

Lyon visit report 10-13 Oktober 2013

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My impression of France being the European country which is most advanced in matters of new forms of localised food production and short supply chain approaches was confirmed during the Grundtvig meeting on regional logistics in Lyon. AMAPs being a well-established concept with a seemingly good dynamic of new AMAPs being created all the time, other ways of linking producers and consumers are now being developed. The idea is to make regional products more accessible and attractive to persons who could not yet be reached by AMAPs (the latter still seem to be the reference for short supply chain schemes).

AlterConso in Lyon

Our first field trip took us to [AlterConso](#), a **cooperative working in the field of regional logistics**. Compared to an AMAP, Alter Conso offers a wider range of products (including dairy products, honey, eggs, ...) from approximately 50 producers and the convenience of **delivering these goods to 13 distribution points in Lyon**.

This scheme thus brings the local produce closer to the consumers. Besides, the scheme offers clients more flexibility. For instance, they can order a range of products on a one-off basis (convenient for products like honey or vinegar). However, the longer-term commitment to producers (as known from AMAPs) is maintained through six-month-orders of weekly baskets that the consumers subscribe to.

At first, I had the impression that the main differences between AlterConso and regular logistics schemes were “just” that AlterConso have direct connections to the producers, only deal in regional produce, work with a slim infrastructure and offer reduced fees for low-income customers. **Contributions by consumers for transport range from 0-20% of the price of the produce, 15% being needed by Alter Conso to be economically viable**. Additionally, producers pay a contribution of a further 15% for the service of having their products picked up by Alter Conso at their farm and distributed in the city.

What really changed this impression for me was learning about the way in which Alter Conso facilitate direct contacts between producers and consumers: each producer working with Alter Conso has signed a contract to visit each of the 14 distribution centers at least once a year during one of the weekly food distribution hours.

For the producers, this means that they have to come to Lyon once in 3-4 weeks (compared to twice-weekly or weekly commitments in most AMAP schemes). For the consumers at each distribution point, the arrangement implies that they have the opportunity to meet each producer once a year at their local distribution point. Every week, producer-consumer contacts are made possible at each distribution point.

This to me constitutes a **profound difference to conventional logistics schemes that are characterised by total disconnection between the people who produce and the people who consume**.

De la Ferme au Quartier in Saint-Etienne

The next day's visit to the organisation ['de la ferme au quartier'](#) in St. Etienne showed us a variation of the scheme seen at Alter Conso's: the aim is to provide people in the city with fresh, regional, organic food and facilitate direct contacts between producers and consumers.

Smaller and younger, the organisation is less strict on farmers compared to Alter Conso: organic production is not a fixed requirement but an aim. The idea is to assist farmers who are currently not organic to take the step in switching to organic agriculture. Moreover, there are no fines for farmers who don't come to the distribution points although this is part of the scheme in order to allow producer-consumer contact. A further difference to Alter Conso, who have the consumers themselves weigh the produce and assemble their basket, is that *'de la ferme au quartier'* assemble the baskets at their facility. The consumers then just need to pick these up at the distribution points. **These distribution points are based at locations as diverse as a Muslim centre, family associations, churchly institutions and a railway station. This offers the possibility of bringing the scheme right into society.**

One of the surprises for me in St. Etienne was that *'de la ferme au quartier'* were able to establish the infrastructure for their scheme (including a van, a cool chamber, boxes, ...) for less than 30 000 Euro. This money came from a regional administration body. Before hearing this, I thought that it had to be much more expensive to set up a regional logistics scheme.

The running costs (including rent for the building they use, fuel and wages for the two employees) are covered by contributions from producer and consumers. The latter's contributions are linked to their income class and range from 0-20%.

Conclusion

Both schemes, Alter Conso and *'De la ferme au quartier'* seemed to me to be good additions to AMAPs opening up new markets for regional products and giving people in the cities access to affordable, fresh regional products. Very inspiring examples of regional logistics and lots of ideas that I have taken back to my own home region.

Thanks to all who contributed, especially to Jocelyn Parot, the organiser of the Lyon meeting!