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The role of civil society in urban governance for urban and peri-urban farming in Toulouse

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Abstract

The importance of non-governmental organizations (NGO) in farming development has been assessed and discussed for a long time in developing countries. The on-going debate in Europe on urban food supply and urban food governance is currently reshaping farming policies within a more global framework of smart cities, sustainable and inclusive growth. New actors are now taking part in this debate, including local public authorities and NGOs. The participation of the latter has been seen as a way towards a more participative democracy, an opening of the public realm to civil society, as well as the introduction of new scenarios for the definition of public goods and for the formulation of local policies. Nevertheless, some authors advocate a less mechanical view of the effects of NGO participation in public policies by taking the relationships of these actors with the other actors involved in local governance into account.

In keeping with this approach, our aim was to understand and categorize the involvement of civil society in local policies that support urban and peri-urban farming in the Toulouse area, the fourth largest city in France. This urban area is one of the case studies of the Ruragri Era-Net Taste project. First, an inventory of local actions to support farming was made on the basis of previous knowledge and its actualization by press reviews, Web browsing and interviews. These actions were then classified according to a smart growth grid developed in the WP3 of the Taste project. After a selection of these local actions, qualitative interviews took place to improve our understanding of NGO participation, their own construction of the public goods that they help to shape, and their relationships with public actors and public actions.

The results show an enhanced participation of NGOs and, more largely, civil society representatives in the local public realm who advocate new ideas to encourage the presence of farming in and around the city. They also demonstrate a variety of participation forms in public actions, depending on their economic dependency on public institutions and the technical profile and competency of the NGOs.

In conclusion, this paper presents a reflection on local governance for the purpose of maintaining farming in urban areas, introducing a complementary view to the more common focus on private-public partnerships.

Keywords: urban farming, civil society, participation, public action

Introduction: new scenarios for farming in and near cities

Expectations about farming have diversified considerably since the creation of the common agricultural policy (CAP) in Europe. Until then, the issue was to increase agricultural production to provide food for the inhabitants and, for some countries like France, to export food. Various policies served this goal: the professionalization of farmers, the concentration of land and the disappearance of the smallest farms. In France, these policies were negotiated and implemented by a close agreement between the government, through its Ministry of Agriculture, and professional organizations in what was referred to as the co-management model of the farming sector. Since then, over-production crises followed by various health crises have led to a reexamination of the finality of the farming sector. While CAP policy extended its support to rural development, European societies developed critical views on farming, arguing for environmental protection, food quality and food sovereignty.

In the same time, the rate of urbanization increased. Even if it sounds paradoxical, farming is no longer a productive activity specific to rural areas. For example, 47% of the farms in France were located in urban areas¹ in 2010. These farms controlled 44% of farmed French lands (Giroux, 2015). The future of farming in France depends, to a large extent, on urban policies and, particularly, on urban land planning policies. The last two decades have experienced a deep change in urban involvement in the food production sector worldwide. The notion of smart growth for cities illustrates the concern about preserving farmlands in and around growing cities. Urban farming is considered as a powerful tool to mitigate the vulnerability of citizens to economic and ecological crises. As a consequence, new or old-fashioned forms of food production in and near cities are promoted at the local level, such as community or allotment gardens. New expectations towards farming are developed locally based on new links between food production and urban life. They assume new forms of production, new types of producers and new links between production and consumption. One of the issues behind these changes is the change in the governance of the food production sector it implies. The objective of this paper is to illustrate these changes by considering the actions of two new types of actors in this governance at the local level: public authorities and the civil society organizations involved together in local food production.

Civil society support for urban farming: new actors in local public policies

The role of civil society in a new type of local governance for place-based policies

The term governance has been used to differentiate new forms of government whose characteristic is the quantity and diversity of actors involved in public decision and policy implementation (Tollefson et al., 2012). A large part of the literature concentrates on private-public partnerships to provide public goods. More complete definitions include the networking of three types of actors: public, private and civil society organizations (Jean and Bisson, 2008).

This concept has been largely applied to the domain of environmental policies (Rumpala, 2008; Lane and Morrison, 2006). According to Caillaux (2013), the notion of sustainable

¹ In France, urbanization is now studied at a new scale: the urban area. At its center, the urban pole is defined not only by its building density but also by the number of jobs it offers. Since 2010, the main urban poles are the ones offering more than 10,000 jobs. Around the urban pole, the peri-urban perimeter is composed of the communities where a large part of the inhabitants are commuters. The urban pole and the peri-urban area form the urban area of a town.

development in France has introduced less centralized and more transversal ways of coping with environmental issues than the traditional technical, top-down and sectorial organization of the government. This qualitative change was facilitated by the expansion of government decentralization in France and the subsequent empowerment of local public authorities and the networks they formed with other types of actors to cope with locally defined issues. The participation of civil society in the definition of environmental public policies has been largely documented (Lane and Morrison, 2006).

Civil society encompasses different types of non-governmental organizations built to focus on issues of general interest: professional unions, associations, citizens' collectives, lobbying groups, etc. According to Lane and Morrison (2006), their creation results from the observation of the failure of the government and the market to provide services or goods of value to these collectives or their intended beneficiaries. Their participation in public action at the local level can adopt different forms: participation in public consultation, claims, projects of local change, creation of forum for debate, etc.

Associations in France

French associations are subject to the law of 1901. They are non-profit organizations. There are some 1.3 million active associations in France, working in several domains: cultural activities, home help, sports and leisure clubs, education, health, environment, etc. More than 12% employ people. Moreover, employment in the associative sector increased in the 2000-2014 period, whereas it decreased in the private sector. The associative sector employed almost 10% of the private workforce in 2014, the majority of which had short-term contracts. (Bazin and Malet, 2015)

This participation has been seen as a way towards a more participative democracy, an opening of the public realm to civil society, as well as the introduction of new scenarios for the definition of public goods and for the formulation of local policies. Nevertheless, some authors advocate a less mechanical view of the democratic effects of non-governmental organization (NGO) participation in local governance (Rumpala, 2008; Lane and Morrison, 2006). On the one hand, NGO involvement might not in itself increase public deliberation but, on the contrary, might create a privileged relationship between local authorities and a specific group of interest (Lane, 2003). The representativeness of the diversity of interests and the legitimacy to configure and to participate in the debate about public issues are of particular relevance. On the other hand, community participation in local policies through consultation, for example, does not necessarily translate into empowerment or an increasing ability to intervene in the decision-making process (Mathur and al., 2003). On this point, even more than NGO participation, it is the relationships between the civil sector and the public authorities that should be considered. Even if these relationships cannot be hierarchical, they can be strongly asymmetric due to financial dependency, for example. On that point, identifying the resources of each type of actor in the relationship and his or her mutual or asymmetrical dependency on the resources provided by other actors is of relevance.

Case study presentation and M&M

Toulouse is the fourth biggest city and urban area in France in terms of number of inhabitants (approximately 1.3 million in 2012). It is characterized by its demographic dynamism, notably in the peri-urban area, and its geographical extension (453 municipalities, 4000 km²). This very large urban area presents a “rural” landscape with a predominance of agricultural land uses. The land planning policies and documents (master plans and urban codes) have

recognized the presence of farming activities near Toulouse and are increasingly protective of agricultural land uses, trying to contain and rationalize urban growth. More recently, urban authorities, mainly at the intercommunal level, have implemented new policies to connect productive activities to urban life: creation and support of community gardens, farm acquisitions to develop direct sales and educational activities, a planned agricultural park, creation of a farm incubator for organic vegetable production, an increase in the contribution of local food for school meal services, etc. These policies increasingly aim at developing local food production and consumption.

In order to understand the involvement of civil society in such actions, from their conception to their implementation, we adopted a qualitative approach based mainly on interviews with civil society organization members and public personnel with elective or administrative status. We also interviewed private actors responsible for developing actions that favor local food supply and consumption in the urban space. These interviews were partly conducted with or by a student, intern in the research project (Tshibangu, 2015).

	Public	C.S.	Private	Location
Organic vegetable farm incubator	++	++	+	CC1
Community gardens	++	++		TM
Allotment gardens	+	++	+	TM
Producers' shops			++	TM
Farm acquisition	++	++	+	TM
CSA (community-supported agriculture)	+	++	++	CC2
Agenda 21	++	++		CC2
Land management policy orientation	++	++	+	TM

Table. Actions selected and categories of actors involved in the definition of the action and its implementation

(Location: TM = Toulouse Metropole ; CC = *communauté de communes*, other federation of municipalities around Toulouse)

To select the civil society organizations to be interviewed, we followed two steps. Well-known and active organizations were selected first. To diversify the sample, we made an inventory of local actions in favor of local food production and/or consumption at the scale of the urban area by consulting local newspapers (2012-2015) and websites (consulted in April 2015) and the organizations already identified. The 262 actions identified were classified according to their main objective. We focused on the most commonly cited objectives: local food supply, social inclusion, planning policies and landscape management. Finally, we selected actions involving both public authorities and civil society (C.S.).

Sector	Type of organization	Nb of people interviewed (2015)	Earlier interviews
Civil Society	NGO in:		
	Environmental education	1	
	Community gardening	3	
	Land sharing (3 events)	1	
	Alternative farm development		1
	Community organizations of community gardeners of allotment gardens	2 1	1

	of local citizens	1	
	Advisory board	3	
Public Sector	Elected representatives	2	3?
	Public project coordinators	4	
Private Sector	President of producers' shop	1	
	Producers:		
	for a producers' shop	1	
	for a CSA group	1	

Table . Number of people interviewed for each type of local organization. (CSA= Community-Supported Agriculture)

The resulting corpus is presented in Table 1. The majority of actions are located in the central intercommunal body, Toulouse Metropole (TM), composed of 37 municipalities, including Toulouse. However, some actions are located in peripheral intercommunal bodies. In some cases, several people participated in the same interview, for example, an employee and the president of the same NGO. In other cases, the same person expressed herself as an NGO employee and as an urban gardener. That is the reason why the sample is presented in terms of the number of people interviewed per category of organization (Table 2). Earlier interviews (2009-2012) were also used to better understand the initial conditions of some of the actions.

The interviews were recorded. They were entirely transcribed. Their analysis was made under the software NVivo. We elaborated a thematic analysis where we tried to identify the internal organization of associations for one part, and the diverse relationships they maintain with the local public authorities.

Civil society: involvement in urban food production

The term civil society is vague and potentially encompasses very different kinds of organizations, even with the same associative status. Our corpus shows part of this diversity.

Three types of civil society organizations that contribute to public actions in favor of urban food production

These organizations in our corpus share common features (they are non-profit and use volunteers) and a shared sensitivity to urban food production issues. We nevertheless distinguished three types according to their proximity to urban food production: those directly involved in the action, those in a position of facilitation, and those involved in a global reflection (Table).

We referred to the associations formed by local citizens in order to fulfill a collective project concerning their neighborhood as community organizations. This could include the creation of a community garden or the collective management of existing allotment gardens. Their implication in urban farming is direct in this case: they include people who want to produce their own food in their urban environment. It should be noted that food production is neither the sole nor sometimes the main purpose of urban gardens, especially community gardens, which serve several objectives for their gardeners but also for the public authorities (the commune of Toulouse, in our case) that support them. For the former, a community garden might also be a place to get together and mingle with other people, to share knowledge, to build an open public space and to limit the privatization of public space, etc. One of these organizations in our corpus has a more global purpose: to induce and promote a more ecological way of life for the entire area by organizing group purchases of organic products, notably via CSA, but also by encouraging local authorities to commit to the development of an Agenda 21. All these associations function with volunteers and do not have any employees.

Professional organizations have a distinct profile, even if they share the same associative status as the former. Their associations were created in reference to a global cause and to defend it at the local level. They employ people to work for this purpose, thanks partly to public subsidies. In part, their employees were at the origin of the creation of the association. These organizations also benefit from government-supported contracts for young people (*service civique*). They develop and propose skilled interventions to facilitate food production and local food consumption in the urban area. Depending on the association, these skills encompass knowledge and innovations in legal matters linked to land access and land tenure, assistance with group organization around a common purpose such as the creation and life of a community garden, assistance with organizing debates to enhance participative democracy on food questions, technical skills and resource provisions for production. They nevertheless benefit from the volunteer work of the board and the members of the association as well. For example, in one case, the association has formed a group of volunteer members to constitute an independent diagnostic -tool for urban food production.

We also have a third type of non-profit organization in our corpus: an advisory board of the intercommunal body, Toulouse Metropole (TM). These advisory boards of intercommunal bodies, referred to, in French, as “Development councils”, are mandatory in French urban areas with more than 50,000 inhabitants (Law N° 99-533, "LOADDT", 25 June 1999) in order to increase participative democracy. The composition of the council, even if not precisely described in the law, should allow for the direct representation of the variety of economic, civic and cultural organizations. These councils propose ideas and offer comments concerning the territorial projects of the local authorities. The TM development council consists of 240 people and defines itself as a locus of expertise and of debates on metropolitan issues. Its members are volunteers but the council has two employees to help organize its work. It also defines itself as an interface between TM and the local civil society. It is structured in sub-groups by issues it has judged relevant. One of these issues is a reflection on the intertwining of built areas and agricultural lands in Toulouse Metropole (Codev, Toulouse Metropole, 2015). It is a proposal to give impetus to the urban planning process to promote food production and green infrastructures.

This differentiation was also clear to some of the interviewees. The person in charge of urban gardening for the commune of Toulouse made a clear distinction between the collective of inhabitants sharing a garden and more "professional organizations", according to the relationships they develop with the public body. One of the professional organization interviewees expressed his own difficulty to become a member of the development council because of a lack of time, but also because of the general scope of the reflection since he is more familiar with localized concrete actions.

Building new legitimacies to take part in "agricultural" development

These organizations are relatively new; most of them were created during the last decade. They are new actors in the field of agricultural development with, generally, no legal prerogatives to intervene in this field, contrary to the public authorities (notably, the French Ministry of Agriculture) and to professional farmers' organizations. Promoting local food sovereignty is a common objective for all of these associations, even if it serves a more general ecological purpose for some of them. To reach this objective, they promote alternative forms of production or new relationships between producers and consumers such as urban gardening or community-supported agriculture (CSA). These forms, aside from being the main economic activities of farmers, do not benefit from the existing agricultural extension services. Some of these civil society organizations have developed and are offering an expertise adapted to this broadening of the field of food production by offering education and resources on technical matters linked to urban food production or assistance with building

local collective actions. The interviewees spent time presenting their capacity of expertise, in some cases the result of their formal education or personal itinerary. In some other cases, however, expertise and skill are the result of a different professional career. One interviewee explained to us that, as a project manager, he used various methods to organize collective actions and to enhance collective creativity, methods he also used as the president of a local association.

A second type of legitimacy is linked to the experience of living in the place where the association is devoted to local change. We could refer to this as a *legitimacy of local experience*. Nevertheless, the interviewees were prone to explain that they defended causes that go beyond their personal interest: beyond the local project that they defend, there is a project to change the society they live in. Some associations develop this ability in order to build a counter-expertise that they could propose to local authorities in order to enhance the quality of their projects, e.g., in ecological domains. For example, they might organize groups of local volunteers to propose diagnostic studies (of local biodiversity, of agricultural activities to protect in future master plans, etc.). They acquire this type of expertise by being aware of what is going on locally through their network of local citizens, as well as through their participation in diverse debates and meetings with other associations. The development council (Codev) is a locus of interactions and debate between local actors and local associations around common reflections.

These two kinds of legitimacies are not exclusive and some associations develop both. Both give them the capacity to propose their services in response to public calls and to compete with more traditional organizations such as local farmers' organizations or private consulting firms. The former, i.e., Chambers of Agriculture, are increasingly dependent on public calls to finance their activities and have developed a special department to address this issue. For example, the Chamber of Agriculture of Haute-Garonne may carry out an agricultural diagnostic for the preparation of an urban code and master plans in response to intercommunal calls. The latter are beginning to involve themselves in urban food production but have lacked the technical expertise and local knowledge to do so until recently in the Toulouse metropolitan area.

The role of civil society in public action to promote urban farming: toward new forms of governance

In this chapter, we discuss and illustrate two dimensions of changes in governance aimed at food production in urban areas. To do this, we consider the relationships between two different kinds of actors, the public sector and civil society organizations in the Toulouse metropolitan area. The first dimension is the resources used by each type of actor in the relationship. The second dimension is the form of the governance itself, i.e., the ways the relationships between the different entities are organized.

Mutual interests in common actions for urban farming

The actions in favor of local food production and consumption that we discussed with the interviewees were located in three different intercommunal bodies, Toulouse Metropole and two peripheral federations of municipalities (CC). For the elected representative and the employees of these territorial entities, these were new types of actions. On the one hand, these actions constituted new domains of interest or a new approach to public services. For example, the community gardens are a totally new way to consider the relationship of the citizens to open public spaces, far from the traditional park and garden services provided by the city. On the other hand, these actions were potentially transversal to the administrative organization of the intercommunal body and might require the coordination of various

services, from land planning to social services. Finally, these actions did not enter into the scope of the mandatory attributions of the intercommunal entities and they were not able to hire employees to fulfill them (for example, in Toulouse Metropole, only two people are in charge of the whole food policy, including gardening, farm acquisition and creation, an agripark project, etc.). Civil society organizations propose various resources that help the public authorities to build and manage these innovative transversal policies.

In return, public authorities support these organizations and their actions. Our interviews give an idea of the variety of forms this support can take. It can be the authorization of a mayor to use public places for a CSA delivery, the allocation of an urban public plot for allotment gardens or to create a community garden, or a public investment to help carry out this project (ground improvement, plants, fitting, etc.). Part of this support is economic via subsidies and, increasingly, via grants in response to public calls. This economic support is essential for the associations that employ people, who, in response, develop several types of expertise to be able to compete for these calls.

Resources for common actions in favor of urban farming

Public authorities use various types of resources in their interaction with civil society: economic resources, as mentioned earlier, as well as formal requirements that configure the relationship according to public regulations: calls, rules, temporalities, leadership. One of the associations we interviewed resented the bureaucratic and temporal constraints of such an economic dependency to such an extent that it diversified the source of its subsidies toward private sponsorship.

However, for other associations, contractual relationships with public authorities were necessary to be able to employ people. Responding to public calls assumes that the associations must demonstrate various types of know-how in order to compete and win the call. These calls demand the provision of various types of services, as seen in our corpus: studies and diagnosis, facilitation of debate and common actions, project design, etc. Associations must demonstrate their technical expertise in the domain of the call. For example, one employee of an association that we identified as professional told us that his association developed experience and expertise in its technical domain for several years before it felt capable of "crossing over" and competing to propose its expertise to public authorities. Other associations focalize their services on domains where they identify a lack in the expertise offered, be it in public entities or in private consulting groups. The technical expertise of the professional associations is not limited to these domains but encompasses the expertise to respond to public calls, to understand and accept public regulations and norms and to fulfill the requirements of accountability. According to the public employees we interviewed, it might be a problem for some associations in terms of technical expertise and the time it requires, but also because public authorities ask for an alignment with the institution's discourse and policy when paying for services provided.

Nevertheless, the position of associations on a specific issue and their capacity to debate within an enlarged collective of citizens, professionals and networks of associative entities is also a resource for public authorities in terms of actions to be developed. According to our interviews, professional associations do not offer '*mechanical services*' but, on the contrary, work with public authorities to envision new types of actions by involving themselves in the negotiations to design and justify the action supported by the resources of their own network, notably of other associations, which could lead to other experiences that could then become an incentive.

This access to collective resources, internal and external, is a common feature in the civil society organizations we interviewed. The development council is structured to develop

collective competence. However, the other associations also develop collectives to help them establish diagnoses, enlarge debates and propose actions. For example, one local association created a network of citizens to survey the communal biodiversity in order to encourage communal authorities to protect it. Another organized local discussions to improve environmental quality in the intercommunal body and to encourage it to adopt an Agenda 21. The associations we classified as professional might also develop such a collective expertise in order to be able to propose alternative expertise to public authorities outside of the scope of their service provision.

Organizing the relationship between civil society and public authorities

The new partnerships between civil society and the public sectors we described should be supplemented by the description of the relationships between the three types of civil society organizations described above. In their new involvement in urban farming and the extension of the definition of productive activities and productive actors that this would imply, public authorities must deal with organizations that can challenge their own view of public interest and of the use of public or open space. This has been the case in Toulouse with the gardening projects that were thought of as a way to collectively create public space by community associations, whereas the municipality was concerned by questions of public responsibility in the case of accidents, or by the legal aspects of access to the gardens. One of the functions of the professional organizations is to serve as an intermediary between the public authorities and local community organizations in order to conform with and structure their actions according to public rules. In the terms of one of our interviewees, work should be done to convert local citizens' "*desires*" into "*projects*" that could be supported by the public institutions. This assumes the establishment of a dialogue with each local community organization, a dialogue that is time-consuming and long, before the project can fulfill public expectations.

Professional organizations in that case serve as an intermediary between the two kinds of actors. They are identified as having characteristics of the two sectors: as community organizations, they belong to civil society and might share the same associative status; they are aware of institutional rules and constraints, as a result of their professional profile that allows them to propose services to public institutions. Their service provision, when dedicated to the implementation of projects for the municipalities or intercommunal boards, helps connecting local authorities to community organizations or local citizens while preserving a distance between both. Several of the interviewees dedicated time to explain and illustrate the necessary accommodations in order to establish their respective roles. For the municipal or intercommunal employees, their role implies to be able to respect and to enforce the formalities of the public service, in terms of norms, accountability, even when the realization of the projects is done by the associations or by citizens. For the professional organizations, they should adopt a role of intermediary between two domains with different priorities and be accepted and active in the two domains. The citizen organizations in gardening in public places had been obliged to accept public norms and temporalities when beginning their activities, while preserving values and "*desires*" at the origin of their actions. Collaboration between civil society and public authorities in urban projects has required mutual learning, construction of proximity but also of distance between the actors to preserve their individuality and the specificity of their own project.

The interviews gave example of this symmetric work of maintaining the distance, and the independence, with other types of organizations or with other types of actors. Inside civil society, it could be expressed as a difficulty of professional organization to participate to the advisory board, too big and too far away of their local practical projects. Another example was the difficulties for some organizations to express an independent project while

contributing to a public action. This difficulty is prevalent before election times, where independent and alternative projects might be considered as a critic to the elected board, or, at the opposite, as a contribution to internalize, some members of association becoming candidate at an elected position.

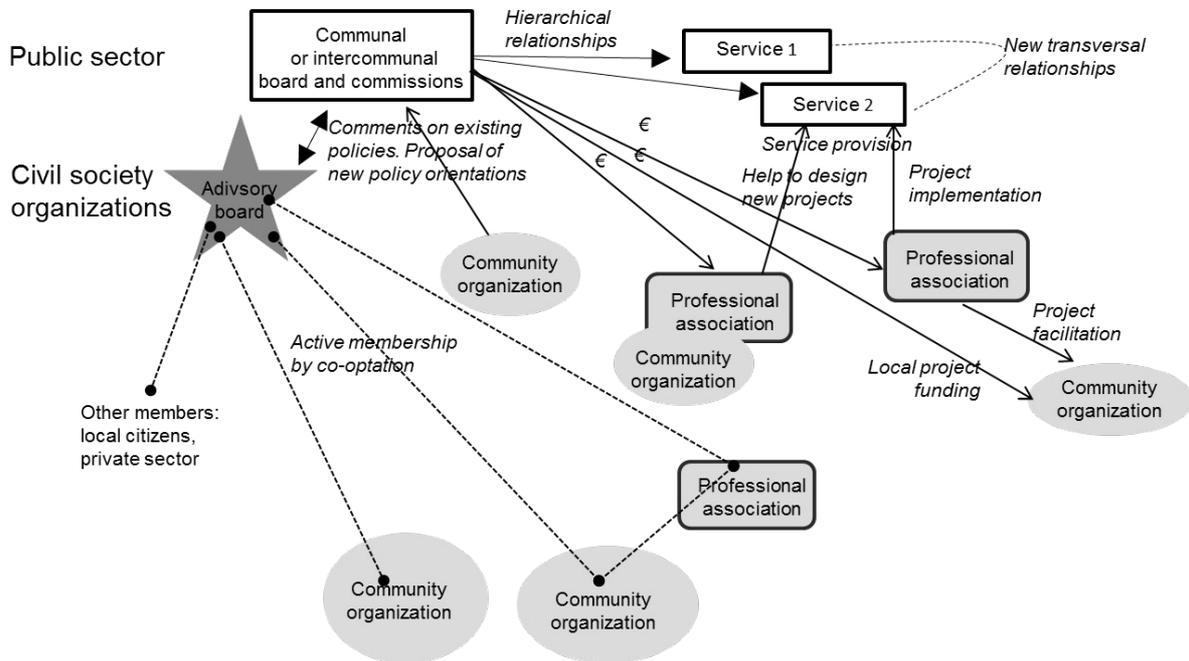


Figure 1. Diagram of the relationships between local public authorities and the diversity of civil society organizations in the Toulouse metropolitan area in the domain of urban farming.

The professional organizations resolve by their structuration this dual necessity to become close to public authorities in order to benefit from their financial support and to remain independent. Their permanent employees develop know-how to be able to answer public calls and to respect public norms of action, while the members of the association form groups of volunteers to explore other venues, to elaborate alternative studies or to engage in independent actions.

Figure 1 illustrates the various relationships between civil society organizations and local public authorities described by the interviewees during this study (Figure 1).

Conclusion

In our interviews, we discovered a variety of civil society organizations that cooperated with local public authorities to design and implement new local policies that seek to impact the local food supply. We were able to differentiate in our corpus three types of organizations according to their involvement in public action in favor of urban food production and consumption. Building on this typology, we identified the legitimacy to act in the public domain these organizations developed. The description of the relationships between public authorities and civil society organizations highlighted the mutual interest of their collaboration and the complementary resources they could put in common. These new collaborations suppose a collective learning of the different types of actors, in order to configure the proximity implied by their work together, but also the distance necessary to maintain their mutual independence. This study is a contribution to the description of the changes in local governance due to the introduction of new issues, as food sovereignty, and new actors able to give them forms and to create mobilization to give them impetus. It

explores new forms of partnerships involving public actors, beside the more commonly described public-private partnerships.

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