities such as work, administrative procedures, health care, etc., must be squeezed in during school hours.

The cooperative's founding members did anticipate these difficulties and from the outset envisaged mechanisms to ease the constraints, mainly through the possibility of occasionally exchanging slots between members and the choice between regular shifts (simpler and more structured, but more constraining) or irregular ones (more flexible but requiring careful planning). At the same time, not quite 10% of members were exempt from work for personal reasons, via the honour system. [12] However, despite these accommodations, the founding principle of equal obligation to do volunteer work is an inherent limitation to the cooperative's inclusiveness—for some, the commitment required by the work system is a real obstacle to membership.

Once personal organizational constraints have been overcome, those doing their first shifts often have apprehensions related to skills and sociocultural differences. Generally, members' mutual support and the super-cooperator's assistance is reassuring, and explanatory documents are made available to everyone (instructions for welcoming members, replenishing the bulk bins, etc.). However, some people feel challenged by interactions in French, lack confidence in their writing or computing skills, etc. These practical difficulties may be compounded by social anxiety at the prospect of meeting strangers, immersion in another community, fear of the unknown, not daring to ask questions or being unable to answer them, etc. A super-cooperator on the social diversity committee tells the story of the first shift of a new member's initiation: "*It went well, she has an incredible memory, but the problem is she can't read the labels...makes it hard to know where to put the products! Then a permanent staffer showed her how do the cheese labelling, but in a tearing hurry, bing-bang, like that, ... I had to show her all over again, calmly.*" Some people also say they are afraid of being misunderstood by their community, and even judged, on account of their involvement with this innovative supermarket and their lack of arguments to justify their choice.

As these impediments are identified, the cooperative becomes better able to pursue its incremental growth through collective action. A host of ideas emerge, some of which are put into effect and have an impact on cooperative operations, while others come to nothing. The Social Diversity Committee alerts the other committees and the permanent staff to any problems encountered and tries to make certain communication tools more targeted, simplify some procedures, etc. It has also put in place a personalized support system [13]: if desired, a new member may be oriented and 'sponsored' by a more senior member in areas of their interest (registration, errands, shifts, participation in governing bodies, etc.). During this transitional coaching phase, new members have the chance to meet other members, build trust, learn about the shop, learn their duties, etc. The first few months of the coaching experiment have been encouraging, i.e. some ten people have been coached, at their request, and all are satisfied with the results.

Without compromising the equality principle, which is the cooperative's core value, these developments lead to flexibility in terms of time and skills that can be mobilized: some members do more than just their mandatory shift, while others give committees the benefit of their individual talents or use them to ease the work of their shift, etc. These adaptations are in keeping with 'pragmatic ethics' (Vermeesh, 2004), as the collective adapts its values to what is actually feasible. While they do to some extent constitute departures from the principle of equality among cooperators, they also make for greater inclusion and enhance efficiency in certain areas (user-friendliness, accounting, communications, social diversity, etc.).

Even though the changes may be successful, they still do only so much to remove barriers to inclusion, and the model remains quite daunting for those who lack time or confidence in their skills (in terms of writing, computing, etc.). Some Social Diversity Committee members would like to go further and propose "*a time-based solidarity system whereby those who have time can share with others who have*

less”, which would be tantamount to giving members the choice of giving up some of their equality. Similarly, it was suggested it would be more reassuring if some tasks to be done during the shifts were phased in, so as to alleviate any initial misgivings new members could have: hence, they could learn the ropes by stocking shelves, then the bulk bins and fridges, receive deliveries before operating the cash register, etc. Time will tell whether these proposals are put into practice and how effective they turn out to be.

5. Conclusion, discussion and implications

This paper addressed the challenge of social inclusion in AFNs through an analysis of a consumer food cooperative. A year after its opening, the cooperative had attracted people of different socioeconomic statuses and generations even though most represented members were in the 25-39 age category (59%) and were women (63%). Importantly, the panel of cooperators did not reflect the cultural diversity of the neighbourhood residents.

By applying the combined ‘set of values’ and “pragmatic ethic” notions developed by Vermeesh (2004), our research findings generated insight on how the participative model helped the consumer food cooperative display and put into practice its values, as well as on how it induced tensions while revealing the limits of the model itself. The rationale was based on the hypothesis that the participatory process—through collective propositions and decisions, knowledge exchange and workslot commitments—could facilitate social inclusion through equality for the largest number. Having reviewed the activities and discussed the motives and rationale of members of one coop and of food activity participants, it became apparent that promoting social inclusion through that participatory process would not alone guarantee accessibility for everyone—the reasons for this lie at the cooperative and individual levels.

Choices and decisions to be made to trigger social inclusion in the cooperative were not obvious to all two thousand members who had varying views of equity regarding food systems and volunteer work. In this sense, the equality principle is questionable when analysed in relation to volunteer work and the single margin. While in the name of equality some considered it necessary to reduce the number of workslots for large families because they generally lacked time, some other single people considered it unfair that they would have to do the same amount of volunteer work as large households. The model imposed the same requirements (work for all) and offered the same services (offer = for all), whereas the cultural and socioeconomic situations differed markedly. This suggests that the equality of requirements could be unfair or generate feelings of unfairness for some members (Messick, 1995). Moreover, this equality of requirement and service may be detrimental to social inclusion. Related to fair prices and affordability, the single margin applied to all products by the cooperative also had limitations. On the one hand, it blurred consumer habits and references because expensive products with huge margins were generally particularly competitive at the cooperative whereas others were not in comparison to the competition. On the other hand, by advocating equal margins on all products, the cooperative wiped out the possibility of promoting and enhancing the accessibility of specific products, e.g. staple food items such as pulses, cereals—the healthiest and most sustainable products. But the lack of empirical studies regarding poor household responses to variations in economic variables led to poorly founded conclusions on the price and revenue effects for those extremities of the sample (Cavaillet et al. 2006, p. 284).

It was interesting to observe that to overcome difficulties related to practical implementation of the equity value, the ‘pragmatic ethic’ led members to make compromises and adaptations to the model, thus reframing the initial vision of equality. For instance, they specialized tasks that could qualify for the cooperators’ workslots, while assigning greater responsibility and power to ‘super-cooperators’. The consumer food cooperative also had to combine conventional trade elements like serving as a one-stop

shop, for convenience or profitability reasons, with new ways of consuming. Indeed, the model relied on the transfer of practices and skills from the professional to the private sphere, in exchange for more time allocated to food processing and distribution, which is contrary to the modern trend of reducing such activities to simplify life.

By taking a step back, we discovered that a paradox in the model stemmed from the desire for an inclusive system which is based on an exclusive system (compulsory workslots, sanctions and exclusions related to their non-respect). In fact, one of the implicit objectives of the workslots—beyond an understanding of the store and a free and abundant workforce—was, in the name of equality, the exclusion of free-riders among members. Volunteer work creates a sense of belonging and fosters solidarity and trust in the model provided that it takes place in a satisfactory atmosphere in the eyes of the member, while also closely depending on his/her expectations and values. Shared values were essential in motivating members to be active in the cooperative—the pleasure of meeting new people who sometimes became friends, chatting, playing store and learning, while contributing to a more inclusive, fair, sustainable, transparent and local model. Feeling useful also contributed to members' motivation because this *“utility anchors the individual in the social world, through his/her belonging to different groups and the place he/she occupies”* (Vermeesh 2004, p. 704).

Belief in the cooperative's values helped members overcome difficulties encountered during these workslots and they were willing to change their purchasing and eating practices when they shared the same values regarding sustainable food. The research illustrated that neighbourhood residents who participated in the research shared the same concerns, such as being healthy and eating high quality organic food. However, they were not equal regarding participation, since they themselves faced inequalities within both society and the cooperative, e.g. with respect to understanding the information delivered, product knowledge and habits or purchasing power.

Moreover, the many published findings regarding sustainable consumption show that attempts to make individual behaviour more sustainable are ineffective (Warde and Southerton 2012; Plessz et al. 2016), while indicating that if people are well-informed they might change their consumption practices. The choice to consume 'sustainable' is related to strong identity dimensions—the need to reconnect, which is part of the collective dimension (Dubuisson-Quellier 2009), the quest for wellbeing, authentic selfhood and control over one's life (Özcaglar-Toulouse 2009)—and this it cannot be a rational choice since sustainability dimensions are contradictory (Darmon and Drewnowski 2015). Furthermore, shopping and cooking involve unacknowledged and embodied skills rooted in a nexus of representations and practices that are meaningful for people and built over the course of various socialisations—all of this constitutes a 'food model' (Poulain 2017). These practices result from socially gendered task assignment related to food purchasing, provisioning and preparation (Counihan 2004), and changes in these practices are often the result of biographical turning points (Lamine 2008). Besides, new activities are also introduced or constrained by individual social networks. Some theorists have shifted the focus from individual to social practices, arguing that it is an entity that prefigures and configures individual action, with social practice being defined as a meaningful network of particular *doings* and *sayings*, recognised in a particular social environment[14]. In the present study, volunteer work and food supply practices thus competed with other routinized buying and eating practices of individuals who had participated in the research.

The paper has shown that the equality value can become unfair and that social inclusion processes require special attention and adaptations to be able to understand and address the desire for diversity of members and local residents. The food policy implications are multiple. First of all, the transition in favour of more sustainable foods is only possible if appropriate educational programmes on food system issues are implemented. Several tailored educational tools (resource collections, animated guides on

reading food packaging, posters on agrifood sectors) have been designed and produced within the framework of participatory action research programmes to meet this need for education and upgrading for all. One of the aims of the food activities organised within the framework of our research was to generate insight into the food system. Participants' observations confirmed the need for this pedagogical approach to the benefit of everyone—members and neighbourhood residents—and its contribution in overcoming the obstacles discussed above.

Nevertheless, the range of foodstuffs and prices is an unavoidable issue that must be addressed to be able to fulfil the goals of social inclusion and accessibility to all. The principles instituted by the cooperative from the outset—single margin, voluntary work and absence of marketing fees—proved insufficient in ensuring affordability to a majority of neighbourhood residents, mainly because of structural disadvantages (e.g. low volumes) and the low incomes of these residents. This suggests that financial solidarity mechanisms must also be put in place to strengthen the coop store's economic accessibility. This question has been under consideration for many months within the cooperative. The latter wishes to establish both internal (e.g. shares and/or baskets subsidized, solidarity fund, differentiated basket prices, staggered payments, etc.) and institutional solidarity (negotiations are under way with the local CPAS to grant a monthly purchase amount to some of its recipients based on the social grocery store model). Note that the main difficulty is not fundraising but rather the choice of distribution criteria (who are distributed to and under what conditions?).

These structural needs are part of a perspective that favours the transition to a sustainable food system as a social issue that must mainly be addressed collectively, by associations and groups of citizens, but also by public institutions and politicians, rather than by individual responsibility, whereby we should each become a 'prosumer' favouring 'responsible' purchases. This viewpoint is particularly relevant when addressing the sustainable food issue with groups of people who are vulnerable and insecure due to their socioeconomic situation (immigration, unemployment, solitude, chronic disease, old age, etc.). The social participation of individuals is not within everyone's reach and depends on their resources and the social environment rather than their own individual motivations (Gaudet and Turcotte 2013). Moreover, promoting consumption changes is questionable for populations with an immigration background because it could induce stress due to worry about not being able to eat well (Corbeau 2012) while also increasing pressure of their social integration by promoting the adoption of new ways of eating (Savall 2017). During some activities, we observed that talking about the agrifood system and associated issues could trigger feelings of injustice and anger in some participants. Moreover, economically deprived families often enjoy eating junk food since it conveys pleasure and compensates for material deprivation (Fielding-Singh 2017). In addition, it could be of little interest for people to engage in ideological combats when, on a daily basis, they are encountering difficulties finding their place in society (mastery of the language, knowledge of social behaviours, etc.). And these observations raise the question of the acceptability of targeting the underprivileged social classes to change their behaviours, which are judged as being less respectable or respectful. More generally, attempts to promote social change solely at the individual level by providing relevant information and targeting his/her behaviours would be illusional and resource consuming. Institutional interventions that foster social change in people are not aimed at changing their practices but rather at producing broader changes in normalities (Vihalemm et al. 2015), including an increasingly shared responsibility and gradual changes in a variety of elements in the system that could span years and decades.

Notes

[1] The cooperative's five founding values are: sustainability, solidarity, participation, transparency and cooperation.

[2] We use that term whereas it has been pointed out in the literature that sustainability dimensions, as theoretically put forward by scientists and politicians, are sometimes contradictory (Darmon et al. 2017; Jones et al. 2016) and are complicated for consumers to put into practice in so-called ‘conventional’ agrofood systems, while also complicating decision making, particularly as the term does not make common sense, nor is it used by highly educated people.

[3] On its website, the cooperative points out that it is, “aware of the cultural and socioeconomic diversity within the Brussels community”, and it is, “working towards providing broad access to sustainable food. Through food, the cooperative is a hub for sharing and exchange that will foster diversity and mutual aid and strengthen the social fabric of our city.”

[4] Callon M., Méadel C., Rabeharisoa V., 2002, “The economy of qualities” *Economy and Society*. 3(1/2), 194-217

[5] In the 1980s ‘sustainability’ emerged as a symbol of social change which involved promoting meaningful change in agriculture and food systems. Ever since it has been challenged due to conflicts over values and a lack of consensus on definitions. Here is a definition that provides the three pillars of ‘sustainability’: “*Economic issues include the incomes and livelihoods of producers and others involved in the network, employment and local economic development, particularly in rural areas. Social issues include labor rights and the safety of workers, consumer health, food culture, and the accessibility, availability, and affordability of nutritious food. Environmental impacts of food production, processing, packaging, distribution, and consumption, in turn, have to do with the use of resources and with pollution and damage to the soil, water, and air (including greenhouse gas emissions), biodiversity and ecosystems, and animal welfare.*” (Forssell and Lankoski 2015, p. 65)

[6] In convention theory, conventions are social norms and values which bind people through related conventional practice and routines.

[7] “Social inclusion (...) can be defined as an ongoing and reflexive process of full and engaged participation by all interested social actors, regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural resources. Social inclusion is based on simultaneous consideration of the whole (i.e. community) and its various constituent parts (e.g. different classes, age groups, genders, etc.) as a process, it is premised on respectful interactions between different groups and a focus on mutual empowerment. Participation is often seen as the most obvious and practical route to social inclusion and has become a priority of many endogenous development projects. Such projects actively seek broader based participation from local people to share the presumed benefits of their project more widely, but also to build public support and legitimacy.” (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002:68)

[8] It is the first food coop that was recently opened. But in late 19th century, food cooperatives emerged on the economic scene to cope economic crises.

[9] A minimum of six activities were planned with each partner, roughly within a 2 month interval. This program was designed to allow to time between activities. The program of the two last groups was extended to more activities over a longer period in order to boost confidence and offer more time to assess potential practice changes, inertia or resistance.

[10] Due to their transversal nature, certain aspects of governance and communication are also included, but without us detailing them in full.

[11] The cooperative’s margins are 20% on dry goods and 25% on fresh produce and bulk goods. The higher margin in the latter two categories is meant to compensate for greater losses (storage of perishables, handling).

[12] The cooperator submits an exemption request, stating his or her reasons, to the members’ office, which rules on it; no proof is necessary. The list of possible justifications for an exemption is open-ended but may include parental leave, bereavement, physical disability, etc.

[13] The founders envisioned an orientation or ‘initiation’ for cooperative newcomers. That possibility is mentioned in the by-laws (*règlement d’ordre intérieur*) but has not become reality because of the delay in implementing the project. The only orientation so far has been a briefing session.

[14] Schatzki T.R., 1996, *Social Practices, A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, quoted by Vihalemm et al. 2015.

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