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Is growing your own safer? Uses of vegetable gardens in polluted industrial areas

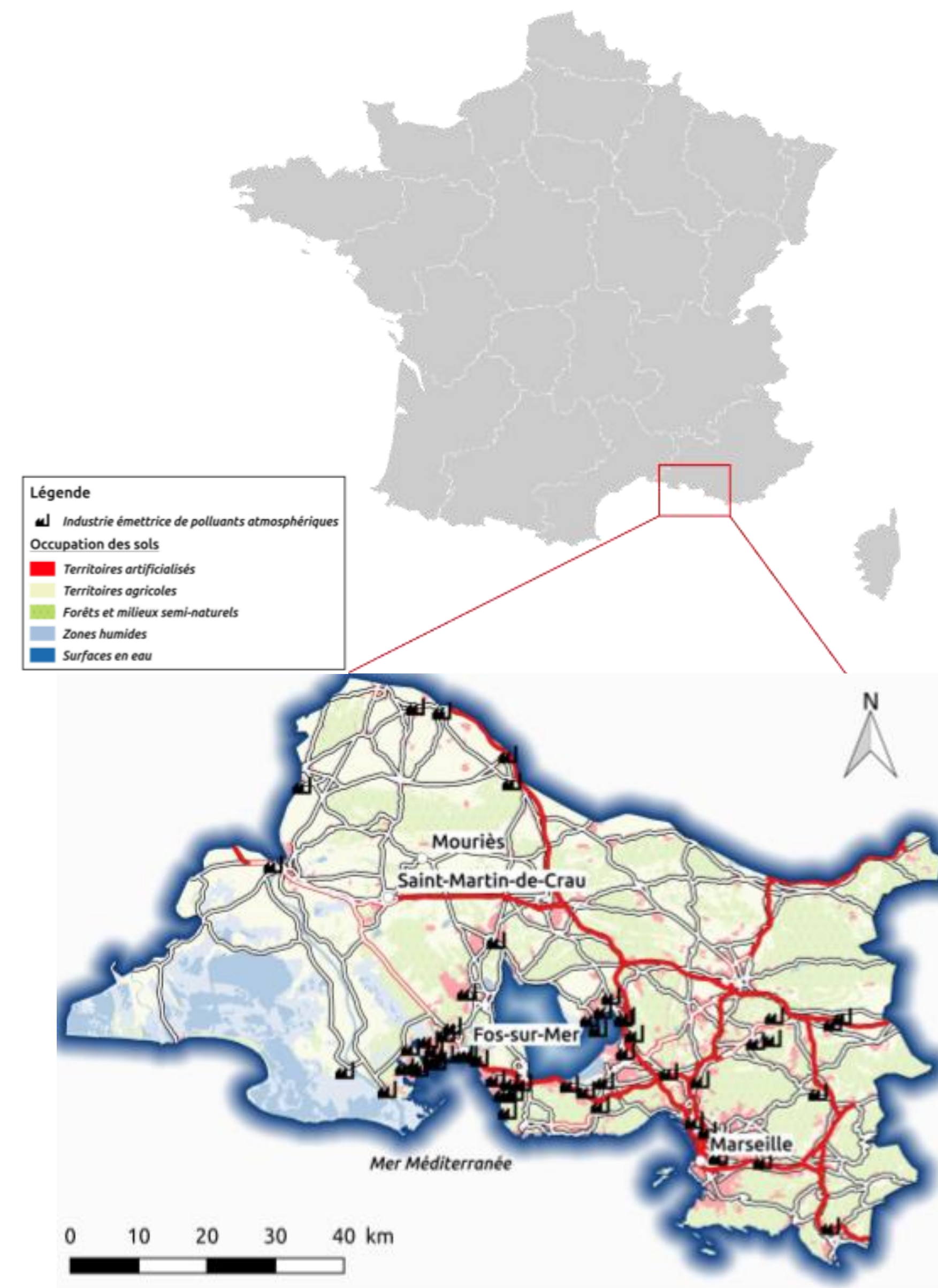
L. Giletto, C. Gramaglia, E. Cadot, S. Goix

Context Social sciences literature points at the noxious/corrosive effects of pollution on the social fabric as environmental and health problems generate tension and conflicts (Freundenburg 1997). Those can be exacerbated when decisions to limit or ban some practices residents are kin on are taken, like the consumption of home grown vegetables, game or seafood. Respected or not, those restrictions create what sociologists called « subcultures of distress » (Erikson 1994; Edelstein 2004).

Our survey deals with environmental and domestic practices, like gardening, in two cities: Fos-sur-Mer Localised alongside one of the most important european industrial facility and a control area, Saint-Martin de Crau, localised 25 Km further.

Question Does pollution discourage the Fos inhabitants cultivating their garden and consuming local foodstuffs? Are they more sensitive to pesticides risks? Do chemical risks lead them to change their practices?

Method ECOLEX is a comparative quantitative sociological survey during which 138 people were polled about their perception of pollution and risks. It complete s the epidemiological study INDEX that analyses samples of blood and urine of people in Fos and Saint-Martin.



Fos-sur-Mer (source C. Gramaglia)

- > One of Europe's largest industrial area
- > 20 000 ha dedicated to heavy industry
- > More than 20 high risk facilities
- > 15 800 inhabitants
- > 86% of pooled people have a garden
- > **59% think their town is polluted**

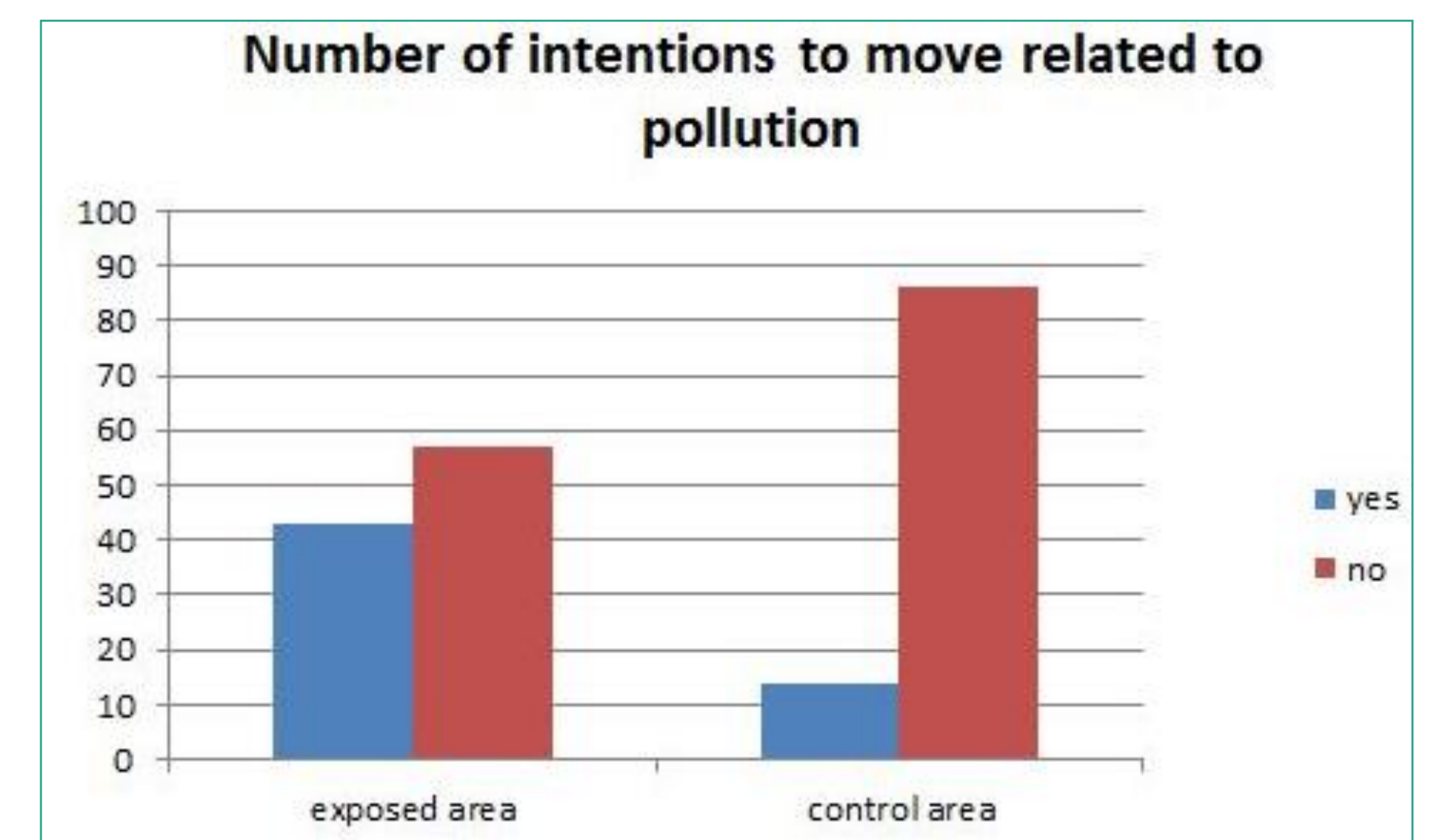


Coussouls in the Crau steppe (source ACCM)



Saint-Martin de Crau (source ACCM)

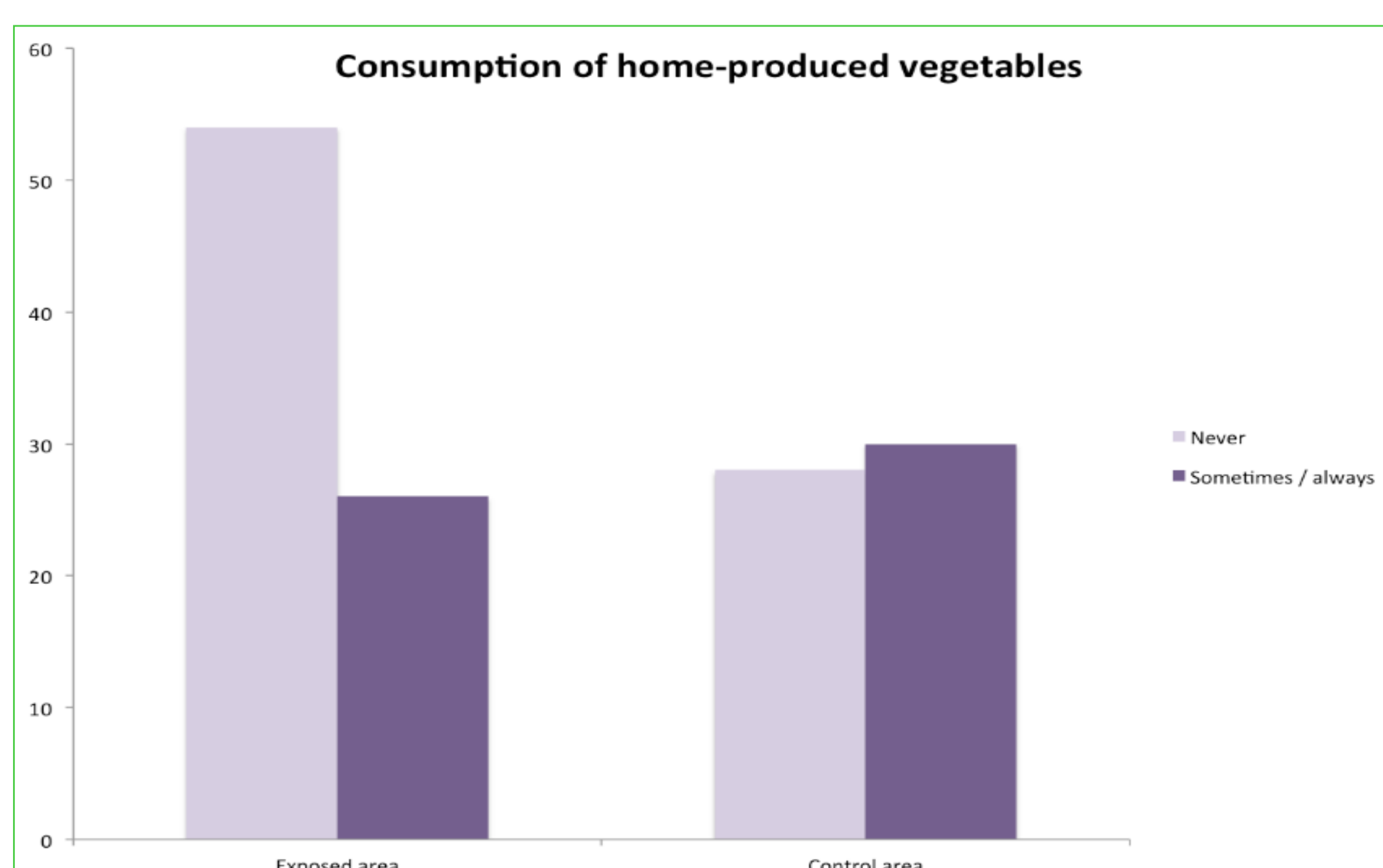
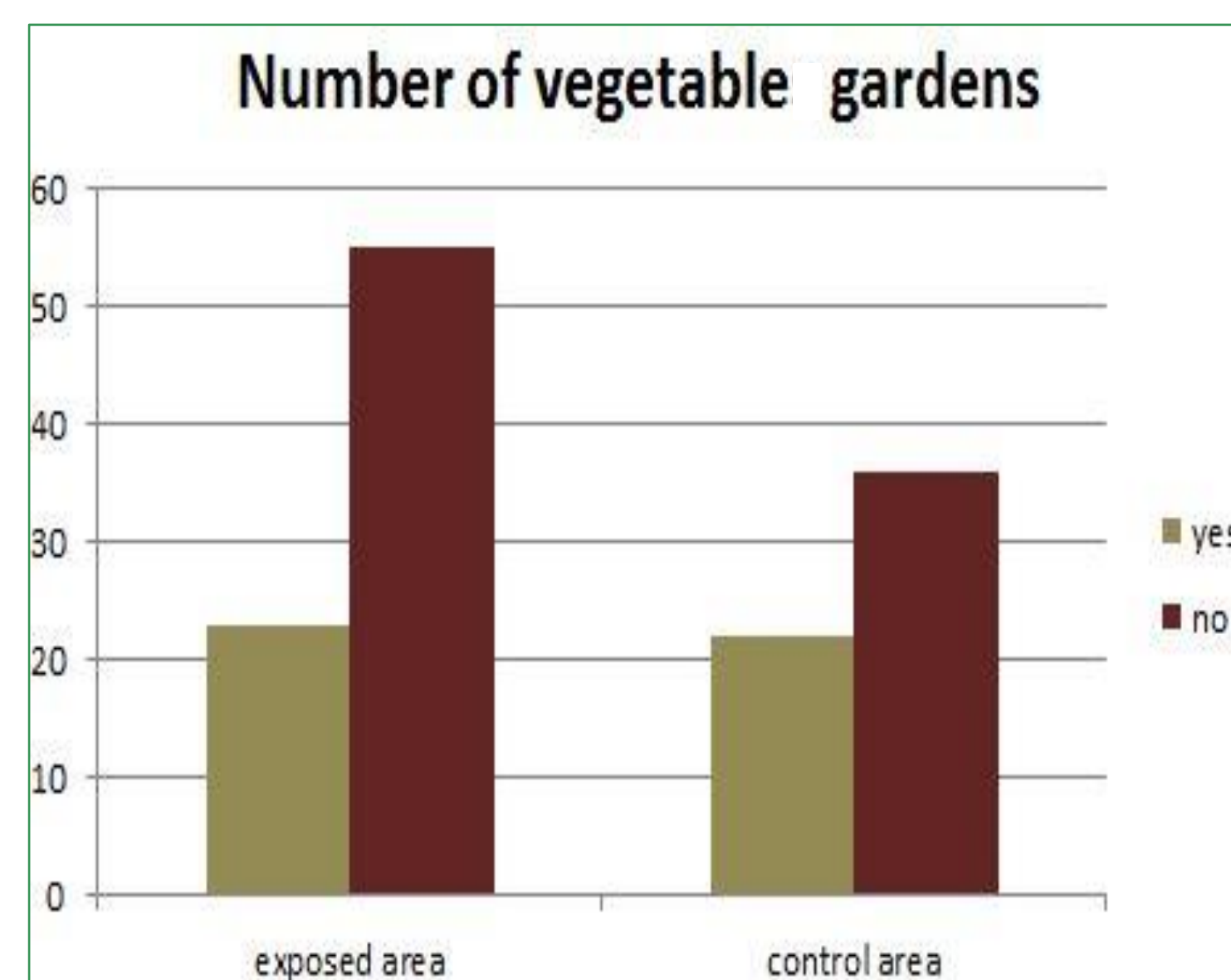
- > Agro-pastoralism
- > 500 ha dedicated to logistics
- > 13 300 inhabitants
- > 88 % of pooled people have a garden
- > **9% think their town is polluted**



Only 14% of the St Martin de Crau's population thought about moving because of problems of pollution, while they are 43% in Fos-Sur-Mer to be willing to do so. **Those results confirm that pollution has negative impacts on the liveability of an area.**

38% of the St Martin de Crau's population grows his own vegetable while they are only 29% in Fos-Sur-Mer. Those results lack statistical relevance, but may show a difference as there are slightly less gardens in the exposed area. Ethnographic data suggest that people tend to get used to pollution and forget it. They think more about it when they have a situation to compare it, either after holidays away from home or when an outside points it at them.

« We don't really notice anything... But we see it when we come back from holidays. Then we see pollution... » Yvan, Fos



However, consumption of home grown vegetables varies a great deal. People in Fos-sur-Mer eat less foodstuffs from their gardens. Notwithstanding, during interviews some inhabitants of the exposed area mentioned having second home in a rural and protected area where they can refuel with fresh air and grow healthier vegetables.

In both areas, about 66% of people declare not using pesticides in their garden. Even when they perceive their environment as heavily polluted, they don't consume more organic vegetables (only about 13% eat organic while expressing concerns about chemical risks).

Ethnographic data make us think that the difference between "locally produced" and "organic" is not always clear for people, local food being often more appreciated compared to long distance and allegedly intensively produced supermarkets vegetables.

« I try to eat organic, when I can afford. Those things are expensive, but I try to buy local food mainly... I mean small retailers... Now, are they organic or not, I cannot tell. They have no label. But at least they don't come from Spain or somewhere... I buy from small producers from here or Martigues... » Simon, retraité, Fos.

Conclusion There is no significative difference in gardening practices between Fos and Saint-Martin. However, concerns about environment quality are noticeable in the exposed area and can be related to a lower consumption of home grown vegetable, indicating that pollution has a real impact on daily life. Industrial impacts can be said to affect the territory's liveability (Gramaglia 2016). As a precaution, some practices can be abandoned. However, this critical situation doesn't seem to have any consequence on their uses of pesticides, as their consumption in this matter is comparable to national data regarding amateurs (Barrault 2012). Perceptions of various chemical risks are definitely partial and partitioned.