Short food supply chains in stretched geographies

Alexandre Dubois, Dpt of Urban and Rural Dvt

PPP Seminar, Darwin, November 8th, 2017
About my research

Territorial Cohesion Policy and Territorial Governance in the EU

Local Development of/in Sparsely Populated Areas

Being peripheral in an era of globalization

What constitutes the contours of the local economy in rural settings?
The relational turn in rural dvt

- Rural development beyond agriculture
  - the limits of the modernization paradigm (may) have been reached
  - multi-actor, multifaceted and multidimensional process (Van Der Ploeg, Renting et al. 2000)

- New interactions emerge within and from the countryside
  - governance and management of natural resources is still a central issue
  - farmers as a category are at the nexus of many of these processes

- Rural development is grounded in new sets of values and norms, which are enacted through new forms of social and economic interactions.

- *Territorial* rural development perspective as a specific modus operandi
ESPON Bridges (2017-19)

ESPON is a Cooperation Programme that aims to support the reinforcement of the effectiveness of EU Cohesion Policy and other sectoral policies and programmes.

- Transnational project teams
- Applied research

The project investigates the development challenges and opportunities of sparsely populated regions; mountain regions; Islands, including island-states and coastal areas.

How can place-based, smart and integrated approaches support the challenges encountered by territories with geographic specificities?
Aim: to examine regional transformation processes and place-based development in diverse European territorial settings.

3 central concepts
- Place-based development
- Smart Specialisation
- Less-favoured regions (regions in industrial transition, institutionally/economically weak regions and areas with geographic specificity such as mountain or sparsely populated areas).
Nurturing proximities in an emerging food landscape

Alexandre Dubois

Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, P.O. Box 7012, 750 07 Uppsala, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords
Organized proximity
Alternative food networks
Periglocal regime
Organic farming
Farmers’ markets

ABSTRACT

Most AFS studies tend to investigate in which ways these socio-economic constructs are distinct from conventional agricultural circuits. Less emphasis has been put on investigating how the relational processes leading to the formation of different types of AFS contain different socio-economic constraints. In this paper, I use theoretical underpinnings from the literature on economic geography about proximity dynamics to explain the relational processes of formation of AFS. The use of proximity as a conceptual framework allows distinguishing between spatial (i.e., Suburban-distance) and relational (cognitive, organizational, institutional and social) understandings of emerging producer-consumer relations. I will perform this empirically by investigating accounts from small urban farmers located in a remote rural region of Sweden on how they establish and develop such short relations. The paper confirms findings from previous studies accounting that individual farmers are engaged in co-occurrence forms of market relations that pass further by emphasizing the new qualities and temporalities of the three of goods, persons and information across the physical landscape that are induced through the formation of AFS.

1. Introduction

Boo and O’Oear (2014) recently listed the main forms that Alternative Food Networks (AFS) may take in contemporary farming and marketing practices including farmers’ markets, farm shops and farm gate sales, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), box delivery schemes, producer and consumer co-operatives or community gardening initiatives. The requalification of agricultural networks through AFS has spurred as many processes of networking and reaching outside the local, as the establishment of renewed expressions of the local itself (Renner and Holst, 2016). Hence, the requalification of agricultural networks has led to the reconstitution of food networks as an assemblage of intertwined relational geographies (Freyon, 2007).

Over the past two decades, scholars in agri-food studies have made significant contributions to theoretical developments in the field of human and economic geography (Freyon, 2007; Morgan and Marsden, 2009; Marsden et al., 2003; Freeman and Marsden, 2003). However, agri-food studies appear to have been less prone to influence from emerging conceptual developments coming from this field (Goodman et al., 2012), for instance, centred on studies investigating AFS seem to commonly ignore the growing body of work on place-making processes from human geography. More specifically, Freeman et al. (2012) argue that, even though the growing body of AFS literature has indeed managed to highlight a “new set of practices”, these experiences and empirical observations “still need adequate theoretical understanding” (2012: p. 4). Using a coherent analytical framework to investigate AFS would ensure a wider scientific basis to systematically compare these experiences and contribute to conceptual developments in the field, based on the identification of commonalities and distinctive features.

In this paper, theoretical underpinnings of the notion of proximity (Torell and Gilli, 2000; Torell and Rullner, 2003) are used to explore the processes supporting the development of AFS in the north of Sweden. The proximity approach is a growing strand of human geography, which, in a nutshell, addresses the issue of how economic processes develop “close” relations. This resonates with well-known issues addressed in AFS studies about the requalification and relocalization in producer-consumer networks, especially in relation to local, direct or short supply chains. In France, proximity is already strongly associated with scholarly and policy debates on AFS and what constitutes the traits of an agriculture of proximity (Guénavar, 2011; Hochsén, 2006; Torell, 2000), as agriculture de proximité. Geographical proximity between producers and consumers is understood as an untapped potentiality that may be exploited through the implementation of relational doctrines. Some studies based on French experiences of what an agriculture of proximity entails have already been published in the international literature (Guénavar and Krell, 2013; Filippi et al., 2011; Krell and Torell, 2012; Torell, 2000), but the notion has yet to be more widely applied in the context of AFS.

This study applies the notion of proximity to understand the spatial, temporal and relational logics of the formations of AFS. It investigates how relations of proximity in agriculture are constituted, maintained
Highlights

- Small-scale producers are engaged in multiple ‘short’ market arrangements simultaneously.
- Social, cognitive and temporary geographical proximities contribute to creating ‘shortened’ food relations.
- Face-to-face interactions (e.g. at farmers' market) are important in initial phases.
- Other arrangements (box schemes, farm shops) can be facilitated through organised proximities coordinated ‘at a distance’.
- New arena of exchanges arise from the mobilization of ubiquities and mobilities.
Alternative Food Networks

- AFN is used as an umbrella term encompassing a multitude of farming practices: Farmers' Markets, farm shops and farm gate sales, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), box delivery schemes, producer and consumer co-operatives or community gardening initiatives.

- *Local* Food Systems and *Short* FSC are recurring focus of AFN studies.

- The growing body of AFN literature has highlighted a “rich set of practices”, but these observations “still need adequate theoretical understanding” (Brunori et al. 2012:4).

- AFN literature systematically ignores theoretical advancements from human geography (Goodman, DuPuis et al. 2012)
Food & Distance

• Distanciation in producer-consumer relations
  – considerable physical separation between the places where food is produced and the ones where it is consumed (Jarosz 2008:233),
  – intellectual and cultural distancing of the consumers in how they relate to food (Dowler, Kneafsey et al. 2009:200).

• AFN allow participants to “collectively gain autonomy from the industry” (Forney and Häberli 2016:149) -> agency: own version of the food supply chain
  – dual process of respatialisation and resocialization of food production and consumption practices
Key features of ‘local’ food

- “shorter distances between where food is grown and where it is purchased and eaten” (Jarosz 2008:232)
- correlated to the ‘thickening’ of the producer-consumer relationships (Bos and Owen 2016).
- direct relationships between producers and consumers (Dowler, Kneafsey et al. 2009), ‘from field to fork’
- new contact interfaces (Horlings and Marsden 2014) based on mutual recognition and personal trust
- Virtual and ‘terrestrial’ spaces of interactions
- Problem of the conflation to the local
-> need to differentiate between relational and spatial aspects
Near + close = short?

Short Food Supply Chains
- Reduce distance between where food is produced and consumed
- No intermediary
- Higher profit margin

But
- Depends on external factors (broadband, roads…)
- Requires acquiring new skills and crafts
Notion of proximity

• In France, the debate on AFN focuses on an agriculture of proximity (agriculture de proximité)
• Proximity is about the ability of actors to collectively coordinate their actions
• **Geographical proximity**, which refers to the physical distance that separates actors between them, and **organized proximity**, which deals with the closeness of actors in organizational terms (Torre and Gilly 2000, Torre and Rallet 2005).
• **Temporary Geographical Proximity**: “Organized, occasional face-to-face events that are dense in interactions and that enable actors to “exchange information, express emotions and be present with a distant partner” (Torre 2008:875-876).
• Possibility of organizing interactions ‘at a distance’ (Lorentzen 2008) (e.g. ICT)
Table 1. Five forms of proximity: some features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key dimension</th>
<th>Too little proximity</th>
<th>Too much proximity</th>
<th>Possible solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cognitive</td>
<td>Knowledge gap</td>
<td>Misunderstanding</td>
<td>Lack of sources of novelty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Common knowledge base with diverse but complementary capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Organizational</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Opportunism</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social</td>
<td>Trust (based on social relations)</td>
<td>Opportunism</td>
<td>No economic rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixture of embedded and market relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional</td>
<td>Trust (based on common institutions)</td>
<td>Opportunism</td>
<td>Lock-in and inertia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional checks and balances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Geographical</td>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>No spatial externalities</td>
<td>Lack of geographical openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mix of local ‘buzz’ and extra-local linkages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boschma 2005

1  2  3  3  3   t

 Séquences : 1 Début du processus de collaboration 2 Interactions à distance 3 Rencontres ponctuelles.

Schéma 2: Le processus de collaboration et les phases d’interactions entre les participants

Torre 2009

Caragliu & Nijkamp 2015

Figure 1. A classification of proximity concepts. Empty brackets in the bottom circle suggests other possible forms of proximity in the KS context.
Proximities in AFN

From Renting et al. 2003

-> organized proximity as a substitute to geographical proximity

-> institutional (certification) and organizational (remote communication) proximity are substitute to social (kinship) and cognitive (recognition) proximity

- Different AFN correspond to different ‘versions’ of proximity (Kneafsey, Venn et al. 2013)
- Issue of cohabitation between these forms

C. Aubry, L. Kebir / Food Policy 41 (2013) 85–93

**Figure 2.** Different mechanisms for extending short food supply chains (SFSCs) in time and space.

From Renting et al. 2003

-> organized proximity as a substitute to geographical proximity

-> institutional (certification) and organizational (remote communication) proximity are substitute to social (kinship) and cognitive (recognition) proximity

direct sales at a distance can be considered as organizationally short (Watts et al., 2005)
What does an agriculture of proximity entail?

• Shortcomings of current proximity approaches to SFSC:
  – organized proximity as a substitute for geographical proximity -> Suggest that producers prefer face-to-face interactions
  – Social proximity is the main mechanism -> other modes of organized proximity as substitutes
  – Proximity as a gradient -> basic weak/strong dichotomies
  – Producers are simultaneously engaged in multiple AFN -> traditional venues may be abandoned for more structured interactions (e.g. from producers markets to box schemes)
Research questions

1. How different types of AFN (e.g. farmers’ market, box schemes...) may be characterised as the interplay between one or more of modes of organized proximity?

2. How do individual producers mobilize different modes of organized proximity at different moments of their development trajectory in order to engage in multiple types of AFN?
### The case study

- semi-structured interviews with 9 organic farmers in the case study region, mostly around the city of Umeå (6) but also in the county’s inland (3)
- region challenges the ‘common sense’ understanding of what proximity is about, i.e. geographic proximity
- peripheral position away from the ‘hot spots’ of productivist conventional agriculture may be instrumental in promoting the development of quality food niches (Murdoch et al., 2000; Ilbery and Maye, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farmer</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Farming activities</th>
<th>Marketing channels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Vilhelmina</td>
<td>Lapland goats, Gotland rabbits, Öland ducks. Handicraft.</td>
<td>Mainly for own consumption, selling extra to close social circle. Online farm shop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingele</td>
<td>Umeå</td>
<td>Vegetables, Eggs, Rugs and other handicrafts.</td>
<td>Local supermarket. Farmers’ own market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gissner</td>
<td>Hölmsen</td>
<td>Vegetables, Local meadow flower seeds.</td>
<td>Vegetable boxes by email ordering (mailing list). Selling flower seeds to retailer in southern Sweden. Farmers’ own market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>Värnäs</td>
<td>Vegetables, Fruits, Plants.</td>
<td>Local markets. Plant schools organized at the farm. Food products (marmalade, honey) sold at upper-end deli shop, bakery and hotel in Umeå. Farm shop under construction. Farmers’ Own Market in Umeå. Online ordering from homepage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina and Björn</td>
<td>Vilhelmina</td>
<td>Suckler cow (Limousin first, and now Aberdeen Angus). Bull (Chianina race). Delicatessen.</td>
<td>Local markets. Online ordering via email, mobile phone or Facebook. Online ordering from homepage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inggerd</td>
<td>Åsele</td>
<td>Suckler cow (Limousin Red), and now Aberdeen Angus. Bull (Chianina race). Delicatessen.</td>
<td>Meat box orderings by email or mobile phone. Local markets in Åsele and Vilhelmina. Sell rescued meat with other producers to Lycksele municipality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Each market relation is a differentiated agencement of the same relational building blocks.

Producers are able to engage in multiple market relations by activating and drawing advantages from organised proximities through different means, spatialities and temporalities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proximity</th>
<th>Accommodation points (restaurants, bouches)</th>
<th>Multi-producer coalitions</th>
<th>Supermarkets</th>
<th>Extended</th>
<th>Marketing by capillarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producers' Market</td>
<td>Producers' Market</td>
<td>Producers' Market</td>
<td>Producers' Market</td>
<td>Producers' Market</td>
<td>Producers' Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction in proximity to the customers’ living environment</td>
<td>Increased presence of jointly labelled products at local and seasonal markets and events</td>
<td>Time and place for the delivery decided by mutual agreement in advance</td>
<td>New customers recruited through the social networks of existing trusted customers (co-optation)</td>
<td>New customers recruited through the social networks of existing trusted customers (co-optation)</td>
<td>New customers recruited through the social networks of existing trusted customers (co-optation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of loyal customers in the local community</td>
<td>Creating a geographically distributed network of small-scale farmers</td>
<td>Regular customers enable relatives and close acquainances to buy products at markets</td>
<td>New customers recruited through the social networks of existing trusted customers (co-optation)</td>
<td>New customers recruited through the social networks of existing trusted customers (co-optation)</td>
<td>New customers recruited through the social networks of existing trusted customers (co-optation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergence of the knowledge around the products, the farm and the farmers into a symbolically charged unit</td>
<td>Creating a regional quality label</td>
<td>Attract like-minded customers independently from their location</td>
<td>Creating experiences of the rural in an urban milieu</td>
<td>Creating experiences of the rural in an urban milieu</td>
<td>Creating experiences of the rural in an urban milieu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity AFN narrative</td>
<td>Proximity AFN narrative</td>
<td>Proximity AFN narrative</td>
<td>Proximity AFN narrative</td>
<td>Proximity AFN narrative</td>
<td>Proximity AFN narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classic AFN narrative</td>
<td>Classic AFN narrative</td>
<td>Classic AFN narrative</td>
<td>Classic AFN narrative</td>
<td>Classic AFN narrative</td>
<td>Classic AFN narrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Key modes of organised proximity in market relations between producers and consumers in the case study. Source: author's creation.
The routinisation of producer-consumer interactions fosters the introduction of new places and moments which create new mobilities around how food is marketed and sold. Examples found are seasonal markets, farm shops, at-door box deliveries or ‘happenings’ at restaurants or boutiques. Unlike the participation at FM, producers have more leverage in influencing if and how they wish to interact face-to-face with consumers.

Regular presence at the FM provides opportunities to maintain contact with returning loyal customers and recruit new ones.

Interactions with customers for marketing and ordering of food products takes place through ‘remote’ communication means, such as emails, social media and webshops. Face-to-face interactions are not necessary for organizing the transaction as it is often remotely organized days or weeks prior to the actual delivery of the products.
Discussion

- Individual farmers are engaged in multiple forms of market relations
- Engagement in AFN that can be partly coordinated ‘at a distance’
  - “relaxation of the constraint of geographical proximity” (Torre, 2008: p. 876)
  - social proximity, not geographical proximity, that drives the process of relocalisation
- Producers tend to prefer modes of organized proximity that can be coordinated remotely, but TGP (occasional face-to-face interactions) act as incubators of other modes of organized proximity
- Understood as an *evolutionary relational process*, the establishment of SFSC enable small-scale producers to relaise their ‘own’ version of the food supply chain by activating the local potential for quality food consumption offered by geographical proximity.
- Torre’s model explains the complementarity and interlocked nature of different types of market relations in the establishment of an *agriculture of proximity*. 
Reconnecting farming with community development

- economies of scale -> economies of scope and synergy of operation

  Diversification // multiple channels // buying a concept, not a product

- Adding value (in kr or $) to commodity produce

- Developing shared identities revolving around food and landscape values
  - Living countryside: the more, the better
  - Animal welfare
  - Caring for the landscape (physical and cultural)
  - Education -> passing values to future generations
Fieldwork Burra 2017
Outlook on Australian literature


- These markets provided economic options for farmers precisely at a point when competitive-productivism was forcing them to find new directions or get out of farming altogether.
- The recent arrival of farmers’ markets simply added the missing piece of the puzzle by providing a relatively small farm with a market that could generate a reasonable income.
- Transition from direct sales to international markets through supported by government incentives; farmers’ markets will have simply been a useful stepping stone along the way.
- Three goals for AAFN participation
  - capture greater value in the supply chain.
  - to be able to make independent decisions
  - to be able to make decisions that protect or enhance the environmental sustainability of the operation in ways that may not be rewarded by conventional markets or other incentive structures

– while alternative food networks and the food sovereignty movement perform a valuable function in building forms of social solidarity between urban consumers and rural producers, they currently make only a minor contribution to Australia’s food and nutrition security.

– Given Australia’s recent history as a rurally-based agricultural producer, ‘urban agriculture’ (food grown and distributed within and around the city, as distinct from pastoral and feedlot operations) has become associated with ‘alternative food networks’ (linking rural/peri-urban/urban producers with ‘eaters’).
### Pilot study

**AIM:** investigate how changing local climatic conditions and urbanisation affects the reconfiguration of agriculture-community linkages (ACL) in small communities that are located on critical climatic ‘lines’

-> From ‘uncoupling’ to ‘reconnection’

- Interviews with producers and other actors
- Interviewed by local ABC radio

---

### The contribution of new food marketing practices to community development

**Short food supply chains in rural regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This study investigates new ways for small-scale producers to market and sell their quality food produce by directly interacting with consumers.</td>
<td>In agri-food studies, Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC) consist in a wide range of food marketing practices that seek to reduce physical distance between where food is grown and where it is consumed as well as the number of intermediaries in the food chain, with ideally no intermediary. Examples of such practices are as diverse as Farmers’ Markets, food hubs, box schemes, farmer’s markets, or online and social media sales.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on experiences from producers in Mid North Australia and North Sweden, the study seeks to identify the resources, e.g. finance, network or knowledge, that facilitate the development of direct food marketing practices in rural areas faced with harsh climatic conditions and unfavourable demographic trends.

With this study, I want to better understand how small-scale producers take their engagement in SFSC from idea to operation. To do this, I need to collect information about:

- how producers have financed their project;
- what persons, institutions and networks that have supported;
- what new skills, competences and know-how they acquired;
- who their typical customers are and where they come from;
- what channels producers use to develop and maintain interaction with their customers, and especially internet and social media.

To perform this study, I intend to use multiple approaches:

- Observations at various Farmers’ Markets in the Mid North region
- Visits at farm-gate shops
- Interviews with producers based on a questionnaire with open-ended questions
- Search of and contact with main regional actors for online box scheme sales
- Interviews with regional actors in agri-tourism development

When possible, this qualitative material will be complemented with official statistics about agricultural and rural development in the Mid North region.

---

### Legal mentions

The study has received financial contributions from the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (KVA), the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry (SLU) and the Nordforsk/Slend's research foundations.

This research project has been approved by the Charles Darwin University Office of Research and Innovation Ethics Committee (Project number 113129). If you have any questions or concerns that you do not want to direct to the researcher, you are invited to contact the Ethics team of the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee on (08) 8946 6083, on the toll free number, 1800 485 213, or by email, ethics@cdu.edu.au.
Case study regions

(Source: Carson et al., 2017)

Both regions straddle on a cultural and climatic line separating viable from non-viable agricultural land, respectively *Odlingsgränsen* and Goyder’s line. As local climate changes, the conditions for agricultural development will be affected. Both regions are being affected by economic and demographic polarisation towards adjacent large urban centres, Umeå and Adelaide.
Thank you!
alexandre.dubois@slu.se

Sponsors

Australia
Charles Darwin University
Mid North Knowledge Partnership

Sweden
Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (KVA), the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry (KSLA) and the Handelsbanken’s research foundations