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Agrifood system between global and territorial vision – Short communication

## Food self-reliant community policy in Quebec: an opportunity for the reterritorialisation of agrifood?

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**Abstract.** This article explores a new government policy in Quebec, the *Plan de développement d'une communauté nourricière* (plan for developing food self-reliant communities), and its possibilities as a niche for socio-territorial innovation. Beyond the issue of food, the policy creates an opportunity to bring together sectors and actors within local communities and local territories that have been distanced or completely disconnected from each other in the ascending trajectory of capitalism, which has led to the devitalisation of local communities. We examine the application of the policy by Saint-Camille, a rural municipality in Quebec where many experiments and social innovations in rural development have been carried out, and explore the new policy's potential as well as certain limitations.

**Keywords:** plan de développement d'une communauté nourricière, local food system, reterritorialization, Quebec, food self-reliant communities.

**JEL codes:** O2, Q18.

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### HIGHLIGHTS

- The process of reterritorialisation of agriculture passes through an alternative model of society that is more socially and ecologically just.
- The food self-sufficient community can represent a prospect for strengthening the local food system and territorial integration of agriculture itself.
- Current agricultural policy in Quebec (Canada) has potential to support socio-territorial innovation niches aimed at adopting strategies that strengthen food self-sufficient local community.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Quebec, as elsewhere in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic shook up the economy, particularly food supply chains organised around major distribution hubs and connected to global markets, largely out of urban

centres. With no pronounced disruptions, the food system managed to weather the storm. However, in response to concerns and fears about the few signs of vulnerability and the fragility of the food supply chain, the Quebec government implemented several measures focused on local sourcing and, more generally, aimed at strengthening local food systems. In this article, we explore a measure that seems advantageous, as it has the potential to transform local food systems beyond the realm of agriculture: the *Plan de développement d'une communauté nourricière* (PDCN), or plan for developing food self-reliant communities. The policy was adopted in 2020 by the *Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec* (MAPAQ), the Quebec ministry of agriculture, fisheries and food. At the end of 2020, the ministry launched a call for projects to develop plans for implementation of local food strategies. In this article we focus on the transformative aspect of this policy.

The PDCN is a public policy that “aims to develop and promote a local food system” (MAPAQ, 2023: 6)<sup>1</sup>. It capitalises on “interactions between agrifood players, grassroots support and access to healthy, fresh, local food” and “takes into consideration more links in the local food system (producers, processors, retailers, community organisations, consumers)” (MAPAQ, 2022: 5).

This article focuses on the potential of this new government policy to support a niche for socio-territorial innovation. Beyond the food issue, the policy offers an opportunity to bring together sectors and actors within local communities and local territories that have been distanced or completely disconnected from each other in the ascending trajectory of capitalism, which has led to the gradual devitalisation of local communities. We focus on the case of Saint-Camille, a community recognised in Quebec as a place of experimentation and social innovation in rural development, in order to show this policy's potential, as well as certain of its limitations.

Before we proceed, it is important to note that Quebec is a province of the federal state of Canada. While the provinces of Canada, and Quebec in particular, have exclusive jurisdiction in certain areas of the law, this does not include agriculture and territorial development, which fall under both federal and provincial jurisdiction. However, the specific policies and bodies discussed in this text are under the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

## 2. WHY IS RETERRITORIALISATION THE BASIS FOR ALTERNATIVE MODELS?

The aim of this article is to analyse an agricultural public policy adopted in Quebec that could encourage the restructuring of local communities around an approach concerned with where we live rather than interspatial competition. This analysis is important because the policy has potential to create niches of social and ecological transformation (Geels, 2002) and thereby further socio-territorial innovation (Klein *et al.*, 2014; Moulaert and Van den Broeck, 2018).

It is worth remembering that capitalist development has broken up the production of goods into production chains composed of various segments. The vertical and horizontal integration of these segments into industries driven by marketing and consumption (Olson, 2021), an integration intensified with globalisation (Sassen, 2007), has accentuated competition on a global scale, where the global and the local are combined (Cox, 1997; Pecqueur, 2006). Hence, the various chains of production are able to benefit from comparative advantages, which reduce production costs and therefore increase competitiveness (Moulaert and Swyngedouw, 1989). This quest for competitiveness is at the root of fierce competition exacerbated by globalisation (Porter, 2001), and this competition has transformed local territories into sources of advantage favouring the profitability of capital on global markets, with no regard for the needs and aspirations of the local population. With reference to the basic logic of capitalism, this model of development – indeed, of society – has been defined as extractivist and neoextractivist (Gudynas, 2011; Chagnon *et al.*, 2022).

This production mindset, which is part and parcel of industrial production, is just as characteristic of agricultural production and has affected and transformed rural territories as agribusiness has developed (Chagnon *et al.*, 2022). The process of deterritorialisation, in which the local is solely a source of production factors enabling increased productivity and profitability, is at the root of a territorial approach based on the notion of productive space, where what is produced has no connection with local needs, particularly in terms of food. To paraphrase Polanyi, this is what we might call the territorial disembedding of agricultural production, a deterritorialisation that progressively devitalises local environments insofar as what prevails is the maximisation of surplus value and, therefore, the reduction of local investment and income.

After the Second World War, Keynesian public policies were part of this process in two ways. Such policies supported agribusiness in order to develop the competitiveness of countries or regions, and secondly, they com-

<sup>1</sup> Authors' translation.

pensated, particularly in Western states, for the losses incurred by local communities through public investment. The spread of neoliberal-inspired political perspectives has led governments to reduce their contribution, particularly to less competitive communities, intensifying the decline of those territories most negatively affected by the deterritorialisation of production.

The vision that inspires this article is part of an alternative approach to development – a post-extractivist and therefore emancipatory approach that advocates for the reterritorialisation of agriculture. As Escobar (2018) and Santos (2017) argue, it is at the level of local territories that the proposal for an alternative model of society can emerge, one that is more socially and ecologically just, since it is at this scale that one can try to meet the social and economic needs of the population while preserving nature. It is also possible to meet all the needs of local communities at this scale, whether in terms of goods or services. This is how we come to see territories as living environments rather than productive spaces.

At the local level, experiments to bring citizen and economic interests together are being organised in response to the destructuring caused by globalisation. This is what Pecqueur and Nadou (2018: 29) call “*faire territoire dans une économie mondialisée*”, or place-making in a globalised economy. A social and solidarity-based economy is emerging at the local level, striving to put forward forms of economic development based on solidarity and liberated from the dominant productivist models (Frère and Laville, 2022). With grassroots support, the main actors are able to launch initiatives that mobilise social economy resources and combine them with other resources (public and private). The local level can thus be a point of convergence between economic approaches that value social capital and economic practices inspired by new values, for example, where individual enrichment is subjugated to objectives that prioritise ecological sustainability (Fontan, Klein and Van Schendel, 2023). Thus, we posit that the territory embodies a fundamental societal issue, which leads us to frame our analysis of innovative policies on agriculture as a proposal to reintegrate food production into territories – in other words, reterritorialisation (Doyon and Klein, 2019). In the following sections, we explain this approach in relation to Quebec.

### 3. THE GRADUAL DETERRITORIALISATION OF QUEBEC AGRICULTURE

In Quebec, as elsewhere, agriculture has long been practised with an eye toward local and national consumption to meet the needs of nearby communities. This

territorial interweaving takes two main forms. On the one hand, commercial agriculture was established in the St Lawrence lowlands and central regions to feed the cities. With urbanisation and the growth of certain urban centres, in particular the city of Montreal, this form of agriculture has become increasingly important. On the other hand, in the more peripheral and remote regions, subsistence farming has supported the expansion of the ecumene, oriented toward forestry, mining or fishing. In these cases, agriculture made it possible to establish rural settlements to support the pioneer fronts, thus alleviating the problem of access to food. At the same time, it lowered the cost of reproduction of the workforce, increasing the rate of profit for the large companies exploiting natural resources and fostering capital accumulation that corresponds to what Harvey (2004) calls “accumulation by dispossession”. This duality of agricultural forms lasted until roughly the Second World War.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, farming began a process of modernisation to serve the ever-growing urban population. In this context, the *Comité d'enquête pour la protection des agriculteurs et des consommateurs*<sup>2</sup>, or committee for the protection of farmers and consumers, was set up in 1952 to identify the advantages and shortcomings of agriculture and to make recommendations for its revitalisation. The goal was to ensure the “progress and stability”<sup>3</sup> of agriculture to meet the needs of a growing, increasingly urban population, a growing proportion of whom worked in non-agricultural sectors. Ultimately, the aim was to maintain the most specialised and efficient farms capable of adapting to the new demands of urbanisation. This led to the concentration of farmland tenure and the disappearance of two thirds of the least productive farms, reducing the number of farms from 140,000 in the mid-1940s to less than 50,000 in the early 1980s (Dupont, 2009). The standards, policies and incentives adopted led to the development of a productivist and extractivist agriculture increasingly disconnected from local needs. The following section outlines the major stages of this evolution. The stages are framed by milestones that marked major political changes at the highest ranks of the Quebec government (see Table 1).

#### 3.1. Milestones of political development

Until 1960, Quebec was governed by a very conservative and generally non-interventionist political party. In

<sup>2</sup> The committee report uses the words “committee” and “commission” interchangeably. Locally, it is known as the “*Commission Héon*”.

<sup>3</sup> Authors’ translation.

1960, the election of the Liberal Party marked the beginning of a major process of social, economic, cultural and political modernisation now known as the “Quiet Revolution”. This modernisation, with a strong Keynesian orientation, resulted in the establishment of a modern quasi-nation-state, regional economic development policies focused on redistribution and productivity, the creation of major economic institutions, the nationalisation of hydroelectricity and the implementation of structures to encourage citizen consultation<sup>4</sup>.

This process of modernisation was also concerned with agricultural development, in keeping with the recommendations of the aforementioned commission for the protection of farmers and consumers. In 1961, the Quebec government passed the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act (ARDA), which allowed the province to implement a pilot plan for regional modernisation (Klein, 2010).

### 3.2. Government intervention in agriculture

In 1965, the government set up the *Commission royale d'enquête sur l'agriculture au Québec*, or royal commission on agriculture in Quebec, whose 1967 report highlighted the need to increase agricultural yields. The Commission recommended drainage work and increased use of chemical inputs to improve soil quality. Thus, this second commission also aimed to modernise agriculture and increase the income of farming families (MAPAQ, 2018).

The arrival in power of a separatist government in 1976 brought a major change in Quebec's agricultural policy. The *Ministère de l'Agriculture* was reformed and became the *Ministère de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation* (ministry of agriculture and food). The Act to Preserve Agricultural Land was enacted in 1978, delimiting a vast zone where non-agricultural land use was prohibited without authorisation. In 1979, the Act Respecting Land Use Planning and Development was passed. The law affected rural areas and modified local governance by creating supra-municipal bodies known as Regional County Municipalities (RCMs). In 1981, the government published a document entitled *Nourrir le Québec* about development prospects for agriculture, fishing and food. It emphasised the need for greater food self-sufficiency (MAPAQ, 1981). Massive investments were made along these lines during this period.

Between 1992 and 2001, a number of major meetings were organised around the agricultural sector. The main

ones were the *Sommet sur l'agriculture* (1992), which resulted in the document *À l'heure des choix*, focusing on conquering new markets (Bouchard, 1992), and the *Conférence sur l'agriculture et l'agroalimentaire québécois* (1998), during which an agreement was reached to aim to double exports over a seven-year period. During this period, Quebec's agricultural policies focused on better positioning the agrifood sector in the context of globalisation. In particular, a decision was made to support large-scale pork production for export. This increased the demand for fodder, which had strong impacts on agriculture, the environment and territories and intensified the extractivist orientation of food production. This industrial, sector-based approach, disconnected from local and national food needs, has serious consequences, such as contamination of waterways, loss of forest cover, abandonment of land less suited to the productivist model, and concentration of agricultural capital.

In 2006, the *Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture et de l'agroalimentaire québécois*, or commission on the future of Quebec farming and agrifood, was set up and highlighted a number of issues facing Quebec's agriculture and agrifood sector. Although the Commission concluded that the agrifood sector was not in crisis, many players in the sector claimed to be “at a turning point” (CAAAQ, 2008: 13). The free-trade agreements signed by the Canadian government have ushered in an increasingly productivist agricultural model that clashes with environmental and health concerns, both from citizens and from farmers adhering to agroecological and proximity marketing models.

In 2013, a plan for food sovereignty in Quebec called the *Politique de souveraineté alimentaire* was adopted but then immediately abandoned by the neoliberal-inspired government elected in 2014. Finally, the *Alimenter notre monde* bio-food<sup>5</sup> policy, adopted in 2018 and still in force at the time of writing, aims to establish a “prosperous” and “sustainable” bio-food sector, and in particular to “strengthen the synergy between territories and the bio-food sector” (MAPAQ, 2018: 105)<sup>6</sup>. The main policy discussed in this article, the *Plan de développement d'une communauté nourricière* (PDCN), is being carried out as part of this bio-food policy.

### 3.3. The evolution of rural development policies

Obviously, rural development and agricultural development are not synonymous. But in order to fully

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of Quebec's economic development from the Quiet Revolution onwards, see Moralli *et al.* (2017).

<sup>5</sup> In Quebec, the term “bio-food” refers to agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture and agri-food sectors combined.

<sup>6</sup> Authors' translation.

**Table 1.** Evolution of agricultural and rural policy issues in Quebec.

Orientation	Policies and programmes	Policy and programme objectives
<i>Before 1960</i> Conservative, but open to foreign capital; right-wing nationalist	<i>Comité d'enquête pour la protection des agriculteurs et des consommateurs</i>	– Assessment of the state of agriculture – First stances on the future of the agrifood industry – Recommendation to maintain the family farm
<i>1960-1976</i> Keynesian; Quiet Revolution; hydroelectricity; economic nationalism	Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act <i>Commission royale d'enquête sur l'agriculture au Québec</i>	– Modernisation of soil use – Regional planning – Improving farm family incomes – Major drainage works
<i>1976-1985</i> Keynesian, separatist social democrat	Act to Preserve Agricultural Land Act Respecting Land Use Planning and Development <i>Nourrir le Québec</i>	– Protecting agricultural land – Streamlining of land use  – Food self-sufficiency – Sovereignty perspective
<i>1986-1994</i> Deregulation; supportive state; reducing public services	<i>Sommet sur l'agriculture</i>	– Integration into globalisation – Shift to export farming
<i>1994-2003</i> Keynesian, separatist social democrat	<i>Conférence sur l'agriculture et l'agroalimentaire</i> <i>Le rendez-vous des décideurs</i> PNR 1	– Doubling exports – Developing the pork industry for export – Support for rural revitalisation
<i>2003-2012</i> Deregulation; re-engineering of the state	PNR 2 <i>Commission sur l'avenir de l'agriculture et de l'agroalimentaire québécois</i>	– Support for rural revitalisation – Finding of lack of diversity in agricultural models, but no government action
<i>2012-2014</i> Separatist, social democrat	Food sovereignty policy	– Support for the bio-food sector
<i>2014-2018</i> Neoliberal	<i>Alimenter notre monde</i> bio-food policy	– Synergy between territories and the bio-food industry
<i>2018- ...</i> Right-wing nationalism; neoliberal; productivist; COVID era	<i>Plan de développement d'une communauté nourricière</i>	– Improving the local food system and food self-sufficiency – Empowering local communities

understand the scope of our main subject of study, the government plan to promote creation of food self-reliant communities, we must also take into account the policies recently adopted in Quebec to foster rural development, the organisations and programmes created by these policies, and their elimination in 2014.

Since 1990, various programmes have been implemented by the government to support rural communities. The flagship measure of government intervention in Quebec's rural communities was the *Politique nationale de la ruralité* (PNR), adopted in 2002 in response to the demands of rural and regional movements. The policy was based on four main orientations: 1) promoting the renewal and integration of populations; 2) fostering the development of the territory's human, cultural and physical resources; 3) ensuring the sustainability of rural communities; and 4) maintaining a balance between quality of life, the living environment, the natural environment and economic activities.

The PNR was implemented in three phases. The first (2002-2007) created rural pacts, which were contractual partnerships between the state and regional county municipalities, focusing on commitment and innovation (MAMROT, 2001). The second PNR (2007-2014) added rural laboratories, in-depth development experiments in little-studied fields of activity that represent promising avenues for rural communities (MAMROT, 2006: 32). These measures were to be reinforced in the third 10-year phase (2014-2024). They were meant to promote the multisectoral nature of the territories, including agriculture, but were dismantled by the neoliberal government elected in 2014 along with the organisations and programmes they had created.

The combination of the deterritorialisation of agriculture and the elimination of the PNR justifies our emphasis on the concept of the food self-reliant community and the government's plan to encourage its realisation. This policy fits well with the current neoliberal

approach, which advocates the withdrawal or even total elimination of the state's responsibility for territorial development. But it also opens a window of opportunity that communities can use to strengthen their agency and freedom from the constraints of extractivist agricultural development. Our hypothesis is that when built from a community perspective, the food self-reliant community carries the gene for agrifood reterritorialisation.

#### 4. THE PDCN IN SAINT-CAMILLE

As mentioned, at the end of 2020, the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ) launched its first call for projects to carry out the PDCN<sup>7</sup>. In drafting their PDCN, communities are required to produce an overview and analysis of the food system in their territory, establish and maintain dialogue between the various stakeholders, and identify actions to implement in order to find solutions. As mentioned above, the plans must encourage interaction between agrifood actors, have grassroots support and provide access to healthy, fresh, local food (Québec, 2023). For MAPAQ, a food self-reliant community requires 1) productive land, 2) prosperous and responsible businesses, 3) improved access to healthy food, 4) increased local demand, 5) an optimised life cycle, and 6) local food governance.

Municipalities or groups of municipalities wishing to undertake such an approach must respond to the ministry's calls for projects. The municipality of Saint-Camille seized this opportunity. At the end of 2020, the first round of funding was granted to carry out PDCNs. Saint-Camille received \$18,900 in funding from MAPAQ (Québec, 2021). Implementation of the plan was entrusted to the *Corporation de développement socioéconomique de Saint-Camille* (Saint-Camille socio-economic development corporation). We present this case as an example of a food self-reliant community plan carried out under the leadership of a community with strong, inclusive and well-established local governance. But first, a brief introduction to Saint-Camille is in order.

##### 4.1. The community of Saint-Camille

Like many rural municipalities in Quebec at the turn of the 20th century, Saint-Camille's activities were essentially farming and forestry. Beginning in the 1950s,

farming shifted from producing for family and local needs to a more commercial activity. This period was marked by the decline of small farms and the expansion of more productive ones. The farming population itself turned away from agriculture and moved to the cities, where they found employment in mining<sup>8</sup> and manufacturing. Thus, at its peak in 1911, Saint-Camille's population was over 1,000, whereas by 2001 it had dwindled to just 440 (Klein *et al.*, 2015). This demographic decline led to the disappearance of various services associated with agricultural activity, but also threatened the existence of services for the population, notably school, as well as the sustainability of the community itself. Under these circumstances, various initiatives were undertaken to revitalise the municipality.

In 1986, four residents set up a fund to acquire an important building in the heart of the municipality, the former general store. The premises were to be occupied by a non-profit organisation created at the same time with the mission of operating an intergenerational meeting space with a community and cultural vocation (*Le P'tit bonheur de Saint-Camille*, 2023) (see Figure 1). This organisation offers a weekly meal service in the municipality, providing a place for the community to meet, and promoting local products and locally grown vegetables.

The solidarity cooperative *La Clé des champs* was created in 2003 (Doyon *et al.*, 2020; Tremblay *et al.*, 2019). It became a private company in 2010, but it kept the same name. The vegetable grower couple who acquired the business have essentially the same goal as the cooperative once did, which is to provide the local population with fresh, healthy food (Klein *et al.*, 2015). Their produce is distributed through direct-to-consumer channels, such as the weekly baskets, as well as farmers' markets (local and regional).

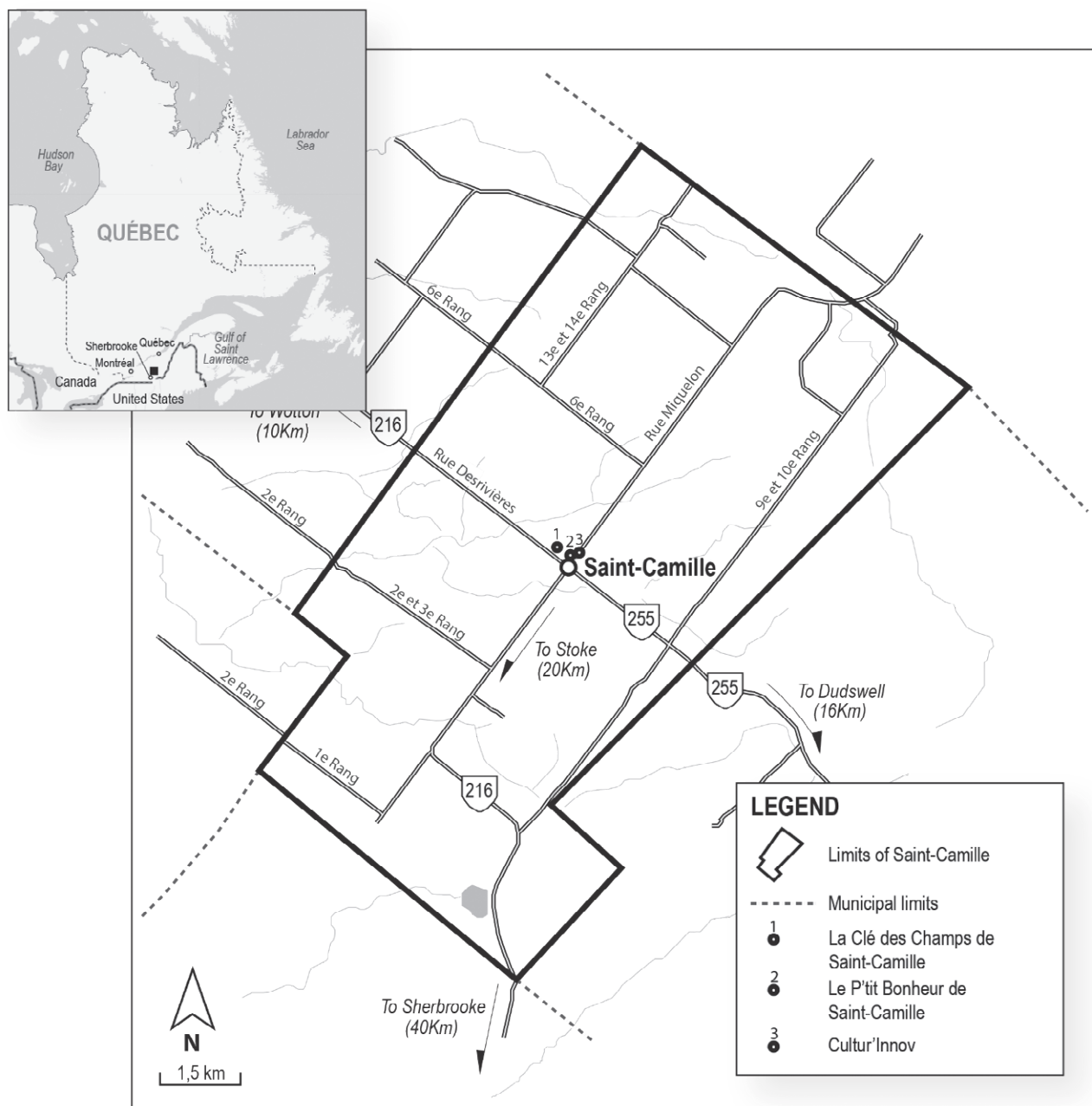
The *Cultur'Innov* cooperative was founded in 2009, which, in addition to producing food, offered consulting services for non-timber forest products such as the cultivation of new berry varieties, nut trees, medicinal plants and mushrooms. Since 2017, it has a 4.5-hectare experimental orchard (*Cultur'Innov*, 2023). More recently, *Cultur'Innov* has invested in setting up a packaging and processing centre to serve producers (Doyon *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, in 2019, Saint-Camille adopted a local appellation of origin, *Fabrications d'origine camilloise*, which is meant to highlight the originality of local products and services and the expertise of their makers and suppliers including food (e.g., winter spinach, spicy wild boar pizza, apple creton). The same year, the municipali-

<sup>7</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, other measures such as the *Panier bleu*, essentially a showcase for local farmers, processors and merchants, were also put in place, leaning on local sourcing.

<sup>8</sup> The region was known for its asbestos mines. Les Sources Regional County Municipality is the new name (since 2006) of Asbestos Regional County Municipality.

Figure 1. The municipality of Saint-Camille, Quebec.



Produced by : Mourad Djballah, cartographic technician, Department of Geography, UQAM

ty also adopted a local procurement policy, including for agrifood products.

#### 4.2. Research and intervention method

The research work surrounding the Saint-Camille PDCN was carried out on the basis of grounded theory as proposed by Glaser (2002), according to which

we begin on the ground and then generalise, and the partner-oriented research approach, which is based on the cross-fertilisation and co-construction of knowledge (Fontan *et al.*, 2014). The research is part of a larger project called *Ateliers des savoirs partagés*, or shared knowledge workshops, an experiment with rural communities taking action to reverse their devitalisation and researchers from the *Centre de recherche sur les innova-*

*tions sociales* (centre for research on social innovations, or CRISES). The project experiments with new ways of running events, offering services, promoting local heritage, living, developing the territory, revitalising and working toward food security. Saint-Camille was the only community that participated in the first round of the *Ateliers des savoirs partagés* (Klein *et al.*, 2015), while the Petit-Saguenay municipality and the Bellechasse regional county municipality joined in the second round (Tremblay *et al.*, 2022). The third round includes some 15 communities.

This type of partner-oriented research between the academic and practical worlds is part of a new approach in which the university becomes a stakeholder in community development. This partner-oriented approach allows for the creation of social innovations that respond to the needs and aspirations of citizens and communities (Bouchard, 2021). In this approach, researchers work with stakeholders to analyse the problems facing communities and identify potential ways to ensure their resilience. From a pragmatic and performative perspective (Gibson-Graham *et al.*, 2019), partner-oriented research allows for experimentation with new development strategies.

##### 5. SAINT-CAMILLE'S PLAN FOR A FOOD SELF-RELIANT COMMUNITY

For Saint-Camille, the government's adoption of the PDCN and MAPAQ's call for projects represented a window of opportunity that stakeholders seized to develop and create a food self-reliant community (Doyon *et al.*, 2022). The municipality was already very proactive in developing its community and had a history of focusing on agrifood initiatives. The PDCN was intended to help tie together projects that were developing relatively autonomously (although, as mentioned above, some attention was paid to symbiotic relationships such as the use of local products) and to optimise the use of certain local resources. The municipality selected three main themes to guide the establishment of a food self-reliant community: food education and training, the development of food solutions, and the sustainability of local ecosystems and services (CODESESCA, 2022a).

Saint-Camille's PDCN, adopted at the end of 2022, is part of a long-term vision of local development. This vision, which guides the municipality's actions in a number of areas, provides that by 2030 Saint-Camille will be:

*characterised by its avant-gardism and prosperity. It is recognised regionally and nationally for its strong agricultural*

*nature. It is made up of a local ecosystem of strong, symbiotic organisations and businesses that help meet the community's current and future needs* (CODESESCA, 2022a: 6)<sup>9</sup>.

The planning process followed the "classic" steps. First, an overview of the community and of the local food system was drawn up, using data from various organisations (e.g., Statistics Canada, Institut de la statistique du Québec) and ministries (e.g., MAPAQ). A survey, to which 83 people responded (out of a total population in 2021 of 551 inhabitants, or 225 households [Statistics Canada, 2023]), provided additional information. For example, while data are available for large game (e.g., deer, elk), this is not the case for smaller game (e.g., hares, grouse). The survey therefore provided a better understanding of the supply from natural areas (gathering, hunting, fishing, trapping), but also, more broadly, additional information about the territory and agricultural production activities, local food processing, local food distribution and marketing, and finally, waste management and reuse.

After the overview, a public consultation was carried out (in November 2021) in order to perform an analysis, with 61 people taking part. The analysis used two focus groups (in February and March 2022) with 10 local stakeholders to go into more depth. Among the strengths identified were the presence of actors operating in a diversified local agriculture model and the availability of land dedicated to agriculture; the absence of a critical mass of consumers and specialised food processing activities were considered weaknesses (CODESESCA, 2022).

Lastly, a two-phase process was used to reflect on the actions to be implemented or those that would benefit the municipality. First, an initial public consultation session provided an opportunity to present food initiatives launched by other rural communities in Quebec, in order to show the diversity of options and draw inspiration from them (Doyon *et al.*, 2022). Next, a second public consultation was held in June 2022. Some 25 people took part in this new meeting. During this exercise, a number of needs and potential solutions were identified. For example, residents expressed the need for infrastructure or equipment to store vegetables over winter. Local producers also in attendance at the meeting were quick to respond that their refrigerator could potentially be made available.

An eight-year plan was organised around three major objectives: 1) to transfer and enhance know-how, local natural food resources and food self-reliance potential; 2) to increase autonomy, resilience and local food solidarity; and 3) to ensure the sustainability and vitality of our local ecosystems and services (CODESESCA,

<sup>9</sup> Authors' translation.



CA, 2022). Every year since 2021, community members have been invited to take part in collective brainstorming on ways to become a food self-reliant community. A concrete achievement directly linked to the adoption of the PDCN is the creation of an *AgrÉcole* at the Saint-Camille primary school. The programme provides teaching materials, material resources and human resources to help schools integrate agrifood into their K-6 curriculum. After seeing the presentation on inspiring experiences as part of the PDCN (Doyon *et al.*, 2022), the school submitted its application, which was accepted in February 2024.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The policy for creating food self-reliant communities differs from the major state interventions of the past. It is applied at the local level, with the aim of building local food systems, and thus differs from the usual government approach to agrifood, which is more large-scale and industry-focused. It emphasises the diversity of the actors involved. Saint-Camille's experience in implementing the PDCN shows the unifying potential of agrifood projects involving different actors: residents, private companies, municipalities. Indeed, the food self-sufficiency and local food movements are seen as opportunities (CODESESCA, 2022a).

However, in light of the process undertaken by Saint-Camille, but also more generally by other communities, certain limitations of the existing policy become apparent, and the process raises a number of questions. While funding is provided to develop a plan, that funding is actually somewhat limited (financial assistance of up to 50% of eligible expenses, up to a maximum of \$40,000 [Cabinet du ministre de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation, 2021]). It is not enough money to hire someone to oversee developing the plan. Nor is it enough to hire someone to do the work necessary to implement the plan, such as follow-up, communications and events. The plan's development and implementation thus rely on existing employees, and its realisation on local actors. However, in September 2023, MAPAQ announced the creation of a new programme<sup>10</sup> to fund coordinating and carrying out projects of collective interest. There is every reason to believe that these funds could be obtained to coordinate the implementation of the plan and carry out actions.

What's more, mastery of the various aspects related to food self-reliant communities likely varies from one

territory to another. Since local planners have not been specifically hired to carry out a PDCN, do they fully understand what a local food system is? Do they know the difference between the concepts of food autonomy and other related concepts that have different objectives, such as food sovereignty and food security? Do they understand issues related to healthy eating?

Moreover, granting funding through a call for projects puts local communities in competition with one another. While the government renews the amounts over the years and many, if not all, communities could potentially benefit, communities do not all have the same resources and expertise to apply for these funds. Such disparities are likely to persist during the development and implementation of the plans, and may contribute to keeping the areas most in need in a state of decline. In 1995, Saint-Camille created a socio-economic development corporation whose mission is to "promote agrifood and socio-cultural development, industrial/commercial expansion and the protection and integrity of the natural environment in the municipality" (CODESESCA, n.d., n.p.)<sup>11</sup>. This means it is someone's job to work specifically on this type of task, and that person has the knowledge and experience to enable the municipality to apply for funding, as well as expertise in organising community events. Moreover, as part of its PDCN, the community identified its own mobilisation capacity as a strength.

Finally, even if it is too early to assess the impact of a community's adoption of a PDCN, and even if food self-reliance projects are indeed being implemented in some rural areas, it is already evident that the size of a municipality (for example, just over 500 inhabitants in Saint-Camille) limits the actions that can be undertaken locally, a situation the Saint-Camille community identified as a weakness. It would certainly be beneficial, especially for small municipalities – as the case of Saint-Camille demonstrates – to conduct a similar reflection process at the supralocal level, meaning the regional county municipality (RCM), which is a long-standing grouping of municipalities within the same territory that form an administrative body.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The creation of a food self-reliant community in Saint-Camille is a logical extension of the municipality's recently adopted appellation, as it aims to promote (exchange and use) locally produced and processed food, among other goals (Pecqueur, 2023). So, despite the

<sup>10</sup> MAPAQ's 2023-2026 territorial and sectoral development programme

<sup>11</sup> Authors' translation.

questions they raise, PDCNs appear to us to be opportunities to change trends in local communities. This policy provides an opportunity for local communities to expand their repertoire of collective action, provided they have mobilised to combat the decline of their community. The Saint-Camille community's long-standing commitment to finding solutions to its problems, its ingenuity and the expertise of local actors and residents alike suggest that the PDCN can indeed contribute to the creation of a local food system and foster interactions between the various links in the agrifood chain, thereby supporting local agriculture and intersectorality in terms of both production and community services. In this way, the PDCN could also foster identity, a sense of belonging and collaborative governance.

For the time being, the food self-reliant community seems to us to be a niche for experimentation that uses some well-known strategies including locally grown food and food security, but also expands beyond those strategies as a niche of innovation. Firstly, it is based on the notion of the local community and thus lays out responses to the devitalising effects of globalisation, emerging as an option for upending existing hierarchies between the local and the global. Secondly, the food self-reliant community promotes the conditions for socio-economic reterritorialisation, since it brings production and consumption closer together, creates synergies between entrepreneurial initiative and work, articulates the ownership and use of resources, and allows the establishment of more harmonious relationships between the community and nature. In this respect, the PDCN opens the path to strategies to depart from the extractivist and productivist model and toward actions that "re-embed" agriculture in communities. However, these initiatives must not remain dependent on public policy, so as not to be subject to the political vagaries that can kill innovative experimentation, as seen in 2014 with the neoliberal government's elimination of the *Politique nationale de la ruralité*. The forms that food self-reliant communities will take, their contributions to the establishment of local food systems and to community food security, as well as their capacity to generate niches for social and ecological transformation, are certainly avenues of research to be explored in the years to come.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, JLK and MD; Methodology, MD and JLK; Investigation, MD and JLK; Writing – Original Draft, MD and JLK; Writing – Review & Editing, JLK

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