



The potential of direct sales of agricultural products for a new dynamics of city-countryside relationships

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France, Ethnology



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This paper is a presentation of the research programme I am organising with colleagues specialised in different disciplines and working in France and in Japan. This is a comparative study between Brittany (France) and Japan concerning the networks of direct sales for local products from agriculture and cattle farming with a perspective to recreate a local dynamic.

1. The exact and complete title

Comparative analysis Brittany-Japan of city-countryside interactions via networks of direct sales for local products from agriculture and cattle farming. What local dynamics for human sustainable development ?

2. Objectives of the project

The project proposes to carry out field studies of networks of direct sales for local products in Brittany and in Japan to analyse their potential as factors facilitating a safe farming in a perspective of human sustainable development.

On a one hand, this supposes to resume a relation of trust and responsibility between city dwellers – consumers and rural farmers, and on the other hand to encourage farmers to commit themselves into qualitative production instead of a quantitative orientation. Distribution circuits of products will be studied in order to promote local consumption of local products. In order to have children more sensitive to environmental problems and of food security problems, contact with farm activities should be organised. Education to a good diet and to a healthier life should be included in primary education programme. This could be a basis for a new dynamic of city-countryside interactions which will integrate children and schools and a contribution to the maintenance of local farming that will preserve the environment.

3. Outline of the project

The main question to which the project will try to give elements for an answer is a question of society to which by essence light must be brought by a simultaneous contribution from various disciplines.

The subject is agriculture production and its sustainability relies firstly on technical characteristics so that we have among our colleagues a specialist of agronomy-economy.



The organisation of networks of direct sales is in the usual disciplinary field of economists but also of anthropologists and sociologists. Products are for human consumption and therefore there are nutrition and food culture questions to tackle.

Relationships between producers and consumers is not considered as a simple purchase-sale relationship but as social relationship that may be richer; relationship between city and countryside, relationship between people. For example the economical and law concept of product traceability is here a question of human and social relationships between farmers and city dwellers. The latter may come and visit farms and receive with their products to consume not a label but a letter or a journal with a complete story of their production. Products and farming activities may be reintegrated in the nature cycle and a new sharing by the whole society of the joys of the germination and crops could be organised with a village festival.

The education side of city- countryside is essential. The education of taste and food education, and environment education and education for relation to Nature, animals and farm life have been neglected in favour of other subjects. The replacement of schools canteens by caterers delivering deep frozen meals to heat and the practice of fast food are seriously put under question.

Beyond some exhibition as for wine presentation each year where the marketing aspect is dominant, a true re-acclimatization of the city dwellers' life to Nature is a fundamental component for consciousness raising and for their commitment to a sustainable human development.

To be sure in its various aspects, this project demands a collective work by specialists from different social sciences.

The research programme is organised according to four main questions :

- a) Interaction city- countryside
- b) New trends : organic and fair
- c) taste education and food equilibrium
- d) local dynamic and culture

- a) Interaction city- countryside

Production and consumption are two activities but it is possible to re-associate. How is it possible to link farmers who are caring about quality and environment with consumers searching for safe and fresh products? Has this agriculture to be organic? How can it become sustainable ? How is it possible to establish trust between consumers and producers ?

A detailed study of network of circulation of the local products is indispensable to the project. A better knowledge of the criterion for choice and of the place of purchase of market garden products, the frequency and quantity of consumption for meals based on fresh products are also information pieces and matter of analysis of importance. Therefore, what are advantages and problems for networks of direct sales, concerning for example: traceability, price formation etc?

- b) New trends : organic and fair



Environmental problems will be discussed theoretically and practically in interviewing local actors. Take into account and analysis of local and national agriculture policy. Discuss relative importance of productivity and product quality with individual farmers and consumers and also with farmers and consumers organisations and local authorities. Discussion about the relation between farmers and the use of some inputs: pesticide, fertilizers, etc. What efficacy of labels “organic” or how to supervise and check the quality of production?

The fact is that in 2002 in France 50% of the population have eaten some organic food and 19% some products from fair trade against 10% in 2001 (Source : TERREM survey). These new trends must be analysed.

c) taste education and food equilibrium

To take stock of existing experimentations of “safe food and balanced diet for a better life”. The example of the week of taste (“la semaine du goût”) in France at school every October. The experience of some school canteens in Japan. The programme Pure Water in Brittany.

Contemplating the re-opening of school canteens in support of educational programme and in cooperation with cook-teacher-parents-schoolchildren. Raise responsibility and promote participation of children to a daily commitment to the maintenance of environment (programme of environment education in Brittany). Make children and general opinion more sensitive to the life of Earth, comparison France - Japan.

d) local dynamic and culture

Our research tries to find again local dynamic of evolution by reinforcing networks of direct sales of local farm products. A safe and sustainable agriculture is essential for the future of human life and for our planet. Food is source of life and it is time to resume a relation of trust between producers and consumers in order to get safe and fresh products ; this can be done not by the sole illusion given by some advertisement, but by the responsibility of producers and the commitment from consumers. Production and sale may be organised by cooperation between producers and with the support and the confidence from consumers so that will expand a safe and sustainable agriculture that will help the local society to find again a deep and positive relationship with Nature.

4. Methodology

The proposed methodology principally borrows to the usual methods of economic anthropology and social sciences. Syntheses of results of analyses and information that are published in books and specialised reviews, monographs, organisation, going through, analysing and interpretation of surveys, workshop of discussions.

This option of methodology is extremely important in a context where the discourses and the literature as well on agriculture, trade and sustainable development are the more often based on



discussion of costs, and even for sustainable development, of procedures as tax paying to pollute. Here we will try to show that it is possible to produce differently and better without necessity to focus on over-costing to invoice to guilty people and that exchange may offer human and social benefits to be shared.

As a comparative analysis, the study will bring face to face Japanese experiences to French audience who knows very little of it. It will be an opportunity to put at work altogether Japanese and French and this will be an opportunity for us to make better known what we are doing at home, benefiting of their way of thinking and of their own research practices and also of their farmers techniques and their own city-countryside relationships.

To the methodological components linked to a question of sustainable development referring to the biological and natural environment, we have added that of “human” as suggested by the United Nations Development Programme UNDP (2000). We must not forget that at the centre of preoccupations lies the life of humans in society: society must organise itself in harmony with Nature and not destroy it. We hope a better life but for that what do we need ? Money and bread when we share them are broken into more and more small pieces, but joy, when we share it, the more we are to share the greatest it becomes! Happiness lies in the joy of sharing. Hand in hand, how big a circle can we build ? Rebuilding such circles can take us towards a planet for humanity and solidarity.