

# Transition through Alternative Agri-Food Networks (AAFNs) :

## From resistances to systemic territorial autonomy

Catherine Darrot, Lukas Zagata, Emi Tsakalou



### What are Alternative Agri-Food Networks?

Alternative Agri-Food Networks (AAFNs) is a recent expression progressively used to describe a wide range of initiatives of food production, marketing and consumption

- based on an increased and more personalised link between producers and consumers
- most often at a local level
- sharing similar values of economic and social solidarity, of environmental preservation and of opposition to the food-system dominant logic

AAFNs are based on several intertwined functions:

1. Agricultural production
2. Food processing
3. Food marketing (under which we include also consumption habits).

### FarmPath 3 case studies dedicated to AAFNs

- Wide range of local marketing solutions for farms products in Rennes (France)
- Generalization of farmers markets in Pilsen (Czech Republic)
- Local quality wine marketing of Santorini Island wines through tourism sector (Greece)

In Rennes and Pilsen, the dominant regime is characterised by modern industrial agriculture and a processing industry which is directly related to distribution of food via large retail chains (supermarkets and hypermarkets). In Santorini the tourism regime played an important role in the transition and will be included in our analysis.



### Who initiated the niche ?

- In Rennes, the niche was initiated by farmers
- In Santorini, the transition was initiated by wine makers
- In Pilsen, the niche was initiated by consumers

### First alliances within the niche

Partnerships with actors representing another part of the production/consumption chain, or even another sector (tourism in Santorini) were absolutely necessary from the start. This led to tandems:

- **Producers enrolled consumers in Rennes:** farmers met the expectations of militant urban consumers (the "consum'actors") who used their food choices as a mean to express their convictions regarding environment and economical solidarity.
- **Consumers enrolled producers in Pilsen:** a narrow collaboration of consumers with local farmers was necessary to initiate the first markets
- **Processors enrolled the tourism industry in Santorini:** winery visits and new type of quality wine directly marketed on the Island by wine makers relied on a close partnerships with actors of the tourism sector.

### Systemic transition facing Resistance of 3rd actors

To progress further, a third category of actors were enrolled.

- In Rennes, larger volumes and higher level of consumers demand → need to find **intermediary processors** willing to be involved in the AAFN. Their lock-in situation is technical (they have invested in costly industrial equipment which cannot be converted to other uses) and economic (they depend on economic chains involving up-stream and down stream regime partners)
- In Pilsen, the size of the niche has remained limited, but the fast and ever growing success of the niche will probably initiate similar developments as in Rennes.
- In Santorini, the wine makers – tourism sector needed the commitment of **farmers** growing wine. These were expected to change their grape production practices to meet the new quality standards required by the niche. They initially resisted because those technical changes had a strong impact on their work conditions and their individual and collective identity.



### Overcoming the resistances

**Rennes :** A new type of intermediary actors was generated, created, and integrated into the niche dynamic: some butchers, logistic platforms, restaurants and cooks either changed their practices or appeared as new comers with innovating practices. Some actors are "generated" by the niche, such as small collective slaughtering infrastructures managed either by farmers alone or in partnership with a butcher. Other actors were existing but sought to escape the regime, not least due to economic difficulties.

**Santorini :** first a semi-forced enrolment of the existing grape producers by increasing the prices paid for grapes, offering technical assistance. The prices paid for grapes to farmers were first and suddenly doubled by the winemakers of the niche. Then some pioneers and more innovative established wine makers brought changes in vine production practices.

### Key lessons learned

- AAFNs can be initiated by any actor in the production/consumption chain.
- AAFNs seek to be autonomous from mainstream agro-food systems. They do not aim to change how the mainstream system functions, but to offer an alternative to it thanks to this autonomy. Scaling up is not their goal.
- This strategy of autonomy needs the involvement of the three categories of actors of the food chain: production, processing, marketing. The resistance by mainstream actors of lacking actors of that food chain is gradually overcome thanks to gradual increases in engagement and growing desire to leave the mainstream system mutual benefits due to the increasing autonomy gained toward the regime. autonomy progressively appeared interesting for the more resisting actors.

For further information see: [www.farmpath.eu](http://www.farmpath.eu)



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