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The role of low-income consumers in food system transitions: case studies of community supported agriculture and social groceries in France

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Abstract

A growing interest in local food systems in the form of local initiatives and policies is spreading in Europe as a response to the unsustainability of the industrial food system. Researchers call this phenomenon a “food systems transition” (FST). The extent to which these trends are socially inclusive remains contested. The study analyses the shape of low-income consumer (LIC) participation in FST and the factors playing a favourable role in this process. In a given area of Rennes region (Brittany, France) ranging from urban to rural, all the AMAPs (as illustrations of FST initiatives) and social inclusion initiatives such as social grocery shops (as an illustration of LIC inclusion through food) were analysed thanks to semi-directive interviews with responsible persons. We detailed the factors influencing social inclusion in FST initiatives and the presence of FST elements in social assistance organisms. Social inclusion appears rather absent in the former, priority being given to the current stability of the initiative and to other ethical dimensions. FST elements are gaining a prominent place in the latter, either accidentally or as a desired part of the assistance strategy. It is through partnerships with one another that some rare structures engage in a socially inclusive FST. Social and cultural capitals are necessary for LIC to get involved in the FST and claim more food justice.

Keywords Food system transitions · Low-income consumers · Social inclusion · Food aid · Community supported agriculture · Ethics

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Introduction: addressing the inclusion and participation of low-income consumers (LIC) in the food system transition (FST)

The lack of environmental, social, and economic sustainability of the current industrial food system has been widely acknowledged. This system has proved to fail in responding to problems like malnutrition, socioeconomic inequalities, and environmental degradation (Markard et al., 2012; McMichael, 2009; Moragues-Faus et al., 2017).

Recent changes in the food sector have been encouraging the use of the expression “FST” to translate the notion of sustainable development into the agri-food sector (Stassart et al. 2012; Lamine, 2020). This shift relies on agroecological production methods and local food (from producer to consumer with no or one intermediary (Chiffolleau, 2012) within the same farming region). The FST has seen a scaling up in the agenda of several cities in the USA and Europe (Jouen & Lorenzi, 2014; Sonnino, 2013) and includes practices such as community gardens, local markets, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives. Over 100 large cities from the 5 continents, of which 10 French cities,¹ signed the Urban Food Policy Pact of Milano in 2015.² Since the 2000s, an increasing number of French urban and rural small regions have developed sustainable food strategies, following the national law of 2014 that promotes territorialising food systems.³ In Brittany, North-West France, where our survey was carried out in 2018, the number of local food initiatives based on agroecological practices has been multiplied by 8 in the period 2007–2013 (Berger and Guesdon 2013).

In the FST, the use of the term “system” recognises the interdependence between the different dimensions of sustainability: economy, ecology, and social. In this systemic perspective, we want to address in this article a particular aspect of these interdependencies: the link between the social dimension and the other two dimensions, ecological and economic. In the wider context of sustainability transition, social sustainability remains often the most underdeveloped aspect (Kohon, 2018). Tregear (2011, 419) claims that “from a socioeconomic perspective [...] some localised food initiatives may maintain rather than overturn preexisting inequalities between participants and exhibit insularity and defensiveness rather than openness”.

To address this issue, the notion of food justice is particularly interesting. This notion can be summarised around two major components: first, it explores the extent to which all consumers have equitable access to sustainable food and agricultural products;

¹ Le Havre, Rennes, Nantes, Bordeaux, Lyon, Grenoble, Toulouse, Montpellier, Marseille, Mouans-Sartoux.

² The cities are committed “to develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimize waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change”—<https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/>

³ *LOI n° 2014–1170 du 13 octobre 2014 d’avenir pour l’agriculture, l’alimentation et la forêt* (Law 2014–1170 of the 13th October 2014 for the Future of Agriculture, Food and Forests): <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029573022&categorieLien=id#JORFSCITA000029573024>

second, it is also defined in terms of the possibility of being an actor by participating in the governance of organizations providing food (Hochedez and Le Gall, 2016).

Assuming that the phenomena of food injustice follow the pattern of more general socioeconomic inequalities, we propose to address the question of the inclusion of LICs in this FST and their capacity to be direct actors. The extent to which the alternatives related to the FST are socially inclusive remains contested. Although providing quality products for all is one of their objectives, local food systems primarily reach better-off consumers (Deller et al., 2017; Goodman, 2004; Tregear, 2011; Zepeda & Nie, 2012). Low income is related to less healthy food (Darmon et al., 2014; Shahar et al., 2005; Temple & Steyn, 2009; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2013; Hough & Sosa, 2015).

The agro-industrial food system has generated strong social inequities in access to food (McMichael, 2009; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). In this context, the values promoted by CSAs and, more generally, by the initiatives representing FST are identified as carriers of alternative values (Chiffolleau & Paturel, 2016), based on the contestation of the industrial agri-food system (Merkt-Cakal and Miele 2020). It is, therefore, possible to hypothesise that this value positioning, based on participation (ibid.), the empowerment of the members of these initiatives (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010) through an engagement in social innovation dynamics (Chiffolleau & Paturel, 2016), which contributes to fostering more food justice. Initiatives representing FST have multiplied very rapidly in Europe over the last two decades (Spaargaren et al., 2012; Merkt-Cakal and Miele 2020), including in Brittany and the Rennes basin (Berger and Guesdon 2013), which is our study site. This observation encourages us to refine the hypothesis according to which the acceleration of the FST should be accompanied by a greater number of initiatives translating social justice values into action. In this case, the processes involved ought to be studied.

The path of construction of this hypothesis justified our conceptual framework and our methodological approach.

We explored the space of convergence between FST and social focus on LIC based on two categories of initiatives representative of these two components (Fig. 1). On the one hand, we explored all the CSA initiatives, here represented by the AMAPs,⁴ as an illustration of the pioneering dynamics of FST: are the LICs included, and if so, to which extent, and under what conditions do they effectively participate in the governance of these CSAs? On the other hand, we explored all the social grocery stores in this same region as an illustration of the dynamics of socioeconomic inclusion of LICs: is access to sustainable agricultural and food products (as defined in the FST, i.e. agroecological and local) possible for them, and if so, under which conditions do they effectively participate in these dynamics? Our study focused on a sub-region of the Rennes basin that combines rural and urban areas, where some key representatives of all the AMAPs and all the social groceries were interviewed.

Our survey focuses on local food systems (LFS) as a preferred space for translation of the FST. Local food systems are rooted in concepts of ecological sustainability as well as in visions of social sustainability (Tregear, 2011). Rural sociology

⁴ AMAP (*Association pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne*).

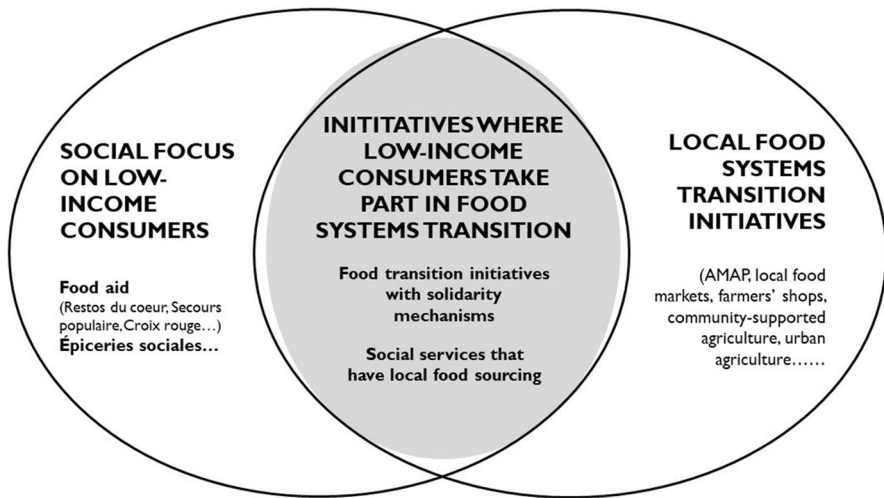


Fig. 1 Exploring the improvement of food justice through the participation of LIC in FST: at the intersection of two dynamics (source: author's elaboration)

and rural development research on LFS are argued to too often focus on the farmers' perspective, assuming that positive externalities in consumers will follow the reconfigured relationships between producers and consumers. Consumers' participation and motives had received less attention (Tregear, 2011) until recently, but a growing number of studies (Chiffolleau & Paturel, 2009; Mundler, 2013; Paturel et al., 2015; Darrot and Noel 2018) and experiences in France are drawing the attention to the consumer's perspective on FST and, particularly, LIC. A general argument is that local foods can improve community health by providing access to healthy foods and awareness. Local food initiatives are also seen as capable of improving food desert situations (Deller et al., 2017; Sadler et al., 2013) and of balancing social differences related to food behaviour and access.

In the first part of this article, we will review the definitions of the key concepts mobilised and detail our analytical framework based on an original diagram.

In the second part, we will present the territory chosen for this study and detail the two types of initiatives analysed (AMAP and social grocery stores) and our sampling and survey approach.

We will present the results obtained, in particular by drawing up a typology of each of the two categories of initiatives: this typology is based on criteria (defined inductively) allowing us to discriminate our initiatives with regard to the question respectively addressed: are the LICs included in the public of the CSAs, and if so, under what conditions of participation in governance? Is access to sustainable agricultural and food products possible for LIC beneficiaries of social grocery stores, and if so with which conditions of participation?

The third part will discuss our results, first by returning to our working questions and our initial hypotheses in the light of our case studies, and then by suggesting the conditions for extending this reflection to the national level.

Enlightening the concepts addressed by the notion of food justice

Contributions of the concept of food justice: One concept, two dimensions

The widely accepted academic definition of food justice (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010) first emphasises the principle of equity in the access to the benefits and risks of the whole food chain, from production to consumption.

Some definitions insist on the spatial dimension of food injustice, notably by addressing the notion of food deserts (Jung & Newman, 2014); other authors (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Minkoff-Zern & Getz, 2011) address it from the perspective of inequities between social groups (racism, migrants, stigmatised professional categories, etc.), to which other social asymmetries such as disability, age, and gender could be added. This social injustice approach focuses more generally on the various forms and causes of low income and their effects in terms of food injustice (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010).

The notion of food justice is based on two major components. The first of these components is equity of access to food and to the mechanisms that produce and provide it. It is based on the combination of physical and spatial and economic and social accessibility. Concerning social accessibility, Chiffolleau (2012) suggests that social inclusion in FST would recreate social links, particularly between producers and consumers, and also as social interaction via collective actions (Tregear, 2011). The second component is the participation and the agency of the different members of initiatives. In effect, equity of access does not guarantee the equity of participation and capacity for decision and action. We suggest that the latter is subordinate to accessibility, without which the possibility of participation (from a distance, from outside) is reduced. This remark will have a significant impact on the analysis of our results.

The notion of participation suggested by the concept of food justice is often extended by questions of food democracy. As highlighted by Paturel and Carimentrand (2018), food democracy adds to this lens the dimension of citizenship, i.e. the notion of engagement in collective actions with a view on the common good. The topic merits hence further attention. Levkoe (2006) suggested that food democracy movements have the potential to be important sites of transformative learning, creating social capital. However, Deller et al. (2017) underlined that there still exists a few empirical analyses of the many positive arguments around the potentiality of local food context to enhance social capital. A clear food democracy approach, however, is still hard to find since, in practice, the food aid programmes may fail to build a real link within vulnerability, recreating rather a food exchange relationship mediated by the food aid structure (Paturel & Carimentrand, 2018). Similarly, in the USA, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programme (SNAP), a well-known nationwide initiative that targets frail consumers and directly provides benefits to purchasing nutritious food, does not always show a clear improvement in LIC's diet quality (Andreyeva et al., 2015; Leung et al., 2012). The mechanisms of food justice that may operate within places where LIC's nutrition is targeted and where some FST dynamics are somewhat present are still worth research.

Which access and participation of LIC to sustainable food through the FST?

Limits to the access of LIC to FST

There exists vast evidence that local food is mainly purchased by consumers who are economically better off (Dixon et al., 2007; Hough & Sosa, 2015), which could deepen commercial relationships between farmers and affluent consumers (Goodman, 2004). A multivariate analysis that used hard data from across the USA found that, although local and organic food consumption was not initially related to income, the lower income percentiles were absent from participating in this trend, suggesting that income is a barrier to the participation in FST (Zepeda & Nie, 2012). However, contradictory observations exist also: CSAs propose similar or even lower prices than supermarkets (Mundler, 2013), and LIC can be identified in CSA's initiatives and participate even more (Galt et al., 2017), indicating that the price is not a limit.

Food choices of LIC are strongly influenced by economic factors, particularly by the price of food (Fonte, 2013; Hinrichs, 2000; Kato, 2013; McGuirt et al., 2014). However, food behaviour is less likely to change if prices change for the case of LIC than for other income groups (Burns et al., 2013; Darmon et al., 2014). Some studies in France have directly addressed the question of price as a source of blockage for LIC to join FST initiatives. Specifically, Mundler (2013) analysed the average price of a popular CSA initiative, the AMAPs, which usually involves highly educated people. However, the study shows that the prices of AMAP foods are sometimes considerably lower than prices in conventional long-chain food retailers; other factors beyond prices probably limit LIC participation. Different mechanisms to make CSA more economically accessible have been described in certain studies (Forbes & Harmon, 2008; Mundler, 2013), as well as the motivations and barriers that LIC face in these contexts (Galt et al., 2017; Mert-Cakal & Miele, 2020; Pole & Gray, 2013). In this line, Forbes and Harmon (2008) found a constant willingness in CSA to create partnerships which could give flexibility to payment plans to become hence more accessible.

Local (as opposed to or complementary to organic) food is however not generally perceived as expensive (Dolstad et al., 2016; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). Stronger barriers to access to better food for LIC included cultural, convenience, geographical (retail accessibility), and social aspects such as the preferences of the whole family, education and information, and a lack of familiarity (Adams & Adams, 2011; Bellisle, 2009; Rodier et al., 2017; Sosa et al., 2014). Even if often claimed as a limitation, knowledge about how to cook fresh food is not always a significant barrier for LIC (Sadler et al., 2013).

Limits to the participation of LIC in the dynamics of the FST

KATO (2013) showed that the dynamics of social exclusion in FST go beyond the above-mentioned factors. She reported how ecological transitions are perceived as non-open spaces by LIC. The barriers faced by LIC in the context of FST are

hence diverse and more complex than the economic aspect, which in turn defines a “LIC”. A macro study survey in California, which addressed the barriers to participation from the direct point of view of 41 CSA’s members by looking at the CSA membership experiences by income group found that LICs are more likely to “find the economic risks prohibitive, their cultural coding unwelcoming, and/or their modes of interaction unfamiliar” (Galt et al., 2017). Furthermore, membership in CSA has been found to require commitment and awareness of the ethics behind the ideals of the CSA (Forbes & Harmon, 2008), pointing out again a strong cultural barrier carried by “like-minded people” (Merkt-Cakal and Miele 2020).

Some examples of FST initiatives worldwide have succeeded to include a more socioeconomically diverse set of actors (Fonte, 2013; Levkoe, 2006; Loh & Agyeman, 2018; Reed & Keech, 2017). Forbes and Harmon (2008) described different strategies used by CSA to enhance opportunities for limited-resource individuals: government food assistance, payment plans, working shares, subsidised low-income shares, low-cost shares, transportation assistance, bartering, outreach efforts, and connections to emergency food assistance.

In France, Darrot and Noel (2018) went beyond CSA and analysed different local food initiatives where efforts had been made to include frail consumers, such as purchase groups, collective gardens, or alternative food aid structures such as social groceries (in French, *épiceries solidaires*). They identified 43 initiatives, mainly in cities in Brittany by 2015 and analysed the strategies that different FST alternatives initiated by citizens develop in order to be more inclusive to LIC, as well as how traditional food aid programs designed for LI populations try to localise their food sourcing (Noël and Darrot 2018). Most such initiatives are initiated by social or consumer associations (Darrot and Noel 2018). It is interesting to note, however, that LIC associations do not exist. In other words, given that food transition initiatives are fuelled by bottom-up dynamics and that LIC does not tend to follow such associative activities, *LIC themselves seem to be left out of the participation to the FST*.

Why focus on AMAP and social grocery stores?

In order to explore the space of convergence defined in Fig. 1, we decided to focus on two types of initiatives.

We chose the AMAPs (*Association pour le maintien d’une agriculture paysanne*) as French examples of CSAs in order to illustrate pioneer examples of FST, where LIC could potentially be included. As an example of local FST initiatives, AMAPs have been selected as case studies as a well-established and popular movement in France, considered one of the pioneer movements of FST in France (Fig. 1). An AMAP is a system whereby local consumers, organised in a stable association, support a local organic farmer through a mid-term subscription to a weekly box scheme. They involve a change in economic relationships: payments to producers are made at the beginning of the season and imply mutual commitment. This allows producers to offer organic products at lower prices compared to other organic options. Their ethical chart states an adhesion to social and solidarity economy.

We focused on the social grocery stores to illustrate place-based initiatives dedicated to the social accessibility of LICs to food, with a potential contribution of sustainable (local and ecological) food products illustrating the FST, in order to examine if those initiatives favour the participation of LIC to the governance of such food provision for themselves. The social grocery stores are a French alternative to classical food aid structures. They are food shops where food is sold at up to 20% of the original price, depending on the consumer's socioeconomic situation, thanks to a partnership with social services. Beneficiaries are directed to these social groceries by social services and access the shop for a limited duration of time (in general, 6 months). This reduces the feeling of stigmatisation of LIC. The underlying objective is to provide diversified food to beneficiaries.

Social grocery stores and, more broadly, innovative food aid systems are privileged places for denouncing food injustice and for experimenting with food democracy. Their specific mobilization in favour of the LICs also and above all makes them places of high stake for the FST: the LICs should find their particular opportunities of participation in the FST. As an example of social focus on LIC, social groceries were chosen, as constituting a space where LIC have more economic autonomy and, especially, allow food choice (Fig. 1). Social groceries often work with geographically near food providers, which could show the dynamics of potential or existing local food partnerships. In some cases, food aid structures aim at including elements of FST. This is the case, for instance, of the “Uniterres” initiative⁵ (Paturel & Carimtrand, 2018) in the above-mentioned grocery shop system in France, which attempted to go further and create partnerships between economically vulnerable farmers, who created a CSA-like agreement with the food aid initiative, and its LIC beneficiaries.

We looked for arguments allowing us to situate each initiative in the intersection space of Fig. 1. AMAPs voluntarily, including LICs, and social grocery shops voluntarily, including agri-food products from their own territory.

Typology of the 13 initiatives: a low contribution of the LIC to the FST

An exhaustive survey in the urban area of Rennes, a pioneer in FST

This research initially focused on the Rennes region (Brittany, France), a reference example of the re-localisation of food in France, with growing support to FST from citizens and public authorities (commitment to the Pact of Milan,⁶ Sustainable Food Plan development in 2016⁷). Rennes hosts a third of Brittany's policy plans oriented towards underprivileged districts, where the poverty rate⁸ can increase up to 48.4% (Institut National de la Statistique Economique, 2018).

⁵ Uniterres was a public project that made a link between insecure organic producers in the territory and social groceries by funding the farmers who would directly produce for them.

⁶ <http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicycompact.org/signatory-cities/>

⁷ https://metropole.rennes.fr/sites/default/files/file-PolPub/PAD-engagements_2017-2018.pdf

⁸ The poverty rate is defined as the percentage of individuals (or households) that is below the threshold of poverty (60% of the national median income).

The survey was carried out in a quadrant covering about 1/8th of the Rennes urban area and going from the city centre to the city's northeast periphery up to 50 km, where the socioeconomic gradient is said to be representative of the demographic diversity of Rennes' small region (Darrot, 2014). We identified and then exhaustively surveyed all the CSA initiatives and all the social grocery stores in this geographic area selected for the survey, social groceries, i.e. 7 CSA initiatives and 6 social groceries. We interviewed the main representatives of each initiative. The survey took place between March and June 2019.

The factors shedding some light on the question "What factors influence the inclusion and participation of LIC in food system transitions?" were identified and classified in order to provide the structure of the typology. For the CSAs (Table 1), these categories are: hierarchy between ethical arguments regarding social aspects, priority given to social inclusion, perceived social incompatibility towards LIC, perception of the possibility of inclusion of LIC, dynamics regarding the inclusion and participation of LICs, and partnerships and side efforts as tools for LICs' access to the CSA (AMAP). For the social groceries (Table 2), these factors are: dynamics regarding FST (products from local farms adopting sustainable production), economic and logistic constraints, volunteers' and grocery managers' will regarding FST, ethics favouring/limiting the orientation towards FST, strategies for social assistance favourable to FST, and local agriculture landscape favourable to the FST dynamics.

LICs remain outside of the CSA initiatives

The motivations that drive consumers towards the AMAP are diverse and evolving. Recently, the militant side of this kind of association is being perceived as diminishing. In our interviews, it is interesting to note that the responsible persons of the AMAP often claim the political dimension of belonging to the AMAP but do not consider this as an important motivation for its members.

When hypothetically discussing strategies for social inclusion in the AMAP, different visions of what social inclusion in the AMAP would mean have been identified, with a clear difference between two approaches: efforts coming from the AMAP to facilitate access to a more socioeconomically diverse public (actively looking for/approaching LIC, price arrangements, accompanying LIC with a stronger network of volunteers), or efforts coming from LIC themselves to get involved in the dynamics of the association.

These differentiated elements have served the purpose of building the ideal types that follow (Table 1).

Producer-centred AMAPs

Producer-centred AMAPs are typically rural, with a dynamic strongly influenced by the producer's needs and constraints. Some AMAPs are clearly focused on the relationship between members and the producer in terms of the support that the latter obtains from such a relationship. An AMAP vice president's words illustrate

Table 1 Typology of CSA (AMAP) based on their factors of inclusion and participation for LICs

Factors	Producer-centred (rural, quality of products, and trust)	Consumer-centred (high incomes families and alternative consumption)	Association-centred (ethic, conviviality, and students)
Hierarchy between ethical arguments regarding social aspects	Social legitimacy of the AMAP = economic relationship consumer-producer, the needs of the producer cannot be compromised by the needs of LIC	Even if this type of AMAP is particularly driven by the needs of the consumers, an intention to make the AMAP accessible to a wider socioeconomic public is not present	The AMAP constitutes the practical environmentally-friendly option for its members Conviviality that encourages all kinds of students
Priority given to the social inclusion	Social inclusion and participation of LIC is not a concern, nor a priority. It is not always desirable and can contradict AMAP's ethics	Social inclusion and participation of LIC is not a priority, but sometimes it is a concern	Social inclusion and participation of LIC is not a priority but it is a concern
Perceived social incompatibility towards LIC	LIC lack the assets and abilities necessary to participate in an AMAP (cooking skills, interest in vegetables, etc.), which prevents the AMAP from taking responsibility for inclusion	Members usually with high revenues might imply a cultural blockage even if efforts to approach LIC are present	LIC students are not incompatible with the rest of members or the AMAP's logics
Perception of the possibility of inclusion of LIC	The perceptions of LIC prevent their inclusion: "Not a paternalist approach" "They are not interested in eating vegetables" Not ethical to make differences between members	The perceptions of LIC prevent their inclusion: Not ethical to make differences between members Belonging to an AMAP is a choice everyone is equally free to make	Help by external organism welcomed. There are not ethical constraints that could justify a reject to differential treatment "They make concessions elsewhere" is an explanation, but not a requirement
Dynamics regarding the inclusion and participation of LICs	The AMAP is yearly promoted in town associations events, but this is not translated into the inclusion and participation of LIC	When the number of members is stable, AMAP's focus is on diversifying offers. When the AMAP is looking for members, there is a difficulty/lack of interest in reaching a variety of socioeconomic groups	Yearly renewal of students allows for some constrained budgets to be present, although they do not always continue for the following year
Partnerships and side efforts as tools for LICs access to the CSA (AMAP)	Being mostly rural, the notion of territory is usually present. This encourages partnerships with local actors of which social groceries	The delivery places are often neighbourhood centres which could be used as a tool to approach LIC (but currently not done)	Openness to partnerships that could eventually fund certain strategies

LIC, low-income consumer; FST, food systems transitions; AMAP, Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne.

this: “in terms of the evolution of the association, we have had difficulties, but in general changes were rather related to the changes in producers that we’ve had; we have given them the freedom to participate in the AMAP up to the extent that they needed”. In one case, the AMAP’s management board decided to increase the adhesion costs in order to support the producer’s investments and to give AMAP members the possibility to donate even more to this cause. Another AMAP was originally initiated by the producers themselves.

Commitment and support are two important ethical pillars of this ideal type of AMAPs, along with the generalised environmental concern. However, this is slightly evolving towards the quality of the products, giving less importance to the alternative economic relationship, even if this aspect is more present in this ideal type than in others. Recent changes in the AMAP are usually related to producers’ investments and networking assets. The history of producer-centred AMAPs often involves an issue of gaining legitimacy or force in the territory using the place of the relationship producer–consumer as a distinctive.

This kind of AMAP tends to establish partnerships with local actors, even if not always successful (e.g. attempts to donate leftover baskets to the local social grocery). It often offers the possibility to its members to spread payments over time, which allowed a more diverse socioeconomic status of its members. Cases of members who ask to pay for food baskets in cash occasionally are also a unique element of producer-centred AMAPs.

However, the idea of making the AMAP itself more socially inclusive with a specific strategy seems counter-productive, even unethical: “We are all equal here; we are not looking for a paternalist approach [such as solidarity food basket]”. The producer’s place is clear: “We cannot start a social cause and turn our back to the needs of the producer”. The idea behind this is that increasing the accessibility of the AMAP by lowering the price of certain food baskets would destabilise the committed relationship. The interviewees of producer-centred AMAPs usually hold the vision that social inclusion in FST would mean accompanying LIC with a stronger network of volunteers who would be specifically dedicated to them: “it is not my online recipes that are going to help [LIC]. It is necessary to accompany them on the whole cooking process, how to prepare foods, how to reason why seasonal products are cheaper...”.

Consumer-centred AMAPs

Consumer-centred AMAPs attempt to satisfy members’ demand, which usually drives changes in contracts with and networks between the producers.

Environmental concerns, support of organic agriculture in general (not as the livelihoods of a specific producer) and short-circuiting supermarket systems are often cited as the motivations that encouraged AMAP creators. Consumer-centred AMAPs highlight the fact that members had all undergone a critical reflection about their way of consumption, and hence, all have “an intellectual capital that allows them to reflect about all these [environmental] questions”. “AMAP members are people with an environmental awareness” is often cited as the description of consumer-centred AMAP members. There also exists a prominent health concern. This

aspect is gaining force in recent years. AMAP members consist of high-income consumers, families with children being most common. Commitment and trust, for this type of AMAP, is defined as “the certainty that the products that we will get are organic and local”, which goes back to the previous point. In other cases, this trust is rather related to the source of food knowledge.

Common strategies include an increase in the diversity of products offered within the food basket as a means to satisfy such demands. This influences the number of producers that belong to an AMAP as well as the number of food baskets that they are able to provide. A limitation of the number of food baskets is a common situation, which is not only a result of producers’ production limitations but of their wish to personally know all AMAP’s members.

Belonging to an AMAP is the result of a free choice and personal reflection about members’ lifestyles. Belonging to the AMAP means making concessions; it is often cited as an explanatory reason for the lack of social inclusion: “People can approach us even if they have small budgets [we are open to everyone], but after all, it’s up to them to make the choice; sometimes people with small budgets do also have smart-phones!” A cultural barrier between AMAP’s consumers and LIC is also used as an explanation in consumer-centred AMAPs: “They feel that they do not belong here”.

Generally, approaching potential members is not a priority of the AMAP: “The objective of the AMAP is to make it possible for local and organic agriculture to exist, agriculture in which we can trust. If we also intend to open to different economic levels... well, it’s not our first objective”. This lack of priority is also present even when the limits to social inclusion are well-acknowledged by interviewees: “If we want to access another social category of the population, we cannot require them to make the effort; it’s us who must go look for them”.

Association-centred AMAPs

Association-centred AMAPs’ motivations are more abstract and slightly more detached from the reality of its members, given the fact that the rate of members’ change is high. The AMAP does not only attempt to maintain the members for a few years but to maintain high association standards (ethical, environmental, and convivial) that can constantly attract new members. Recent changes in the AMAP include an emphasis on the diversification of products, products division, and management to provide wider access to other members beyond the classical food basket contract. Members with constrained budgets often belong to the AMAP, though they may leave after one year because of the price. This means that, although the experience of belonging to the AMAP is not ideal for LIC, there are always some members that have constrained budgets. Everyone is equal in terms of participation. A specific social inclusion strategy is not present. However, there are no ethical or ideological impediments to its development but rather logistical and organisational constraints.

The case of a student’s AMAP is very illustrative of a case where the AMAPs dynamics are rather influenced by the ethical motivations of its members. The fact that the AMAP has a high rate of renewal of its members as they start and finish their studies makes yearly communication an essential point of development. This AMAP has developed logistics and networking assets since they received a high

student demand for ethical food offers that were, in terms of spatial accessibility, easy to reach. Interestingly, the members of this AMAP find the delivery system more practical than other systems (markets, producers' shops, specialised shops...), probably because they go to university, the place of delivery, every day. This ethical dimension is more flexible than the case of other AMAPs, in which presidents usually place AMAP against long food chain structures like supermarkets: "People in our AMAP have this environmental conscience... I think they would not hesitate to participate in anti-waste initiatives such as a grocery [with leftover products from supermarkets, like the one in Rennes 2 University campus]."

A strategy of price arrangements as a means to increase social inclusion in the AMAP would not hinder the ethical pillars of the AMAPs. These could be achieved through partnership with a student grants institution that could cover some food baskets' costs.

In a complementary way, social grocery stores have been chosen as an illustration of the other half of Fig. 1: this second part of our survey explored how LICs are possibly actors in the dynamics of TSF.

A limited and specific involvement of social grocery stores in the FST

The aim of social groceries is not only to provide food but also to "help people with their particular problems", "make them not feel alone", and to "create a social link", which allows for a diversity of side activities beyond food provision. All social groceries are concerned with the quality of the products, as long as they are related to the healthy habits of beneficiaries. This allows for emerging attention to the inclusion of "transitional products" such as organic foods and/or local fruits and vegetables.

Organic products (seen as "healthy products") are often present, whether as a priority for its managers/beneficiaries or simply as appreciated products sometimes obtained from food providers. In one case, organic products were not given any special treatment or recognition. Local products often revolve around the concept of seasonality and making healthier and cheaper choices. They are provided informally by neighbours or via established partnerships with local producers or institutions (insertion garden). The extent of FST in the context of social groceries depends on the nature of the products offered and on the logic behind this local or organic offer. Social groceries covering a larger territory or population tend to be more involved in FST.

Social inclusion in FST gains different meanings for the several social grocery managers interviewed: accompanying people in insecure situations and providing them tools in terms of knowledge and strategies so that they can gain food autonomy once they finish the experience in the social grocery; ensuring access to good quality food; promoting the freedom to make (or not) an ethical choice; using FST elements as lever points for social assistance; or a position of incompatibility between social assistance and FST.

These differentiated elements (idea of social assistance, way of sorting out constraints, future visions, scale) have served the purpose of building the ideal types (Table 2).

Table 2 Typology of social groceries based on the factors favouring their commitment in FST

	Constraints-driven (<i>small, partnerships to have enough, "good food" broadly</i>)	Opportunity takers (<i>big and rural, FST products as a lever for food autonomy of LIC</i>)	Charity dynamics (<i>social assistance logic; few FST products to avoid frustration</i>)
Dynamics regarding FST (products from local farms adopting sustainable production)	Having enough vegetables prevents from enlarging the number and type of food providers	The assessment that the quality and seasonality of products could be improved allows the inclusion of local producers	Having enough vegetables prevents from enlarging the number and type of food providers
Economic and logistic constraints	Economic and logistic constraints determine partnerships	Logistics and economics do not limit the participation in FST	Economic and logistics constraints limit partnerships
Volunteers and grocery managers' will be regarding FST	Intention to include FST products/elements is present in grocery's managers/volunteers, but it is not sufficiently strong to involve the general grocery's logic or strategy	Sensibilisation of volunteers by a larger scale organism facilitates a smooth inclusion of FST elements in the grocery. Volunteers and grocery managers' will to contact partnerships and being actors of the territory allows for a diversity of types of partnerships with FST actors	If FST products/elements are to be present in the grocery, it must be out of the particular producer's will
Ethics favouring/limiting the orientation towards FST	<p>The focus on the prevention of isolation allows for the creation of a social link with beneficiaries</p> <p>The notion that social empowerment can be achieved through food education places F&V at the centre of the grocery's attention</p> <p>The importance of the economic participation of beneficiaries promotes a vision of beneficiaries as actors</p>	<p>There is a presence of FST ethical elements in the grocery</p> <p>The importance of economic participation of beneficiaries promotes a vision of beneficiaries as consumers who can make choices, and one of the criteria for making choices can be of ethical nature. This promotes the presence of a variety of offers, including FST products</p>	<p>A strong sense of social assistance towards the beneficiaries, together with the conception of the grocery as a place where volunteers freely help beneficiaries, limits the involvement of the latter in FST as actors</p>

Table 2 (continued)

	Constraints-driven (<i>small, partnerships to have enough, "good food" broadly</i>)	Opportunity takers (<i>big and rural, FST products as a lever for food autonomy of LIC</i>)	Charity dynamics (<i>social assistance logic; few FST products to avoid frustration</i>)
Strategies for social assistance favourable to FST	<p>The main social assistance driver of this type is to alleviate the beneficiaries' situation of insecurity in general. In this strategy, FST details are sometimes included:</p> <p>Good quality products are used as a means to lower the feeling of stigmatisation of receiving food aid</p> <p>Promotion of a healthy diet usually involves seasonal F&V</p>	<p>The participation in FST of beneficiaries is seen as a means of promoting social empowerment in beneficiaries. Strategies of social assistance place FST at the centre:</p> <p>The promotion of healthy choices is always linked to FST products (local and organic), behaviours (anti-waste strategies) and mindset (promotion of environmental awareness)</p>	<p>The main social assistance driver of this type is to provide sufficient [healthy] food to people in need and to prevent negative feelings in beneficiaries. Aiming at not frustrating beneficiaries after their experience in the grocery, there may exist an equalisation of nonorganic and organic products, the latter hardly affordable by beneficiaries outside the grocery's context</p>
Local agriculture landscape favourable to the FST dynamics	<p>Quality of local products is a requirement</p> <p>Neighbours with gardens often donate to grocery</p>	<p>The grocery follows a wider territorial FST dynamics</p> <p>Not only quality but also control on quantity and type of products is a requirement</p>	<p>Local products are present if donated and if physically delivered to the grocery</p>

LIC, low-income consumer; *FST*, food systems transitions; *F&V*, fruits and vegetables.

Constrained-driven social groceries

Usually of small or medium size, with beneficiaries coming from one city and assisting up to 40 families, constrained-driven social groceries logics imply accompanying beneficiaries towards social autonomy. This includes solving diverse problems and emotional support, as well as an emphasis on lowering the feeling of stigmatisation of beneficiaries. Constraints faced by groceries are sorted out by changing partnerships privileging easier logistics and more beneficial financial conditions and by choosing cheaper providers. As far as developments are concerned, the status quo around the current products is generally sufficient. The wish to get better products (including organic and/or local products) is present, however, with the constraints faced by this ideal type of social grocery: gratuity and logistic convenience.

The place is FST of constrained-driven social groceries is defined by an intention to contact some local producers, even if this contact depends on the above-mentioned requirement of convenience. “Accidental” organic products (hazardous partnerships with organic platforms or non-consistent donations from partner supermarkets and neighbours’ gardens) are sometimes present, and they receive special treatment. In terms of beneficiaries’ participation in FST, this type of grocery encourages cooking and healthy food choices as part of its accompanying strategy, as well as promoting a choice based on “pleasure” from good products.

Organic products are hence appreciated but do not always constitute a priority: for some constrained-driven social groceries, organic products are simply occasional products that are given by food providers and not necessarily a priority in the grocery’s food sourcing strategy. In a very remarkable case, the social grocery’s manager said that these products sometimes served as a point of entry for the beneficiaries to feel more comfortable in the context of food aid: “with respect to self-esteem, being able to consume good-quality products is pleasant. [...] We sometimes have people who arrive for the first time and feel ashamed, then I accompany them and offer them organic apple juice or tea, I tell them to share it with a friend... the next time they come, they say “oh, your apple juice was so good!”. [...] If it’s a good product, a good quality product, there is feedback”.

For this type of grocery, the interest to participate in local agriculture projects such as Uiterres (Paturel & Carimentrand, 2018) is rather motivated by side-effects such as belonging to a network and by the financial and logistic advantages (products in this project were free and an organiser transported them towards the grocery).

Opportunity-takers social groceries

Opportunity-takers are larger-scale groceries with beneficiaries coming from a vast [rural] territory or with a high number of members. The two social groceries that showed a higher integration of LIC in FST could be framed in this ideal type. These two groceries showed a greater complexity in terms of scale. One of them comprised 400 families—beneficiaries, in contrast with an average of 32 families for the rest of the groceries. The other case is a social grocery that covers a great area involving 19 communes.

The idea of social assistance in this case is rather related to providing access to a situation of empowerment. Financial constraints are faced by accepting funding for projects even if extra efforts are required, and logistics constraints are sorted out by counting with a wide network of providers or other types of associates. This ideal type of social grocery shows a clear intention to get better products or to continue to provide access to good-quality local fruits and vegetables. The organic and/or local F&V used to allow for ethical choices in beneficiaries and “showing that it is cheaper to eat seasonally”. Organic, for these groceries, is sometimes also related to local.

An illustrative example was the case of the largest interviewed grocery, with a vast network of food providers, amongst which a local organic vegetable producer. They source from donations from all other partnerships except this one: they use the money paid weekly by beneficiaries to buy the products of this producer, which they offer separately from the compulsory amount of food aid products (although still at 20% of the actual price), promoting a free and voluntary approach of beneficiaries towards these products. A similar situation happens in another grocery that involves an entirely rural area. Their partnership with the social insertion garden of the region allows them to offer organically produced F&V to beneficiaries. These constituted 10% of the total F&V offered in 2018. They are sold at the same price as nonorganic F&V, “so that [beneficiaries] can make a choice as they would make in a normal supermarket or shop”. This grocery is also participating in a call for projects in order to set up a dispenser of products without packaging, with the intention to increase organic products in the grocery and promote awareness of anti-waste practices. It also participated in a project called *Défi familles* (“family challenge”) in 2016, in partnership with diverse local actors, which consisted in accompanying and teaching families from inside and outside the grocery how to eat organic without increasing the food budget.

Social inclusion in FST means ensuring access to good-quality food and recreating a similar environment that affluent consumers may experience in their usual shopping, thus promoting the freedom to make an ethical choice. This means that there is an idea to use FST as a lever point for food empowerment.

Charity dynamics social groceries

Charity dynamics in social groceries relate to the concept of helping people in need. A network of providers based on trust, shared ideas, and historical partnerships allow for sorting out certain logistic constraints. Current fruits and vegetables are judged to be sufficient in terms of quantity and quality. Potential local producers could be accepted as providers as long as they are donors and follow a charity logic.

Organic and nonorganic are treated at the same level; these should be mixed when offered on the shelves. The concern is preventing beneficiaries’ future frustration: “when people leave the grocery, they are sad and frustrated because they cannot afford the same quality”. Organic and/or local products are however usually present, but beneficiaries are not aware of this.

For these groceries, FST is not a concern. There exists a vision that LIC does not belong to transition, and providing an experience with organic/local products can frustrate beneficiaries when they finish their experience in the grocery and can no

longer afford these products. An incompatible distinction between the logic of FST and social assistance was made by the responsible manager of one of the social groceries: “we are volunteers, they just do business”.

LICs weakly involved in FST: Which learnings?

Our study has contributed to addressing the issues of food justice in the dynamics of FST. It was based on the analysis of 13 initiatives of CSAs (AMAP) and social grocery stores identified in a territory of approximately 1500 km² located north-east of Rennes (France), ranging from the city centre to the rural belt 50 km away. We made the hypothesis that we could identify and describe a range of initiatives actively increasing food justice through an effective practice of inclusion and participation of LIC to the FST.

Low contribution of the CSAs (AMAPs) to more food justice

Surprisingly, our analysis of all the AMAPs of the study area shows that the logic of FST alone, though inscribed in social and solidarity economy, does not guarantee a logic of social inclusion. This first exploration leads to the relative invalidation of the first half of our initial hypothesis: AMAPs appear to be very weak contributors to the food justice dynamics for LICs in the FST. The AMAP, composed of students, was the only one to show a form of inclusion for low-income consumers. Its specificity is based on a dissociation between economic capital (low) and social and cultural capital (high among students).

For the other AMAPs of our sample, the ethical foundations and core ideas of FST initiatives, i.e. some aspects of ethics widely present in AMAPs, paradoxically hinder social inclusion. The community selected around this project reveals homogeneous, both in terms of values and social profile: well-rooted idea in AMAPs that all members participate equally and should receive equal treatment, and that the approach to their association must come from a volunteer and individual commitment, overlooks the realities and constraints for most of the LIC. This idea characterises both producer-centred and consumer-centred ideal-types and creates de facto an excluding context for LIC. In addition, producer-centred AMAPs sometimes claim an incompatibility between providing proper support to the producer and making the AMAP more socially inclusive: “We cannot start a social cause and turn our back to the needs of the producer”. The priority given to the solidarity with the farmer and the strong expectation of accessible local organic products justifies a lower priority according to the solidarity with LIC.

A variable contribution of the social groceries to the FST

The dynamics towards the centre of Fig. 1 can variably be identified for the three ideal types of social grocery stores. The size of the grocery store appears to be the

first determining factor. For constrained groceries, which are small in size, the need to maintain enough suppliers is limiting the range of products offered. The focus is mainly on health through food, especially fresh or seasonal products—a definition of quality that is broader and more flexible than the definition of sustainability, which is characteristic of the FST. The only ideal type that can be considered to reach the centre of Fig. 1 is the opportunity-takers social groceries. Their large size gives them the possibility to finance organic or bulk products and then propose them to LICs as an alternative to conventional products. By doing so, these grocery stores allow LICs to allow—only for a few products!—consumption choices comparable to what would be possible in conventional, non-subsidised stores. This lever opens a narrow path for the involvement of LICs in the FST.

The groceries which show greater participation of LIC in FST have in common the promotion of free choice between FST and non-FST products, scale and partnerships, engagement in the transition of institutions responsible for social assistance and environmentally aware volunteers.

Another element specific to the charitable dynamics of social grocery stores is that the inclusion of FST elements is determined by the way social assistance is understood and by the perceived incompatibility of these logics with those of FST.

Another interesting outcome of our survey is that it is through partnerships with one another that the smaller-scale groceries actually commit to FST. These partnerships are of diverse nature: products donations (formal or informal), products purchase (social groceries that establish buying contracts with local producers), activity sharing (environmental associations that propose activities to groceries), or project engagement (FST initiatives that address social groceries as a domain of action, intended to establish dispensers of products without packaging to promote anti-waste behaviour and organic foods in grocery's beneficiaries). Most types of those partnerships require time and dedication from the managers, volunteers, or members of the structures and initiatives. They illustrate how the improvement of food justice relies on social innovation processes (Chiffolleau & Paturel, 2016; Merkt-Cakal and Miele 2020).

Why less contribution than expected from FST initiatives to more food justice?

Our results show that the process of convergence towards the centre of Fig. 1 is not as strong as hypothesised, especially for the case of AMAPs. It is not so common in our research to invalidate quite radically the initial hypothesis. Such a situation of falsification invites the identification of more realistic empirical elements than the initial statement. The hypothesis was based on the one hand, on the stereotype of the existence of strong values in favour of food justice in social grocery shops but also in CSAs, and on the other hand, on the capacity of these social initiatives to translate these values into their practices. We, therefore, expected illustrations of the two dimensions favourable to food justice for ICLs: inclusion and participation (Hochedez & Le Gall, 2016).

Our case studies show that the inclusion of LIC in SFT initiatives remains very limited. In the case of the AMAPs, which we chose to illustrate the pioneering

consumer-led transition initiatives, the inclusion of LICs is almost absent. We will come back to the exceptional case of the student AMAP below. In all other cases, the very values promoted by the AMAPs are an obstacle to the inclusion of LICs. It is interesting to note here that the economic obstacles, which are widely mentioned in the literature, are only marginally mentioned here. The obstacles to the enrolment of LICs in AMAP dynamics are rather related to the priority given to the “entre-soi”: priority given to the constitution of a community of solidarity with the farmer for one of the categories of AMAPs; priority given to the equal treatment of AMAP’s members, which passively define the contours of a culturally and symbolically homogeneous community. In other words, the importance given to a common cultural and symbolic capital is central to the construction of AMAPs and explains the relegation of LICs to the outside. This observation is in line with the literature that identifies CSAs as “non-open spaces” (Merkt-Cakal and Miele 2020). This literature emphasised the perception of this “entre-soi” by the categories of the population kept outside; the survey shows here dynamics from the inside, which question all the more the capacity of these AMAPs to contribute to more food justice. Under these conditions, it is all the more interesting to point out that the only AMAP with low-income consumers is made up of students, a population with significant cultural and symbolic capital.

This first concluding step qualifies the scope of work in which social innovations for greater food justice have been identified (Chiffolleau & Paturel, 2016; Merkt-Cakal and Miele 2020). In contrast to these works, our case studies were not chosen to specifically highlight these qualities instead, we have exhaustively inventoried and surveyed all AMAPs and social grocery shops in the survey territory. Our findings, therefore, point to the pioneering nature of the initiatives highlighted in the food justice literature and the scarcity of such postures among FST initiatives: in terms of contributing to more food justice, AMAPs still seem to be at the beginning of the path.

The situation is slightly less pessimistic for social grocery shops. It is true that the latter focus from the outset on the LIC public, which perhaps a priori favours their inclusion in the food transition process. However, it is still necessary for the social grocery shops themselves become involved in such dynamics. Our survey shows that this is not systematically the case. In cases where access to transitional food products (organic, local) is not offered, it is generally the logistical constraint linked to the need to offer a large number of foodstuffs at a low price that dominates: in other words, a technical and economic constraint. This observation gives reason to the authors who subordinate the emergence of more food justice to the economic difficulties of consumers relegated to the sidelines of the transition.

In the case of social grocery shops, which offer small quantities of products resulting from the transition, the latter are systematically accompanied by a very strong symbolic charge. Be it the restoration of a sense of dignity—by having a box of organic tea at home to share with guests—or the possibility to make a conscious food choice—by opting for an organic or local product rather than a similar but conventional one—the products of the FST are in all cases invested with specific cultural and symbolic qualities. These qualities crystallise the reinclusion of

LIC among shared societal values; in this respect, the grocery shops that make these choices are actively trying to include LIC in the FST.

In other words, a review of these cases invites us to pay close attention to the role of the cultural and symbolic dimension, both as an obstacle to the inclusion of LIC in the FST (in the AMAPs) and as the main lever for achieving this (in the social grocery shops).

On the other hand, none of the initiatives chosen to illustrate Fig. 1 showed active participation of LICs in their governance, except for the students' AMAP. In the case of the social grocery shops that rely on FST products to improve the feeling of inclusion of LICs, the latter do not seem to participate in these decisions; only their act of purchasing (at a facilitated price) shows a very marginal beginning of participation. This finding was disconcerting for us; indeed, our main hypothesis concerned the identification of processes allowing the participation of LICs in the dynamics of FST. Paturel and Carimentrand (2018) had already reached cautious conclusions on the contribution of social grocery shops to the improvement of food democracy when it comes to enabling LICs to become "food citizens" fully involved in the governance of their food provision. In our cases, we were unable to characterise these processes because we were unable to identify such dynamics in the initiatives of our sample. LIC is far from being able to participate in the supply choices of the social grocery store or in the governance of the AMAPs, which is not the case. Paturel and Bachelard (2014), as well as Noël and Darrot (2018), pointed out that there are no examples of socially inclusive local food projects (representing the FST) initiated and maintained by the people they aim to reach.

In conclusion, it is therefore interesting to return to the decomposition of the notion of food justice according to its two components, inclusion and participation (Hochedez & Le Gall, 2016). Our case studies show that the first of those components is altogether discreetly on the way in social grocery shops, though far from being systematic in the FST initiatives. The second dimension was absent in 12 of the 13 initiatives of our sample, with the last one, composed of students, being hardly extrapolable to other LIC. This leads to a very reserved conclusion regarding the processes illustrated by Fig. 1: the actual contribution of transition initiatives to the improvement of food justice appears limited in number when a comprehensive sample of initiatives is studied in a territory showing—however—local dynamics of FST (Berger and Guesdon 2013). Under these conditions, the promotion of the notion of food democracy, which gives a central place to the capacity of each individual to decide on his or her food choices and to take part in food governance, as proposed by Paturel and Carimentrand (2018), still appears as a crucial challenge for the FST dynamics.

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