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► To cite this version:

Estelle Masson, Sandrine Bubendorff. ‘Local foods’ as trustworthy food: geographical proximity, social areas and interpersonal relationships. *Review of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Studies*, 2022, 103 (1), pp.29-49. <10.1007/s41130-021-00159-7>. <hal-03984635>

HAL Id: hal-03984635

<https://hal.science/hal-03984635v1>

Submitted on 13 Feb 2023

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‘Local foods’ as trustworthy food: geographical proximity, social areas and interpersonal relationships

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Received: 31 August 2020 / Accepted: 15 November 2021 / Published online: 9 February 2022
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Abstract

This article seeks to explore consumption of neo-traditional sourdough bread in France in a context of food concerns and growing interest in local foods. Focusing on social representations, we investigate how local foods are used by consumers to re-appropriate food and restore trust. The data presented here are based on 27 in-depth interviews with French customers of bakers and farmer-bakers (*paysans-boulangers*). The interviews were fully transcribed and coded using Hyperresearch software and subjected to a thematic analysis. These results rely on a broader research also including focus groups, observation and interviews with 41 bakers and farmer-bakers. We show that proximity, a rather polysemic notion, mostly stems from the added value of the baker as a known individual, anchored in a common socio-geographical space. Interpersonal relationships between consumer and baker establish trust, which is able to blunt the need or desire for information reducing uncertainty associated with processed food. Here, ‘local’ does not refer to geographical distance but to a relational, inter-individual, subjective proximity. We suggest a particular type of consumer involvement in alternative food-sourcing systems, based on the trust placed in an individual described as close. While this study adds to the current understanding of the mechanisms of trust in food, bread plays a special role in French food culture. Further research on less symbolically charged foods could clarify these initial results.

Keywords Trust · Proximity · Social representation · Bread · Local foods

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Introduction: an increasing lack of clarity in the food field

In a context where a growing number of consumers are questioning the true origin of what they eat, the growing interest in local foods seems to be part of a process allowing a sort of taking back ownership of food and rebuilding confidence in eating (Fischler & Masson, 2007). For a better understanding of the mechanic of this process, we propose to examine the social representations of local foods consumers (Moscovici, 1976; 2000; Lahlou, 1998, Masson, 2001). More specifically, we will focus here on how bakers and farmer-bakers' regular customers perceive the organic sourdough bread they usually buy and eat, also on their values and imaginary associated with these local foods.

We will see that the consumers interviewed see this local bread as a singular product as described and analysed by Karpik (2007; 2013). We will show that consumers conceive this bread as authentic, belonging to a cultural patrimonial but also that it is indistinguishable from craftsman skills attributed to a singular individual: the baker who is its creator. The patrimonialization, authenticity and personalization of this bread give it a new value and make it part of this economy of enrichment that Boltanski and Esquerre (2017) have described and conceptualised. By adopting a sociogenetic perspective of social representations (Jodelet, 2015; Kalampalikis & Apostolidis, 2019) we'll show that this bread, which corresponds perfectly to the criteria used by socio-economists, geographers and economists to define local food, is above all conceived by consumers as a product resulting from and creating proximity. Their use of the notion of "proximity" and its polysemic meanings mainly concern the added value of the baker as a known individual anchored in a common socio-geographical space. The trust established by interpersonal relations between consumers and their baker or farmer-baker replaces the need to know and the desire to verify information and help to counter consumer uncertainty about food.

In order to understand the appetite for local foods, it seems useful to emphasise the context of consumers' mistrust of the modern food in rupture of which it is a part.

In search of safe food areas

The accelerating industrialisation of food production and processing over recent decades has widened the distance between consumers and what they eat (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Masson, 2011; Rémésy, 2005). In a context of frequent food industry failings exposure in the media, Lévi-Strauss's (1962) comment that 'it's not enough that a food is "good to eat", it must also "be good to think" (Levi-Strauss, 2016: 90)' seems particularly relevant. Indeed, the food scares that marked the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries (Raude, 2012; Schwartz, 2001) have shaken consumer trust. The 1996 announcement that mad cow disease could be transferred to man was a real breaking point in the contemporary history of the food industry. The ensuing crisis over beef consumption (Setbon et al., 2005) was interpreted by the public authorities and media as a symptom of irrational fear based on a biased perception of contamination risks. However, this crisis could also be

interpreted as an expression of outrage (Masson, 2011) that manifested in the form of a boycott of food that was shown in some way to be impure (Douglas, 1969). The perceived threat was more one of identity than health, because, together with the announcement of the contamination risk, the dark side of mass food production had been revealed. What the French public learnt from this was that modern husbandry techniques had turned herbivores into carnivores that cows had become cannibals. A transgression had been committed against the natural order of things (Lévi-Strauss, 2001).

The mad cow disease crisis was not only revelatory; it also amplified existing concerns about modern food (Ferrières, 2006; Schwartz, 2001). It created confusion around food and exacerbated consumer wariness about the true origins of their food. Since that time, there have been continued exposures of food scandals by the media and by certain citizens' associations (e.g. L214 in France), gradually turning mistrust to distrust. The fear of being deceived has led many consumers to feel alienated with regard to modern food and to want to take back ownership of their diet.

A growing desire to take back control over food

Taking back ownership of one's diet means taking control of what we eat. This movement is particularly noticeable in the current increase in 'special diets' (Fischler, 2015; Masson et al., 2018). Following a gluten-free, exclusively organic, vegetarian, vegan or locavore diet is akin to a behavioural adjustment. The characteristics specific to each of these new diets reveal on the one hand the multitude of concerns linked to today's food trade (industrialisation, biochemical content, farming methods and location, etc.) and on the other the many different motivations based on distinct values (selfishness, eco-consciousness, altruism) (Feldmann and Hamm, 2015; Schwartz, 2006).

However, in a context perceived as threatening, where the threat is not clearly identified but covers multiple and varied domains such as health, the environment, ethics, politics and economy, it is impossible to effectively verify everything. The kinds of knowledge needed to be able to have confidence in what we eat seem infinite compared with what is available to consumers or what they can reasonably envisage obtaining. Furthermore, having this information would not prepare them for possible misleading or fallacious information from food sector actors (Giddens, 1990).

Self-production is sometimes idealised as a means to totally and rigorously control what goes on one's plate, but it is often impossible to put into action (Masson and Debucquet, 2012). Delegating production to someone who is geographically as close as possible appears to be a satisfactory alternative in several ways. A number of authors who have studied local production (Dubuisson-Quellier and Le Velly, 2010; Lamine, 2005) and/or short food supply chains (Dufour and Lanciano, 2012; Maréchal, 2010; Vincq et al., 2010) have shown the diversity of virtues that consumers attribute to this kind of supply system. Regarding consumers' reasons for seeking this sort of production, two aspects seem to emerge as particularly crucial for our study, namely the possibility of obtaining information on production processes and the possibility of

verifying these empirically (Amemiya et al., 2008; Deverre and Lamine, 2010; Feldmann and Hamm, 2015). Amemiya et al. (2008) emphasised the fusion of proximity and the food's supposed healthy quality that is brought about by the possibility of going to check in situ.

These studies have often examined the concept of 'local' from the point of view of the number of intermediaries involved in the food supply chain (from production to sale). In other words, they have looked at concrete and measurable variables, where, for example, the number of kilometres between the raw materials and the finished product eaten by the consumer becomes an agreed element in the definition of 'local' (Chiffoleau, 2008; 2019; Pearson et al., 2011). They have tended to show that it is the idea of the objective possibility of tracing a product to its source and producer that reassures the consumer.

'Local foods' and the notion of proximity

Rather than focusing on those kinds of objective variables, we will question how the notion of proximity gives sense to local consumption. Taking a sociogenetic approach of social representations (Jodelet, 2015; Moliner & Guimelli, 2015; Kalampalikis & Apostolidis, 2016), we will analyze the significations for eaters of consuming organic bread made of natural sourdough, produced by artisanal or peasant bakers working and living near their homes. We will examine how proximity, understood on the one hand as pertaining to a shared cultural and geographic area and on the other as a reduced interpersonal distance, lessens the subjective distance between consumer and product and contributes to the re-enchantment in the sense of Weber (Weber, 2013) of food (Fischler and Masson, 2010). To do this, we based our work on qualitative information gathered from the clients of bakers and farmer-bakers producing organic sourdough bread. Bread was chosen as the subject of our research because it is not only a cultural food (Goody, 1982) with strong symbolic power but also a common food eaten every day by two-thirds of the French population (CREDOC, 2016). Moreover, as a processed product composed of just a few ingredients (flour, water and salt), it was an interesting food in terms of trying to understand consumer social representations of the local character of a finished product and its ingredients. Here, we will analyze the consumer narratives collected during the interviews as expressions of social thought understand 'as a mental construction of objects in the world and as a source of form of life that have impact social becoming' (Jodelet, 2015, p. 7). We will show how common sense thinking, by mobilizing polymorphic notions such as proximity, manages to give meaning to practices and endow them with meanings (Bruner, 1990) and how the consumption of bread produced by baker and farmer-bakers helps consumers 'finding one's way in social space' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2015).

Material and methods

The qualitative data used in this study came from the psychosocial component of the multidisciplinary research programme entitled *[BAKERY]*. This participatory and collaborative research programme, which was conducted in France, brought together researchers from the field of biology, statistics, sensorial analysis, social psychology and sociology as well as organic sourdough bread bakers and their customers.

During the psychosocial component of this research, data on the professional practices, representations and motivations of 41 organic sourdough bread bakers were collected using a multi-method approach that combined qualitative and quantitative aspects (interviews, questionnaire, observation and focus groups on practical and theoretical know-how). The bakers were selected so as to make up three subgroups corresponding to the three professional statuses predominant in the world of organic bakery in France: farmer-bakers, artisan bakers and SME bakeries. The bakers selected could be differentiated by their production volumes, their geographical location and the degree of control they personally had over the process of producing and distributing their bread. For example, the farmer-bakers (Barbier & Moity-Maïzi 2019) would choose and grow the wheat varieties themselves for their breadmaking, while the others (the artisan bakers and SMEs) would use millers. Moreover, recent research about farmer-bakers has shown how this way of baking can be seen as a completely different practice regarding both the type of procedures mobilised to make the bread and the baker career path (Barbier & Moity-Maïzi, 2019).

In parallel, in-depth interviews (Jodelet, 1986) were conducted with 27 of these bakers' customers (see Table 1 below). These interviews focused on customers' representations of food in general and of bread in particular as well as their food and consumption practices and their expectations about food. The participants were recruited in line with the participatory design of this research (Cf. Michel & al., 2019) as bakers were involved in it. Interviewees were recruited either directly by researchers at the point of sale of the bread, either with help from the baker who facilitated their meeting. In the latter case, the bakers acted as intermediaries between researchers and customers. They provided us with the consumers contact information or referred us to customers who were identified as regulars during our time at the various points of sale (14 were recruited this way and identified in Table 1 by *). For the other 13 interviews, we directly recruited customers in the different point of sale (farmers markets and markets, bakery shop) without any kind of mediation from bakers. Due to the selection process, our sample is therefore constituted by consumers that can be in interaction with their backers, except for one interviewee who buys his bread in an organic store where he has been recruited. This recruitment method of interviewees did not allow us to build a corpus based on specific socio-demographic variables (see Table 1) but enabled us to collect the singular discourses of the customers of different types of professionals producing organic bread with natural sourdough. The sample was subdivided into three groups according to their baker's

Table 1 Socio-demographic details of the interviewees

ID Code	Type of baker	Point of sale	Gender	Study level	Age	Households members	Localisation (French department)	Type of living	Households Income
1	B	Bakery	F	Bac +	40–49	3	75	Urban	3500 et +
2	B	Bakery	H	Bac +	–40	4	75	Urban	3500 et +
3	B	Bakery	F	Master +	40–49	4	75	Urban	3500 et +
4*	Farm B	AMAP	H	Master +	40–49	4	34	Rural	1000–2000
5*	Farm B	AMAP	H	Licence	40–49	1	34	Urban	–1000
6*	Farm B	AMAP	F	Master +	40–49	1	34	Urban	–1000
7	Farm B	Market	F	Licence	50–59	1	67	Urban	1000–2000
8	B	Market	H	Master +	50–59	4	67	Urban	3500 et +
9	B	Market	H	Master +	50–59	2	67	Urban	3500 et +
10*	B	Bakery	F	Licence	60 +	1	12	Rural	–1000
11*	B	Bakery	F	Licence	60 +	1	12	Rural	–1000
12*	B	Market	F	Licence	–40	3	12	Rural	–1000
13	B	Bakery	F	Licence	–40	4	75	Urban	3500 +
14*	B	Bakery	H	Master +	–40	4	75	Urban	3500 +
15*	Farm B	AMAP	H	Bac +	50–59	2	78	Urban	1000–2000
16*	Farm B	AMAP	F	Licence	40–49	5	78	Rural	2000–3500
17*	Farm B	AMAP	H	Master +	40–49	3	78	Urban	1000–2000
18*	Farm B	Bakery	H	Master +	50–59	3	11	Rural	2000–3500
19*	Farm B	Bakery	H	High School	40–49	2	30	Rural	1000–2000
20	Farm B	Bakery	H	High School	60 +	2	11	Rural	2000–3500
21	B	Bakery	F	Master +	–40	3	68	Rural	2000–3500
22	Farm B	AMAP	H	Bac +	60 +	1	63	Rural	–1000
23	Farm B	AMAP	F	Bac +	50–59	2	63	Rural	2000–3500

Table 1 (continued)

ID Code	Type of baker	Point of sale	Gender	Study level	Age	Households members	Localisation (French department)	Type of living	Households Income
24	SME	Organic Store	H	Bac +	60+	2	68	Rural	3500 et +
25*	Farm B	Bakerhouse	F	-	40-49	2	35	Rural	-
26*	Farm B	Bakerhouse	F	-	40-49	NR	35	Rural	-
27	Farm B	Market	F	Master +	- 40	2	67	Urban	2000-3500

professional status, thus reflecting the diversity of paths that lead from the grain to the finished product. Compared to French consumers of organic products, our sample shows a greater diversity regarding incomes. While only 40% of people with an income below the French median consume organic products at least once a week (AgenceBio, 2020), our sample is evenly distributed around the median income. The only thing they really had in common was that they all ate organic sourdough bread from one of the bakers participating in the study and described this consumption as their main (if not exclusive) bread consumption. They bought this bread at the market, directly from the bakery, from the AMAP ('Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne' — association for the preservation of small farms, which they were members of), at a Biocoop or another shop. The sample was recruited from seven different French regions and included 13 women and 14 men. The average age was 48.5 years (standard deviation: 13.05). Of these customers, 13 lived in cities of more than 30 000 inhabitants and 14 in rural areas. Among them, 64% are among the higher socio-professional categories (household income higher than the national median income, higher education level). This overrepresentation is in line with the one in the general population: as the study conducted by the 'Agence Bio' on consumers of organic products indicates, 60% of the higher socio-professional categories consume this type of product at least once a week in France, against only 40% of the lowest socio-professional categories (Agence Bio, 2020, 13). The majority of the interviewees ($n=19$) were not formally involved in alternative food systems (Deverre and Lamine, 2010). Those who were involved ($n=8$) were solely members of an AMAP with a low involvement. They only buy products there, and none of them have participated in the farm work, for example (Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008; Aubry & Chiffolleau, 2009) (see Table 1).

The participants were informed of the study's context and aims by the interviewer and asked to sign a consent form informing them of their data rights. They were rewarded for their participation with a gift voucher. The interviews were transcribed in full and coded using the HyperResearch software in order to perform a thematic analysis of their content (Bardin, 2003; Dany, 2016). To maintain interviewee anonymity, only the participants' first-name initial, gender and region are retained in the presentation of results.

The content of the customer interviews was compared with the data collected from the bakers. This data triangulation (Caillaud & Flick, 2016; Flick, 1992, 2018) aimed to establish how well customer representations and knowledge of their baker's professional practices corresponded with the reality of these practices particularly regarding sourdough uses in baking process.

Results and discussion

In the interviews with the organic sourdough bread consumers, the notion of proximity appeared as a praxis (Lafont, 1978) or floating signifier (Lévi-Strauss, 1950) that was devoid of a single, stable signification but which possessed a polysemic signifying power. The signifying power of proximity both ran through and structured

the social representations (Jodelet, 1997; Moscovici, 1976; 2012) of the customers interviewed. An analysis of the different meanings of the notion of proximity (geographical, subjective, affective, ideological, etc.), which appeared in the interviews to have largely positive connotations, allowed us to examine the mechanisms at work in the construction of trust (Karpik, 1996; Simmel, 2010; Watier, 2008). Here, we will particularly focus on three themes that were developed by all the interviewees, namely proximity in terms of a minimal spatial distance, a shared cultural and geographical area and a reduced interpersonal distance. In other words, we will look at the physical and subjective dimensions that proximity covers in the interviewees' discourse.

Geographic proximity

A local product

In all interviews, the bread from participating bakers was valued by their customers as a local product: *'Well, I buy it here because, here, there's good bread here in Aveyron'* (10 S, female, Aveyron). The simple fact that the bread is identified as being made locally appeared to be a sign of quality. The production of this bread close to the consumer initiated the process of valorising a product perceived as *good to eat and good to think* (Levi-Strauss, 2016). However, the preference for proximity cannot be explained solely by rational thinking based on objective facts (Moscovici, 2012). Regarding products labelled as organic, one interviewee pointed out that *'in Germany they don't have the same standards as us, it seems that strawberries and all that are not the same. It's less strict'*¹ (7 C, female, Grand Est). Twelve of the interviewees, as did this woman, mentioned the differences in labels specification from country to country; nevertheless, none of them were able to specify their thoughts about quality standards or whether they were 'less strict'. Their concerns and doubts therefore projected beyond the borders not only of the local area but also of larger entities, such as countries. The participants imagined there to be malpractice elsewhere. 'Murky things' are assumed to happen in the shadowy areas in the distance. Thus, in the aftermath of the mad cow crisis, 'French meat' certification was taken by French consumers as a guarantee of an uncontaminated product since it did not come from England, which was where the disease had originated. At the same time, the USA imposed an embargo on French beef (which would only be lifted 20 years later, in January 2017). Hence, prohibiting or promoting French meat (depending on the place) had become an 'anti-mad cow' prophylactic measure, and it was the customers' sense of national belonging that determined the perceived or non-perceived relevance of the measure. This example illustrates the fact that the preference for proximity was not based primarily on objective knowledge (Moscovici, 2012). Food was interpreted as either coming from far away, from abroad or

¹ All extracts from the data have been translated from the French.

from the unknown or conversely from close to home, from the familiar or from the known depending on the consumer's sense of identity and geographical belonging.

In the interviews, it was repeatedly observed that the affirmation that the bread was anchored as close to home as possible, in spaces shared by the producer and the consumer, was enough to raise its status to one of a quality product, one that the consumer did not need to be wary of. Unlike industrial production, it was possible for the consumer to monitor the production of these breads made 'right next door' (10 S, female, Aveyron). Paradoxically, however, as soon as it became possible to make such checks, the desire to do so seemed to diminish. Referring to the wheat grown by his farmer-baker, one man said he had '*an idea of where it comes from, but I have never been to check*' (18 H, male, Aude). His immersion in the wheat fields, which could amount to a form of verification, was transmuted in his discourse into leisure time and the experience of eating together with the baker and his relatives: '*we've been picnicking several times ... Fortunately I have a nine-seater minibus, so we take everybody in that. We take the people who are at his place, in training or whatever, and we all picnic in the wheat fields*' (18 H, male, Aude).

Sometimes the reality of actually *seeing* was a source of disappointment when this destroyed aspects of an idealised representation. For example, one consumer told us about his disappointment after discovering that his baker used a mechanical kneader and cooked his bread in an electric oven. '*We want to imagine something a little bit old-fashioned, just a little bit ... I mean maybe something like a wood fire or that kind of thing. Well, he's shattered the myth!*' (8 F, male, Grand Est). However, even if what the consumer saw contradicted the ideal representation, the fact that they had seen gave them access to the reality of production and substituted the ideal product with the real one, the one made by an artisan for whom '*it is not easy to ... well, you need to make life easier*' (8 F, male, Alsace). Although access to the manufacturing process undermines the 'myth' built up by the consumer upstream, it nevertheless gives the product authenticity. It is a product made by someone and no longer '*something that comes out of a machine like in the Louis de Funès film, The Wing or the Thigh*' (3 A, female, Paris). That difference is enough to give consumption a meaning that is often thought to have been lost: '*it is true that the baker does not necessarily have a very easy life ... to make a living ... we understand that many bakeries are equipped with automatic ovens, that it's ... because it's easier. But now, good old traditional bread, it has ... It's a pleasure to eat. And there's maybe a bit of that too, we know the work that goes into it*' (11 A-M, female, Aveyron). The analysis of the interviews shows that all the interviewees make multiple references to forgotten techniques and practices that inscribe the product in this economy of enrichment that relies 'on enhancing the value of existing ones, objects often drawn from deposits of outdated things that may have been forgotten (...) These "found" objects are supplemented by newly created ones whose value is indexed to the past' (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020, p.71).

Much more than just a requirement to allow real monitoring, the notion of proximity was mobilised as a point of reference for thinking of the product as possessing specific characteristics. In contrast to the lack of differentiation that marks industrial agribusiness products, local products appear to have a strong identity. Thus, the proximity of the place where the ingredients are produced and the bread is made

contributes to anchoring it in a particular geographical space. This common territory shared between customers, their baker and the product they consume helps to nurture their territorial belonging and their local identity. The product can then be described as being part of a regional tradition. The mechanisms we describe above are narratives of the actors — both bakers and consumers — around bread. They echo the descriptions proposed by Boltanski and Esquerre of the 'collection form' of objects (2014). These links to the terroir as they appear in the verbatims can be understood as processes of patrimonialization which, in the 'collection form', contribute to confer authenticity to the objects. If these discourses are noticeable among both the farmer-bakers' consumers and the consumers of craftsmen bakers living in communes of less than 300,000 inhabitants, they are exacerbated among those who have a particular proximity to their baker and his product. This enlightens the fact that this product is not just consumed, it is incorporated as part of a local history rooted in an area: *'Eating this bread, its smell, smelling the bread is absolutely wonderful. I can feel the earth, I can sense things living, it represents something very powerful for me'* (H, male, Aude). Eating this bread every day allowed this interviewee to describe himself as participating in a 'local economy' and 'investing [...] in the life of the country'. It was therefore a form of responsible consumption (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013) that allowed him to be part of his area and to participate in the preservation of traditions and know-how of a 'country' that he claimed to feel as one with.

The perceived authenticity of the product confers constancy, consistency and authenticity on the person who eats and thus incorporates it rather than collected (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2014). This authenticity is experienced in the very encounter between the consumer and the product. Just like art in Walter Benjamin's approach, the local product roots the consumer in the *hic et nunc* (the here and now) that transcends reality. For (H, male Aude), eating this bread allows him to come into contact with an 'immediate reality' (Benjamin et al., 2008: 35). Its consumption becomes an 'auratic experience' (Palmier, 2006). It is as though the characteristics associated with the place, or region, are concentrated into this bread that has been produced close to home, and eating it makes it possible to incorporate those qualities. The valorisation of the local is therefore much more significant in terms of belonging and identity than in terms of the possibility of effective checking.

The perimeters of the local and of proximity

Despite this anchoring of bread within a specific space, the term 'local' can cover areas that are sometimes precise and sometimes fuzzy, depending on the interviewee. But more than socio-demographic characteristics, the different places of purchase seem to impact this perception of the local. For some farm bakery customers who buy their bread directly from the bakery, the term 'local' was limited to a defined area and could be applied simultaneously to the places where the wheat was grown and where the bread was made and sold. For other organic sourdough bread customers, such as the one buying in the AMAP, it could be that only the place of purchase was known and precisely located. However, as Vidal pointed out, when it comes to purchases made at markets *'if the local product can be found in the*

market, then it becomes local precisely because we get it from there' (Vidal, 2011: 123). While geographical proximity was readily assumed for all different stages of the production process, from seed to wheat grain to finished product, this was not necessarily readily apparent. Only when consumers were asked about the precise places where the wheat was cultivated and then transformed into the flour and bread (in those cases where the place of sale was not the bakery) did the question seem to occur to them and sometimes raise doubts: *'It's made here, locally, it's really local [...] the flour ... well ... I don't know ... he told me ... I'd have to ask him again ... but it comes from here too'* (14 A, male, Paris). In the absence of precise knowledge, the borders of proximity were drawn from the outside. This is particularly true of the source of flour. It was thought to come from nearby simply because the consumers did not imagine it would have come from far away: *'I know he doesn't have his flour come over from the United States, I trust him as a matter of principle, because I tell you, I don't know where it comes from ... [...] if he gets his flour from a bit further away, from somewhere in France, a little bit further, it's because he thinks it's the best'* (11 A-M, female, Aveyron) and *'I don't think she goes to get her flour at ... in Africa or ... I don't believe that anyway'* (15 S, male, Île-de-France). For these two consumers, the borders of proximity obviously did not extend beyond the European continent, and they probably only mentioned other continents to emphasise the absurd nature of such a suggestion. When the consumer's knowledge did not allow them to affirm with certainty that the flour was made in a precise place, they imagined it came from 'a bit further away', as the first interviewee put it. The same was true for this AMAP member, who was content to clarify his position without mentioning any particular distance: *'the important thing is that it is a short food supply chain. If he's bringing his organic products in from Germany or Switzerland, I don't see the point'* (5 W, male, Hérault). These three examples are all the more interesting as they involve customers of farmer-bakers. The flour is therefore produced in the same places where the wheat is grown and is usually prepared by the baker himself. If the entire sample declares to be attentive to the origin of the products they consume, in this particular case, the hyper proximity of production seems to be missed in favour of other elements justifying the consumption of this particular bread.

The notion of geographical proximity was mobilised by the consumers to give meaning to their consumption. But as we have just seen, although the perimeters of this proximity were not indefinitely extensible, they generally remained fuzzy and imprecisely delimited regardless of where the consumers get their supplies or where they lived.

Proximity and intersubjectivity: interpersonal proximity

When trust replaces knowledge

Compared with a variable and uncertain geographical proximity, the interpersonal relationships had a tangible and concrete character. They were a palpable reality. The baker's word mattered much more than any knowledge of a specific place, even

when what they said was not remembered, as shown in the following interview extract: *'I asked her, well, during a conversation, it wasn't a concern (...) yes well I can't remember where she gets it from exactly, but she told me a place ... Well I don't know anymore, I trusted her'* (17 PE, male, Île-de-France). When there is trust, knowing becomes secondary. For many of the consumers, it was enough just to feel that they could ask if they wanted to. There was the belief that if they asked, they would get an answer consistent with their idea of proximity, and so they did not ask. Thus, one customer of a female farmer-baker, having described at length her concern about knowing the provenance of the food she consumed and stressing her efforts to support the work of local farmers, producers and artisans in her shopping habits, acknowledged that she had never thought of asking her baker this question and concluded: *'I simply trust her'* (16 S, female, Île-de-France).

Trust in the baker thus often substituted for knowledge both about the origin of the ingredients in the bread and about the production processes. The client's faith in the probity (Giddens, 1987) of their baker seemed to make any questioning redundant. The interviewees often said they asked 'out of curiosity' (8) rather than for information. In many of the interviews, discussions with the baker about the origin of ingredients or the production processes were described as being more of a topic of discussion than a search for information. Sometimes they seemed like simple phatic communications: *'We discuss stuff (...) How are things growing in the fields?'* (16 S, female, Île-de-France). Contrary to the mistrust mentioned above that characterises the relationship consumers have with the modern diet, the relationship that the bakers' customers interviewed in this study had with their bread marks the transition from 'passive mistrust to active trust' (Watier, 2008: 67). *'When you know the baker, when he can tell you about the flour he uses to make his bread, we, this is what it was like in Prades, he explained to us ... Well, several times, he explained to us that he used only certain types ... I can't remember which ones, but I trust him, only certain wheats, etc.'* (11 A-M, female, Aveyron). This kind of interaction has become possible because of the way bread is bought by our interviewees: the absence of intermediaries in their exchange normalises discussions between them and their baker and creates the opportunity to build trust.

Drawing on the words of La Bruyère, Watier emphasises 'the spirit of distrust makes us believe that everyone is capable of deceiving us' and specifies that 'such a state of mind, which mobilises intellectual capacities in the direction of a permanent alert, leads [...] to a waste of energy, which trust on the other hand would allow us to put to better use' (Watier, 2008: 60). The endless quest for information or guarantees and the practice of verifying and constantly monitoring all stages of the production process that are required in a context of mistrust disappear when the consumer trusts their baker, to be replaced by the pleasures of interaction. It is no longer about verifying but about building and maintaining the social bond.

Bread made by...

Hence, when the name of the product was mentioned in the interviews, it was always constructed on a model in which the noun 'bread' and someone's name were connected [In French by the preposition *de* (of)]. This syntactic construction made the

bread appear to be intimately linked to an identified entity: *'Franck's bread [pain de Franck], I say Franck's bread because my children say they'll go and get some of Franck's bread'* (H, male, Aude); *'when I have none of Gabriel's bread left ... I have to buy elsewhere'* (A-M, female, Aveyron); *'AMAP bread, in other words Catherine's'* (S, female, Île-de-France).

The chosen entity (the proper noun) was usually that of a person (the baker who made the bread), an association (AMAP) or a point of sale (bakery, Biocoop, market). When the chosen entity was a person, the bread no longer appeared as a mere foodstuff but rather as a personified product that was inseparable from the person who had produced it. The consumer's trust in the person was reflected onto the bread: *'eating his bread is ... it gives me security'* (A-M, female, Aveyron). We will see later that a transfer to the bread of the positive qualities attributed to the person was in operation. In other cases, trust in the product no longer relied on trust in a personal entity but in what Giddens (Giddens, 1990: 27) called an expert system. It was this expert system that served as a guarantee: *'Well, to join the AMAP, I think you have to be honest and I think this baker is honest, and he works honestly, and is totally above board in terms of consumer expectations'* (M, female, Auvergne). The reference to control systems was recurrent in the interviews: *'at Biocoop, they have ... both products that are of good quality, which are ... quite strict about the products they choose, and then there is a whole interaction with the producer, which I really like'* (A, male, Paris). Certification and labelling, which often appeared to be secondary in situations of interpersonal knowledge, became fundamental when confronted with expert systems. This is illustrated by the relative importance that one farmer-baker's customer put on the label depending on where she was buying her provisions: *'If I know the producer and he doesn't have the organic badge, it doesn't bother me because I know how he does his stuff and all that'*. It is only when confronted with the large retailers that labelling becomes a *"security guarantee"* [...]. *If I go to the supermarket, I'm careful that there is at least that ... this label'* (C, female, Hérault). As soon as personal knowledge of the producer is lacking, i.e. as soon as she is unable to use a personal judgement device to apprehend the product, this consumer relies as if by default and with regret ('at least') on an impersonal judgement device: the label, which fills in part of her cognitive deficit regarding the product (Karpik, 2013).

Labels and certifications therefore served as a fulcrum for trust and supported the consumer's choice: *'I saw that a new bakery was going to open, that it was going to be an organic bakery. Certified by Demeter [a French organic certification for products from biodynamic agriculture]. I couldn't wait... we've never had any good organic bread in this district before'* (A, female, Paris). The point of sale's reputation impacted the way in which the product was perceived, and it could be reinforced by exchanges between consumers, who can make or break reputations: *'At the Marne market, we find good products, fresh, not tampered with. [...With] word-of-mouth, you soon know who the good traders are'* (F, male, Alsace).

However, the trust consumers put in an expert system was much more tenuous and less involved than the trust they placed in an individual. Putting trust in an expert system did not commit the consumer. Access to information that was incongruent with the consumer's social representations (Moscovici, 1976) of trust was

enough to rekindle mistrust: *'The other day, the saleswoman showed me the seven security cameras. She told me it was for monitoring them..., them, the employees... I didn't like that. They don't even trust their own staff, why should I trust them?'* (A, female, Paris). The expert system places the interaction within the context of a commercial transaction rather than within an interpersonal relationship in which, 'the presumption of reliability involves the attribution of "probity" (honour) or love' (Giddens, 1990: 33). The attribution of probity is dependent on the consumer perceiving themselves as involved in an interpersonal relationship that opens onto what Simmel called reciprocal action (Simmel, 1978). If a customer can have faith in their baker, it is because they themselves feel involved in their relationship, and this involvement consequently *obliges* them. This mechanism explains a customer's contrite admission of disloyalty. For example, this confession was accompanied by a justification of this wrongful act in this excerpt quoted above: *'when I have none of Gabriel's bread left ... I have to buy elsewhere'* (A-M, female, Aveyron), as her baker only baked at weekends. She is saying she too was trustworthy and only disloyal out of necessity, not through indifference or thoughtlessness.

Bread made by ... not just anyone

In the interviews, it was observed that the trust placed in these organic sourdough bread farmer-bakers and bakers was based on the feeling of personally knowing them. All the customers revealed, at one point or another, that they had *knowledge* of their baker as a person. Surprisingly, this was the case even for those who had never met their baker directly, like this customer talking about the baker who makes the bread he buys from time to time in a Biocoop: *'There aren't many who would take the trouble of making organic sourdough bread and selling it in a Biocoop ... they can't make a lot of it, nor a very good profit. He's really a guy who believes in what he does and I take my hat off him'* (M, male, Paris).

However, it was those customers who came into contact with their baker regularly, who knew them in the flesh, who had the most to say when asked to explain why they trusted them. Among all the arguments put forward, a recognition of their professional qualities was recurrent: *'He knows what he's doing'* (A-M, female, Aveyron). The customers' points of view also overlapped, as shown by the following two excerpts from customers of the same Parisian family bakery. Although these two customers had never met, their comments echoed each other and seemed as if they could have come from the same interview: *'the question of skill is also important, the people at Comedia are people who ... it's a difficult job ... but what they do they do well'* (A, male, Paris) and *'it's always nice to see people who... care about what they do [...] Comedia, their bread, they have proper procedure so I know they put their heart into it and that it is really organic'* (C, female, Paris). These remarks were not, however, specific to the perception of the professional capacities of this baker in particular. In Aude, talking about the work of his farmer-baker, one man said: *'he's very exacting when it comes to wheat quality, the quality of the agriculture, he's very exacting when it comes to... I've already seen him working I don't know how many times on the sourdough... asking questions, knowing what he was going to do so that his sourdough was a little more this, a little less that, so that*

it was balanced ... So it's a quest, an ongoing quest' (H, male, Aude). The same passion for her baker's work and her research into the bread-making process was described by the customer of a baker in the Île-de-France: *'also she does a lot on the wheat, the grain, the flour, what I mean is she's interested in the whole story, not just the flour to make her bread'* (S, female, Île-de-France).

However, this raises a question: Is the customers' trust in their bakers based on their recognition of their professional qualities, or is it its corollary, a happy consequence of the trust already placed in them? The interviews did not include any references to technical or scientific criteria that would allow the interviewees to form an objective evaluation of the bakers' skills and know-how. Indeed, they appeared either relatively uninformed or totally ignorant about breadmaking (those who managed to describe the steps involved in making sourdough bread or who could explain the difference between yeast and leaven were very rare). How, then, could they properly evaluate the professional qualities connected with making sourdough bread?

Our analysis of the interviews showed that it was the baker, as a person, that the customers trusted. Physical proximity was important since it allowed the interpersonal encounter and contributed to the feeling of knowing about a person: *'Well, it's always the same, it's the proximity, it's the fact that we saw how he set things up, how he works, but it's more personal, it wouldn't matter if he was a baker or not. It's because we know him as a person. We know that he doesn't try to do mass production. We know that he's not just trying to make a lot of money'* (A-M, female, Aveyron). Many personal qualities were attributed to the baker. They were unanimously recognised as being friendly and often altruistic: *'he doesn't do it for the money'* (S, female, Aveyron). Their moral and human qualities were frequently emphasised. The adjectives 'generous', 'reliable', 'ethical' and 'trustworthy' were leitmotifs in the clients' descriptions of them.

The elements of *knowledge* that the customer has of their baker feeds into the way in which their bread is perceived. This knowledge can be based on real experiences: *'I rediscovered bread... good bread... real bread, with Gabriel here, just next door... he's my closest neighbour, so ... there you go. Not only is he a good neighbour, he also makes good bread'* (S, female, Aveyron). However, often this knowledge is not based on any specific empirical experience. It's simply a feeling of being inspired by someone, but this feeling is trusted by the person who feels it: *'Yes, because I know it's someone ... it's someone who's careful and I think that's important too'* (A-M, female, Aveyron). It must be emphasised here that no difference can be apprehended in interviews based on the modes of recruitment in the relationship with bread. The customers recruited by the baker as those recruited by the researchers share same positive representations of the baker. However, the degree of intimacy between the baker and the consumer, which was found in our sample to be independent of the recruitment method, makes an impact. For customers involved in a deeper interpersonal relationship with their baker, examples of this trust are more specific, nourished by concrete memories, whereas, for other consumers, examples are more general, described by them as a feeling or an impression. The possibility offered by direct sales to meet regularly with the baker or his employees, to exchange with them among others about professional practices, seems to constitute the foundation for the development of this trust based on the belief that this baker is a good person.

Proximity and perception of a highly personified product

The bread of the bakers who participated in this study was revealed in the interviews conducted with their customers as being highly personified. The perceived quality of the bread was inseparable from the qualities recognised in the baker as a person. It was as if the baker had left their trace on the bread, as if, during the breadmaking process, the moral and human qualities attributed to the bakers were transferred to their bread and transformed into taste, nutrition and health (encompassing physical and psychological well-being). While the transfer of positive qualities was referred to often in the interviews, we observed that the principle also worked for negative qualities, albeit they were mentioned much less frequently. Any disappointment in the baker as a person was reflected in how their bread was seen. Thus, the woman who discovered the multiple surveillance cameras in her baker's shop concluded: *'I've liked his bread less since then'* (A, female, Paris).

Following the paths of magical thinking (Frazer, 1890), bread therefore appears, in the sense of Lévy-Bruhl (Lévy-Bruhl, 1949), to belong to the baker. We are not suggesting here that consumers are not rational but rather that in terms of representations, magical thinking contributes to the creation of significations and to giving practices meaning, as we have already shown for the social representations of food (Masson, 2001). This fact had already been highlighted by Moscovici (Moscovici, 1976) in his first studies of social representations, by Fischler (Fischler, 1990) and Nemeroff and Rozin (Nemeroff and Rozin, 1989) in their studies of food.

This highly personified bread, which belongs to the baker (in the Lévy-Bruhl sense), does not get thrown away. Like its maker, it was 'respected'. Just like a human being, it was perceived to evolve over its lifetime. The descriptions of its changes echoed the life stages since they seemed to be constructed on the analogy of childhood, adulthood and old age. Fresh bread is *'tender'* and *'can be eaten like cake'* (H, male, Aude). It *'keeps well'* (S, female, Aveyron) and is *'a nourishing food'* that *'ages well'* (S, female, Île-de-France). *'You can't throw bread away,'* said many of the consumers, who nevertheless did not hesitate to dispose of *'soulless bread sold in plastic bags'* (A, female, Paris) or mass-produced baguettes bought at the supermarket which would become *'all dry after just a few hours'* (C, female, Alsace). The bread perceived and described as *'soulless'* (H, male, Aude) was judged unworthy of any effort: *'Well, often this bread is good when you've just bought it. But then, they get ... they deteriorate much faster. You can't do anything about it!'* (A-M, female, Aveyron).

Conclusion

Loaded with the personal qualities of the baker and endowed with every virtue, organic sourdough bread anchors the eater in the here and now. There was a sharp contrast in the consumers' discourse between that bread and industrial bread, which was seen as impersonal and empty of nutritional properties: *'The good bread, for one, it's ... it doesn't have rubbish in it. It doesn't have ... chemicals or things like that. For a start it's a pleasure to eat, we feel better in ourselves. (...)*

It's exactly like when we eat ... I don't know, garden produce, for example, which ... is still much better, um ... on a nutritional level than the produce we buy' (S, female, Aveyron). On the one hand, therefore, the bread nourishes the identity of the eater by anchoring them in a geographical space of historical and cultural significance and social interactions. On the other, it participates in the process of disillusionment with other food.

Our analysis of the interviews showed that representations of the notion of 'local' revolved essentially around the added value of the baker as an individual who was anchored in a socio-geographical space that was shared with the consumer. This finding reveals the existence of a particular type of consumer involvement in alternative food systems that complements the two forms of involvement proposed by Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine (Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine, 2008). These authors distinguished two main forms of consumer involvement, namely empowerment and delegation. 'Empowerment' refers to direct forms of consumer involvement in collective decision-making (e.g. political lobbying), while 'delegation' refers to boycotting as a form of consumer responsibility. By purchasing products with a label/certification, consumers delegate the task of concrete action to expert systems.

Although the consumers we interviewed had the same aspirations to access a 'better to think about' food supply than the individuals interviewed in the Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine's studies (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine, 2008; Dubuisson-Quellier and Le Velly, 2010; Lamine, 2005), their consumption practices regarding organic sourdough bread did not fall into either of these categories of involvement. They were not expert consumers, they were not involved in the governance of alternative production methods relating to where they purchased their organic sourdough bread (if they were members of AMAP, they were not active participants), and they did not exclusively delegate their trust to any of the expert systems involved. The trust that emanated from the interpersonal relationships between the consumers and the producers/bakers replaced the need for control and hard facts that was put forward by these same consumers.

In this case, 'local' took on meaning and made sense not as a geographical distance that allowed the consumers to check the products they purchased but as a relational, interindividual, subjective proximity that was able to bypass uncertainties related to modern food supply and which contributed to restoring the consumers' re-enchantment of food (Fischler and Masson, 2010). Consumer involvement was not delegated here, nor did it take the form of empowerment. Instead, it was based on trust in an individual who was perceived as being close by, in this case the baker making organic sourdough bread.

According to our results, direct selling and the perceived proximity it generates facilitate this type of relation. The perception of interpersonal proximity as a foundation of trust is common to our whole sample, regardless of the type of recruitment.

In future research, it will be necessary to isolate the elements that are sufficient and necessary for the construction of this kind of trust which contributes to the re-enchantment of food. Being identified as a regular customer by the baker, the degree of mutual knowledge, sharing a same geographical space, being part of the same

association (in the AMAP's case in particular) are, among others, some of the variables that could contribute to this kind of trust.

Acknowledgements We would like to thank all the bakers, farmer-bakers and their customers who built the project with us and who shared their experience and knowledge.

Author contribution Collection and analysis of materials (conducting interviews, thematic analysis, lexical analysis).

Funding This study was supported by the French National Research Agency (Agence Nationale de la Recherche) (Projet BAKERY: ANR funding 13-ALID-0005). The agency doesn't interfere in the research process.

Data availability Upon reasoned request and only for scientific purposes.

Code availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Ethics approval Statement at CNIL.

Consent to participate The participants were informed of the study's context and aims by the interviewer and asked to sign a consent form informing them of their data rights.

Consent for publication Consent for publication was included in the consent form signed by interviewees.

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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