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**Is the consumer soluble in the citizen?
Engagements in alternative food systems in France**

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The history of the contribution of consumption, and particularly of social movements around consumption, in the construction of citizenship has been extensively documented by historians. During the American boycotts against British products in the eighteenth century, the market appeared to be a space for the construction of identity and citizenship of a nation seeking its independence (Breen, 2004). Consumer mobilization became a means regularly envisaged to demand new social rights. In some instances, these rights concerned the social groups with which engaged consumers displayed their solidarity, as in the case of the US abolitionist movements in the nineteenth century, which organized the sale of slavery-free products (Glickman, 2006). The US National Consumers Leagues and the social consumers' leagues in Europe, created in the early twentieth century, likewise made consumers aware of the shameful labor conditions in certain workshops. In the first half of the twentieth century, the American Federation of Labor systematized this approach by publishing black lists of firms whose labor practices it denounced (Friedman, 1999).

In some cases social groups defended their own rights through their economic power. Certain cooperative movements, especially the British and US movements born in the mid-nineteenth century (Furlough et Strikwerda, 1999), can be interpreted as middle-class women's endeavor to use the market to secure the status of citizenship which society denied them by refusing them the right to vote. More recently Black American movements, created to fight for social rights, frequently resorted to boycotts and "boycotts" to assert their integration in American society (Cohen 2003).

Most of the mechanisms on which the collective approaches of contemporary consumer-oriented movements are based can be likened to those of the older movements. For example, the principle of the construction of distant solidarity between consumers and another social group, found in contemporary fair trade movements (Raynolds, 2002), existed already in abolitionist movements as well as in campaigns to promote products of the Empire, organized by the British Women's Patriotic League in the 1920s (Trentmann, 2007). In these two movements the idea was to enable consumers to associate products with the issues pertaining to the place and conditions of their production. Likewise, the contemporary principle of consumer responsibility, expressed through the integration of new citizen's duties concerning collective environmental issues, brings to mind the context in which certain governments in the US (Cohen, 2003) and the UK (Trentmann, 2001) highlighted consumers' obligations with regard to the war effort or post-WWII reconstruction (Daunton and Hilton, 2001). We therefore need to consider contemporary movements in relation to this history if we wish to explore the forms of articulation of citizen and consumer figures proposed by the movements that we are studying.

In this paper we examine three types of movement in France, which aim to mobilize consumers around collective issues such as defense of family agriculture in the North and the South, preservation of the environment, and respect for workers' rights. We explore the conditions and forms of this political mobilization of consumers.

The first of these movements is the *Fédération Artisans du Monde* (FADM), one of the pioneers in fair trade in France and currently still the main French network of shops specialized in the sale of fair trade products from countries of the South. In 2008 the *Artisans du Monde* network comprises 170 local groups composed essentially of voluntary workers and, in many groups, one employee. The FADM also develops educational tools that its members can use to raise awareness in the general public or in schools. The second movement was formed in the early 2000s around the *Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne* (AMAP), quite similar to the US Community Supported Agriculture model. By

2007 it consisted of 500 local consumer groups. These consumers enter into medium-term contracts with one or more producers who undertake to supply them with a weekly box of fresh organic farm produce. The aim of this reciprocal commitment is to guarantee the viability of the farms concerned, and to establish an equitable relationship between producers and consumers. The third movement, formed around the non-profit organization *Action Consommation*, stemmed from the French alter-globalization movement ATTAC. The organization was founded in 2001 with the aim of making consumers aware of their responsibility in the deterioration of the environment and problems of social injustice. This movement, which is smaller than the former two, is one of the rare social movements in France to promote political consumerism¹.

In the first part of the paper we present and analyze three forms of consumer mobilization used by these movements: education, engagement in trade, and organization of action campaigns. In the second part we highlight the difficulties encountered by these movements, relative to the ambivalences of consumerism that is unable to ignore existing economic and market logics. The main pitfalls encountered by these movements lie in the difficulty of articulating political action and economic engagement. We see that consumption remains a major device for recruiting and mobilizing individuals, precisely because it makes it possible to actually put into practice one's social conscience. But at the same time, both individuals and movements cannot entirely overlook certain consumerist modes of functioning that stem from the irreducible nature of the freedom of choice.

¹ Our data are drawn from three large field surveys undertaken by the authors. Ronan Le Velly has been working on the *Artisans du Monde* movement since 2002. He has carried out a qualitative analysis of 25 years of the *Fédération Artisans du Monde* archives, observed several local groups' activities and national events such as the federation's general assemblies, and held forty semi-structured interviews, half with voluntary workers and the other half with employees at local and national level. Claire Lamine has been studying the AMAP since 2002, through participation in various meetings of the Provence regional network (general assemblies, work groups) and events (open days, round tables, annual festivities, etc.), about fifty interviews with producers and consumers, and observation of the functioning of several AMAPs (distribution of boxes, meetings between producers and consumers, visits to farms). Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier has been working on a longitudinal study of *Action Consommation* since 2003: participation in board meetings, general assemblies, reception of the public, and certain working group meetings; analysis of documents produced by the organization (buyers' guides, educational material on responsible consumption, brochures, website); biographical interviews with the main active members and members of the governing board, biographic interviews with 30 members, and analysis of emails sent daily to members of the organization.

The three forms of consumer mobilization by engaged consumer movements

The three movements that we have studied implement a wide range of actions which, with reference to the literature on social movements (McAdam and Snow, 1997), we classify according to three main repertoires of their *militant* action, in the sense of tactical actions with a protest dimension, an intention, and the construction of a collective identity (McAdam et al., 2001; Taylor and Van Dyke, 2004). These three repertoires are: consumers' education; their engagement in forms of alternative trade to the conventional market; and, finally, their mobilization in protest campaigns.

Enlightening and educating the consumer

Without being the main mission of the three movements studied – unlike French movements specifically oriented towards educating the public –, the education of consumers is one of the touchstones of their mobilization and of the construction of an identity. The aim is primarily to ground consumers' feeling of responsibility in the evidence of their unwitting or involuntary contribution to certain global disorders.

The rhetoric contained in the various actions implemented by the movements articulates three dimensions: the first concerns consumers' manipulation and the frequent contradictions between the values they claim to have and what they do in practice; the second pertains to the disclosure of certain modes of functioning of conventional agri-food systems; and, finally, the third one aims to equip consumers with new references in the marketplace.

In the three movements we find, in various forms and to differing degrees, a consumer figure relatively similar to the one produced by critical sociology in the 1960s (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1974; Baudrillard, 1968). Consumers are presented as victims of a general scheme to manipulate them, in which their own aspirations are confused with the desires that the consumer society nurtures in them.

Adopting some of the rhetoric of this critical sociology, these movements try to make consumers feel responsible, by showing them the reasons for their irresponsibility. The standpoints of *Artisans du Monde*, the AMAPs and above all *Action Consommation*, highlight the themes of consumers' manipulation and the need for them to feel responsible. Consumers

appear as both victims and culprits. They are urged to disengage themselves from a situation, largely ascribed to all the techniques and commercialization mechanisms that draw them into a consumerist spiral largely exceeding their needs, and to engage in a form of de-conditioning of advertising, as suggested by French anti-advertisement groups (Dubuisson-Quellier and Barrier, 2006). The movements emphasize consumers' contradictions between their displayed intentions regarding respect for the environment or defense of social justice, and their actual consumer practices.

The plan to educate consumers also involves an approach designed to reveal the functioning of globalized food systems. The movements first address their members, as in the case of the AMAPs that often organize discussions at their meetings on the topic of consumer engagement. But they are also oriented towards the general public, and local or regional AMAP events are an opportunity to spread this message outside the network. An example is the AMAP fête in March 2007 in Marseilles, attended by about one thousand people and, on the scale of a single AMAP, a “*Circuit court*”² festival articulating debate on a solidarity economy, projection of a film denouncing industrial agriculture, and a picnic on a Provençal farm organized in February 2008. *Artisans du Monde* and *Action Consommation* also participate in many public events enabling them to mobilize this form of disclosure, by emphasizing the nature of social relations hidden behind the relationships between products (Hudson and Hudson, 2003). *Action Consommation* constructs a large part of its critical repertoire against the modes of functioning of mass distribution. It shows that firms, pretending to defend consumers' buying power by negotiating low prices with their suppliers, exert power over the market in three respects: power over producers, and especially the most marginalized who cannot meet the demands of mass distribution; power over employees, who are subjected to the constraints of temporary and often forced part-time work; and, finally, power over consumers, who have access only to the products that big firms decide to sell.

The specificity of *Action Consommation* and *Artisans du Monde* lies in their targeting of schoolchildren. For example, during the “solidarity breakfasts” organized by *Artisans du Monde*, primary-school children are made aware that behind their breakfast foods, such as chocolate or sugar, there are people who work and who live, sometimes with difficulty, from that work. Actions catering for high-school pupils describe the functioning of the branches of

² In French « Circuit Court » means short supply chain but also evokes cultural arena of movie making and especially documentaries.

what fair trade activists call “conventional trade”. They emphasize the recruitment and labor conditions of workers on plantations belonging to multinationals, and the low prices that “small producers” obtain from local agents to whom they sell their produce. *Action Consommation*, firmly convinced, like *Artisans du Monde*, of the necessity to inform the youth, has designed a specific tool called the educational kit. This kit is designed for high-school teachers, to inform them about sustainable development focused mainly on consumption: from reading labels to highlighting the interests of stakeholders in complex issues (such as regulation of GMOs or crises in the fruit and vegetable sector).

Finally, *Artisans du Monde* also reveals conventional market mechanisms through information provided at the point of sale. Apart from commercializing fair trade products, their shops are clearly designed to be places for making consumers aware of the actual situations in which producers are victims of international trade.

Once consumers feel responsible for their actions, they are urged to make good choices. The movements try to provide them with the data and references necessary to find their way through the market offerings. This may be done directly through the creation of specialized shops, as in the case of *Artisans du Monde* that groups together an alternative offering, or else more indirectly, when *Action Consommation* appeals to consumers to be “vigilant” and “attentive”. The idea is precisely to depart from the automatic, routine attitude that the movement attributes to consumers. It accuses them of relying on the diverse signals of market intermediation such as labels and brand names, without looking more closely at what underlies them. *Action Consommation*’s intention is to highlight the fact that labels fail to give the complete truth, because they say little about some of the aspects of choices made by food producers. The organization’s role is then to help consumers to move about in this new alternative market space which it promotes on its site or in public discourses. In 2003 it published a guide to responsible buying for consumers in an area north of Paris, and it is currently working on the preparation of a generic guide designed to enable each area to produce its own local guide. The AMAPs also wish to guide consumers by building partnerships with other forms of ethical trade (fair trade, farm markets), partnerships based for example on the participation of an AMAP producer in a farmers’ market, or on the distribution of boxes of produce in fair trade shops.

The question of consumers' responsibility is not only based on explanation of the market mechanisms that cause consumers to act irresponsibly. It also involves implementing systems of trade that have to organize the expression of a new consumer responsibility.

Concretely engaging the consumer in trade

The three movements that we are studying are particular in that they are set in the current dynamic of alternative food systems (Goodman, 2002, 2003; Goodman and DuPuis, 2003; Whatmore, 2002). These systems criticize conventional food suppliers for their negative externalities on the environment or social justice (Allen et al., 2003). The *Fédération Artisans du Monde* founded in the 1970s was the first systematized fair trade initiative in France, while the intention of the AMAPs, born later, in 2001, is to organize long-term contracts between producers and consumers around the supply of food products, on the basis of geographic proximity. *Action Consommation* was not founded with the aim of implementing a trade system; yet a few years after its creation some of its members undertook to organize a short demand-supply chain system.

To varying degrees, these different movements have made the consumer's engagement in specific and *ad hoc* forms of trade one of their main forms of mobilization.

In the case of *Artisans du Monde* shops, the offer available to consumers is the outcome of a series of commercial market channels involving numerous different actors (Whatmore et Thorne, 1997). All these channels are built upstream from the act of purchasing, and the consumers participate neither in the selection of producers, nor in the negotiation of purchasing prices, nor in the definition of the criteria governing practices. Moreover, even though at the beginning of the *Artisans du Monde* movement the activists in shops had maintained direct relations with groups of producers in the South, for the past two decades importers specialized in fair trade have taken over that role (Le Velley, 2007). Hence, even though the success of fair trade initiatives depends on consumers' participation through their acts of purchasing, consumers play no part in the construction of the commercial relations preceding their purchases. In this respect, citizen consumption offered in free trade shops is, as Michael Goodman (2004) put it, far more "consumer-dependent" than "consumer-led". This form of citizen consumption moreover implies that a specific effort is made to bring to light the effects of this type of trade. The aim of the information found in shops is not only to inform but also to demonstrate the difference of fair trade and the associated benefits; in other

words, to generate sources of trust in the system, without which consumers would not alter their consumption habits. The use of a rhetoric based on simple messages in which the “conventional” is contrasted with the “fair”, or the “before” with the “after”, also clearly reflects the sometimes deliberately over-simplified nature of the messages transmitted. The prevailing argument in the individual act of consumption is then the aggregate and collective effect that is inevitably produced by these combined individual engagements.

The same does not apply to the AMAPs since in their case the trade network is generally started by a group of consumers that is formed first, before making contact with producers who could supply the weekly box on which the system is based. In this case, unlike that of *Artisans du Monde*, consumers play an active part in building the commercial relationship and determining the contents of the box. The terms of trade are negotiated between consumers and producers, even if this negotiation is often limited and varies widely from one group to another. The AMAPs now have some 100,000 members and often extend their boxes of fruit and vegetables to a wider range of local farm produce. These forms of alternative trade aim furthermore to move into new spaces of negotiation and to embed individual acts of consumption in more collective reflection. These negotiations are particularly effective when there are problems, for instance in cases where the producer has major problems (attacks by pests, crop failure, labor problems). In certain AMAPs that are not involved with organic farming, the most interesting negotiations can be observed around the crop protection practices. In one of the cases studied, the consumers were warned by the producer of the invasion of weeds in one of the fields. Since they refused the use of herbicides, and other techniques were too time-consuming for the producer, they decided to weed the field themselves, manually. Finally, unlike fair trade shops and the third case discussed below, the AMAP system is based on the idea of a supply that is as complete as possible. The quantity of vegetables in the weekly box is calculated so that theoretically the consumers do not need to buy elsewhere.

Strongly inspired by the AMAP model, some of the more active members of *Action Consommation* felt the need to put their convictions into practice. Some families decided to get together to set up a system of procurement from a farmer in the organization. Although his farm is in Lower Normandy, this farmer often travels to Paris for his militant activities. The network, called “*Alter Conso*”, has grown consistently over the years. The fifty or so families involved have organized themselves into 14 groups, in which orders and deliveries are centralized around a host. The producer has managed to associate other farmers and has created an economic interest grouping consisting of fifteen producers who supply diverse

organic products. The network is large in geographic terms, which does not enable it to be an AMAP since the producers are situated some 300 kilometers from the consumers. But the supply chain is short from the point of view of intermediation since the consumers can be in direct contact with one another. Unlike an AMAP, produce is supplied on a monthly rather than a weekly basis, so that consumers sometimes need to shop elsewhere. Finally, like many AMAPs, the members of this system of family supplies try to arrange encounters between consumers and producers, mainly by organizing annual events at which issues concerning producers are debated, for example the situation of small farmers, organic farming, or GMOs. In so doing, they aim not only to open spaces of negotiation between the two parties, but also to create opportunities to involve consumers in the public debates from which they are often absent.

Through the systems that they create, these three movements propose different ways of political involvements through consumption: from “turnkey” modes of political action as in the case of *Artisans du Monde*, affording ready-made opportunities to act individually for the causes associated with the products concerned, to more deliberative political action as in the cases of the Amaps and Alter Eco, in which consumers participate in debates with producers. The three movements see these systems not as ends in themselves, designed to be extracted from conventional market mechanisms, but rather as means to an end. Consumers’ engagement in alternative systems of trade is intended to demonstrate not only the viability of such systems, but also the fact that they do not contribute to the major disorders denounced. This political dimension, which lies in evidence and demonstration, requires the protest groups to specifically highlight the effects of such systems. This they do in various ways. *Artisans du Monde* sees the shop as an ideal place for this purpose. As in the case of other modes of alternative food systems (Goodman D., 2004), the break with conventional consumption practices effected by fair trade practices is never complete. The organization *Action Consommation* tries to promote alternative systems. It actively supports the AMAP movement by frequently relaying information about it, by inviting its members to participate in the debates that it organizes, and by citing the model as an example. It also defends certain fair trade approaches, especially those of *Artisans du Monde*, as opposed to initiatives that it deems to be too close to conventional market mechanisms. The leaders of the organization strongly encourage members to join these networks and a very large proportion is effectively active in them; they highlight the aggregate and collective effect that these individual engagements will inevitably generate.

The AMAPs also rely fully on the aggregate effects of individual acts. They now have over 500 groups and a membership estimated at some 100,000 individuals. In many cases they have extended their box of fruit and vegetables (or meat or other products, in some instances) to a range of local farm produce. Another way of promoting so-called alternative consumption is by encouraging their members to turn to other forms of alternative consumption as well, especially fair trade. However, the aggregate effect is perhaps not as central for the AMAPs and for *Action Consommation* as it is for *Artisans du Monde*. Their main objective is to set individual acts of consumption in more collective and societal reflection, and to urge members to reflect on, and to have a far more critical attitude towards their consumption choices and the implications of those choices. In other words, the political dimension of these consumer engagements lies both in the economic power produced by the aggregation of individual acts (Michelitti, 2003), and in the political strength of a consumer movement capable of reorienting individual concerns in a more collective dynamic.

This is why these two movements also encourage consumers to move into new spaces of negotiation. In the AMAPs, the terms of the contract and the trade between producers and consumers are negotiated on the scale of a consumer group. When an AMAP is created, and at the beginning of each season, these negotiations concern the content of the box (number of different vegetables, quantity, choice of varieties), the mode of production (organic or not, certified or not) and the price of the box – even if the negotiations are to a large extent framed by the network, the tools that it provides, and other similar groups or organizations (Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine, 2004).

Consumers' engagement in these two networks is a means for mobilizing them into more collective, political and militant approaches and for prompting them to put their engagement into practice. The promoters of the networks see it as a space for possible recruitment of individuals prepared to engage in political or collective action.

Mobilizing the consumer in protest campaigns

Our three groups have different ways of organizing their members' participation in forms of political action in the public sphere, and especially in protest campaigns. Their organizational structure often strongly determines the nature of the militant actions developed. *Action Consommation*, established in Paris, has difficulty structuring local groups and is better equipped to undertake national actions, even linked to other national or international

organizations. On the other hand, the AMAPs, which are local groups, are rallied more easily to local actions but have difficulty participating in national or international debates. Finally, *Artisans du Monde* operates on two scales: that of its shops and their local networks; and that of the Federation which is present in most national and international debates on global trade issues.

The targets of the actions are also different. *Action Consommation* and the *Fédération Artisans du Monde* engage their members and sympathizers to appeal both to the public authorities in order to change existing regulations, and to certain private companies in order to change their practices. The AMAPs are less directly involved in this type of action but very often relay information campaigns or lobbying launched by similar organizations.

Finally, the political positioning in relation to public action also varies. *Artisans du Monde* and *Action Consommation* have the same approach in urging government authorities to regulate trade. Several opinion columns have been published by *Action Consommation*, denouncing the weakness of government intervention in three main areas: regulation of agri-food products; regulation of corporate labor practices; and organization of forms of participative democracy. The first includes protest over the cultivation of GMO plants in France, over the transcription into French law of the European directive on organic farming, and over the lack of sufficient control of the ionization of foods. Behind this demand for government regulations, the organization also claims that the dominant economic actors, especially multinationals, will make real change only if compelled by law to do so. The *Artisans du Monde* federation has likewise invested in various campaigns aimed at challenging the behaviors of certain economic actors and altering the regulations on the agri-food system. Examples include actions recently undertaken against the exportation of cheap European chickens to Africa, or the massive importing of South American soy – two commercial practices accused of profoundly destabilizing peasant farming in the majority world.

Within this framework, *Action Consommation* and the *Artisans du Monde* federation propose various tools for people wishing to participate in their action. Most of these are cognitive, involving information produced by the two movements and/or disseminated by them through various channels (websites, e-mails, posters, pamphlets, conferences, etc.). Consumers furthermore have the possibility of signing petitions and sending standard letters.

Whereas certain consumers who belong to these movements see engaged consumption as a substitute for more traditional forms of political action, other members and the movements' leaders consider acts of engaged consumption as complementary to more classical acts of political mobilization. This articulation is at the heart of *Action Consommation*'s militant action in which it encourages consumers to engage in alternative networks, and appeals to economic and political actors via public campaigns. This logic of complementarity also appears to be central for the *Artisans du Monde* movement. First, it is expressed in the targeted effects, since the aim is to build alternative trade systems and to alter the functioning of the conventional market. Second, the actions are conceived of as having complementary goals, since only a minority of producers can benefit from fair trade. This implies the need to deploy other modes of action. Finally, for some *Artisans du Monde* activists, complementarity is expressed in a perspective of raising consciousness. The fact of selling in shops is seen as a way of prompting consumers to think about the functioning of the world in which they live. The purchase of a fair trade product is supposed to be able to trigger a sudden awareness, leading to reflection on less equitable forms of trade and to a wish to be informed about the dysfunction of international food systems. Finally, this articulation is at the heart of the AMAP project, a tool used to make consumers aware of the functioning of food systems and the situation of actors further upstream in the process. Common to all these movements is the determination to build their members' awareness as citizens, based on direct involvement in forms of consumption that enable them both to put their political commitment into practice, and to be able to engage in collective forms of action.

The specific characteristics of these forms of engagement around consumption confront their promoters with real difficulties, related mainly to the tensions that can appear between the consumer figure and the citizen figure.

The limits of consumers' modes of engagement in Alternative Food Systems

Studies on sustainable consumption (Spaargaren and Martens, 2005), political consumerism (Micheletti, 2003) and food democracy (Hassanein, 2003; Wilkins, 2005; Levkoe, 2006) have emphasized the role of the articulation between the citizen and consumer figures in the implementation of public action for effective sustainable development. What is the capacity of the movements that we are studying to articulate the political figures and the market figures, and what difficulties do they encounter?

The first difficulty is related to the plurality of consumers' motives for engaging in these movements. The second stems from the problem of entirely breaking free from consumerist logic expressed in the movements. Finally, the third difficulty stems from the pitfalls encountered by the movements in their attempts to spread their approaches to all consumers.

The plurality of consumers' motives for engagement

Individuals engage in the movements that we have studied for very different reasons, ranging from the pursuit of individual aspirations to highly collective political engagements (Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine, 2004). These differences can sometimes lead to difficulties within the movements.

All three movements have members from different backgrounds, who express varying degrees of activism and sometimes even no political engagement at all. The organizations therefore have to come to terms with this plurality of trajectories, as do most social movements. But the particularity here, in the rifts produced by this diversity, is the forms of opposition between what are thought to be citizen engagements and a logic that could prove to be still "too" consumerist.

In the case of the AMAPs, we can identify three main forms of engagement, corresponding to three views of the box. For the "less engaged", the box represents above all an original mode of buying goods, healthy and tasty products. These "Amapians" are not necessarily particularly interested in the producer or in issues of responsible consumption in general. They often first contact the AMAP out of a concern for their health or an interest in this alternative form of consumption (sometimes with a strategy that could be qualified as distinctive). Others see the box as an original form of trade with a "family farmer". Their engagement lies mainly in the development of interpersonal relations between consumers and producers; they are interested in local consumption and a neighborhood relationship in the AMAP, above all. Finally, for the most engaged consumers, the box is both an engagement to support farmers, as well as an act of citizen consumption relative to the broader concern of the future of the agri-food system. This naturally corresponds to the movement's view.

In the case of *Artisans du Monde*, a rift can be observed within the movement, often pointed out by activists of the organization themselves, between on the one hand a group interested mainly in selling fair trade products and, on the other, a group more engaged in an educational approach and campaigns. In terms of personal profile and motivations, the differences

between the two groups are noteworthy. The voluntary workers who mainly wish to work in the shops tend to be older than the others (many are retired) and see this occupation as an opportunity to defend a cause, to fill their spare time, and to develop social relations. They consider the sale of fair trade products to be a real way of supporting “small producers”. Often they find the Federation’s advocacy campaigns difficult to relay because of the complex economic and political issues involved. In contrast, the voluntary workers who are more engaged in advocacy and education tend to judge – sometimes severely – the “afternoon grannies” whose view of fair trade they see as excessively charitable and insufficiently political. Thus, even if the *Artisans du Monde* movement tends to highlight the complementarity between selling on the one hand and education and advocacy on the other, implementing this complementarity within a group is not necessarily straightforward.

This difference is also felt at *Action Consommation* where the activists’ profiles are less heterogeneous than in the other movements. The most active members accuse the others of using the organization only to obtain information for their own individual consumer choices. Even though, as in the AMAPs, the organization’s goal is above all social and alter-globalist, it is also mingled with strong ecological concerns, promoted by activists who joined later. Today the organization has around a hundred members, of which only about ten are particularly active and participate in the life of the organization. The members’ profiles vary widely, but most were involved at an early age in associative or sometimes professional networks. The most engaged members often have to make trade-offs between the different collectives to which they belong, to be able to manage the time devoted to these causes. This makes it even more difficult for *Action Consommation* to identify available resources for a particular action.

The three movements all highlight the difficulties of mobilizing through collective action: manning the organization’s stand at various events; participating in collective events; giving talks or briefings; and, for the AMAPs, participating in the actual functioning of the system. The members’ expectations of their organization vary. Some are mainly interested in specific resources for their families or themselves: information on engaged consumption, for most *Action Consommation* members; social relations around a cause for certain voluntary workers at *Artisans du Monde*; fresh, good quality produce for certain “Amapians”. Others prefer to grasp the opportunity for more collective action implying strong mobilization. They are seldom satisfied with the other forms of engagement, deemed to be too individualistic and above all insufficiently politicized, possibly because they are too close to a consumerist logic.

How to get rid with the consumer and replace him/her by the citizen?

Questions concerning overly-consumerist logic also structure series of debates within these movements, on collectives' capacity to alter consumers' choices.

In view of the organization of alternative forms of trade and supply channels, the collectives considered here examine in very practical terms the nature of the offer that they propose, regarding range and price. On these two points the approaches of *Artisans du Monde* and the AMAPs all indicate that market realities and dominant consumer logics cannot easily be disregarded. The propensity of these systems to generate new forms of demand-driven trade is therefore questioned, as is the alternative character of the approaches implemented.

Hence, the market dimensions of alternative networks prompt their members to examine some of the questions usually raised about trade. For instance, quality and price have to be envisaged as possible dimensions of a match between products and consumers. But in these particular networks where the aim is political action and not only trade, questions of this nature are more specifically related to political choices and therefore trigger debate within the movement.

The question of quality, for example, has been raised within the AMAPs and *Artisans du Monde* to examine the possibility of these movements opening up to more marginalized producers. Noting that the producer collectives working for its network are not the most marginalized (Mestre, 2004), as scientific research has already shown (Littrell and Dickson, 1999; Murray, Reynolds and Taylor, 2003), *Artisans du Monde* wondered about the level of quality that should be demanded from producer organizations. The question of whether it is possible to reach "small producers" who are unable to find outlets in the conventional trade system, and still to offer quality products that meet consumers' standards, has also been raised in the AMAPs. In some cases AMAP consumers have either accepted boxes with few products for a while, to support a producer who was starting up or had particular difficulties, or else severed the trade relationship with the producer. Some groups have also debated the need to broaden the range of products in their boxes, to ensure that consumers are satisfied, even if this means adding products such as citrus fruit not grown in the area. More generally, the question is also whether consumers' quality criteria should be treated by these networks in the same way as for any market system, or if they should be collectively redefined with the actors upstream or in relation to those actors' requirements and challenges.

This difficulty of disregarding usual consumption logic in the construction of alternative systems applies fully to the question of price. The activists of both *Artisans du Monde* and the AMAPs demand “fair” prices between the different links in the chain. Above all, the aim is to guarantee remuneration enabling producers to cover their costs, to live properly from their work, and to be rewarded for their efforts. In the fair trade supply chains for food, established by *Artisans du Monde*, the prices paid to producers are aligned with the international fair trade standards defined by FLO (Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International). In the mid-2000s FLO worked on determining a way of calculating fair prices that would take into account production costs, costs of conversion to fair trade criteria, living costs, and the profits needed to implement development projects. It was nevertheless unable to define such a formula, due to the technical complexity of such calculations that had to be defined individually for all the products and regions concerned, and probably also due to the impossibility of totally disregarding the prices practiced in conventional trade systems (Le Velly, 2007). For instance, in the case of the AMAPs the price of a box is usually set in relation to the box prices of the closest AMAPs, and/or market prices (Lamine, 2005). In the case of *Action Consommation*, the organization had to give up trying to set a price exclusively on the basis of production costs, to avoid competing with a local cooperative shop.

Thus, notwithstanding political ambitions aimed at extracting these networks from market functioning, the practical reality is far less clear-cut. Market prices, like certain consumer preferences, sometimes remain a compulsory reference for promoters of the alternative supply chains studied.

This raises the question of the role and, more precisely, the power of consumers in these alternative networks. The forms of power existing in fair trade have been examined in the literature to highlight the maintenance of a form of domination by consumers over producers (Renard, 2005; Shreck, 2005). In that the case, the fact that the norms concerning conditions of production and price levels have been determined, until now, largely without representatives of producer organizations, also suggests that these supply chains are dominated by the demand (Daviron and Ponte, 2005). This perspective can be applied to the case of the AMAP, where the principle of consumers’ contribution to the governance of the system is immediately perceived as democratic and conducive to achievement of the objectives. Yet part of that argument does not hold up, in so far as some consumers may not enthusiastically embrace it (some prefer not to go to the farm, or not to acquire knowledge of no interest to them), and in so far as this type of governance is neither exempt from new forms

of demand-driven trade more nor less well tolerated by producers. Some producers may perceive consumers' participation in their decisions as interference in their work. In one of the AMAPs studied, for instance, a producer preferred to start a new group where the consumers made fewer decisions. The AMAPs can implicitly become structures in which consumers have most of the decision-making power, and the producers become their "suppliers". If their production is sold entirely through the AMAPs, producers can fear they might be compelled to meet consumers' demands just as they were formerly forced to comply with the terms and conditions of mass distribution on which they relied to sell their products. Are we witnessing here the creation of new forms of farmers' subjection, under cover of what is supposed to be support (Van de Ploeg, 2004)? This would be particularly problematical for the AMAPs, as one of their basic principles is autonomy, that is, the ability of farmers to make their own choices and be less dependent. It is also striking that *Action Consommation* tends not to take a stand in this type of debate. We could posit that the organization envisages the participation of consumers in these alternative systems less in the form of shared governance with producers, than as support for their initiatives. Closer to a concept of citizen governance and to participative democracy, it considers that consumers' power has to be exercised above all through appeals to public and private actors, and involvement in local public life.

The difficulties that these direct networks between producers and consumers have in balancing the ways in which power is exercised, may suggest the limits of a system without an arbitrator, where producers can be put back-to-back with consumers whose interests differ, as is sometimes the case in conventional demand-supply chains.

The limits of engaged consumers' influence on all consumers

The movements that we are studying contribute to constructing both a specific consumer figure, that of the enlightened consumer, and the figure of a citizen capable of investing in specific deliberative spaces, of appealing to the public authorities, and of denouncing certain actors, especially in the economic sphere. Yet this citizen's role in society has still not been determined.

The three movements studied here have the common characteristic of questioning themselves on their capacity to spread and to enable their offer to be available to a broader public. What role should consumers who belong to these movements have in the rest of the social sphere?

Should they maintain their protest position, embody the consumer-citizen figure, convert the masses, or do all three at once?

This question is also raised when conventional channels harness these alternative offers, for example when producers propose fair trade coffee or supermarkets sell “short supply chain” products. Should these approaches be considered as forms of success of alternative offerings and of the pioneering and enlightening role of alternative consumers, or as a way of leading people astray (Raynolds, 2007)? This is also one of the questions raised concerning the choice of commercializing alternative products, such as organic or fair trade products, via conventional channels, especially mass distribution. On this point, the *Artisans du Monde* federation has profoundly changed its position in the past fifteen years. In the mid-1990s fair trade products were not available in France through mass distribution and the Federation had made the penetration of this market one of its strategic priorities. At the time the reasons for this decision were the same as those put forward today by the militants of Max Havelaar France, the French member of FLO which certifies fair trade products to be sold in supermarkets. The idea was to offer mass access to these products with a view to significantly expanding their markets and to start to raise the consciousness of people who otherwise would never have heard of fair trade. Ten years later the *Artisans du Monde* Federation completely changed its position and now refuses the sale of products from its importer, Solidar-Monde, in supermarkets. Actually, this turnaround probably stems from the fact that the sale of fair trade products in mass distribution via other agents is now standard practice, and the Federation’s arguments reveal a strategy of distinction in the French fair trade field. But arguments are also put forward to challenge the benefits of this mode of commercialization. If we look only at the arguments directly concerning the question of citizens’ engagement in consumption (for a study of the impact of this mode of commercialization on the networks, see Barrientos and Smith, 2007), we can interpret them as a way of promoting a narrow definition of the fair trade project, which implies not working with actors whose procurement and labor practices are notoriously contrary to the values of fair trade. *Artisans du Monde* activists define the presence of these products in supermarkets as “hypocritical”, “contradictory” and “incoherent”. When denunciation is targeted at liberal globalization and its logic, it cannot compromise on collaboration with mass distribution multinationals.

For the AMAPs, as for *Action Consommation*, the fact of relying on dominant actors such as mass distribution groups is seen as an inhibitor of change. They believe that consumers who buy fair trade or organic products in supermarkets only marginally alter their consumption practices and have the feeling of doing a good deed that should offset other choices in which

solidarity with producers is not expressed. For these organizations, mass distribution is one of the commercial agencies par excellence in which consumers tend to feel no responsibility for their choices. The link with production is extremely slack and price is one of the main criteria in the decision to buy. Hence, these organizations consider that the availability of fair trade products in supermarkets is a contradiction in terms: mass distribution captures the majority of the profits, to the detriment of producers and employees, while consumers lose their ability to choose freely and responsibly.

This question is at the heart of certain studies in the sociology of social movements, which for a long time thought that the radicalism of militant expression declined along with its integration into institutions (Tilly, 1978), without this hypothesis being empirically validated (Mathieu, 2004). Are the movements that we are studying here trying to build a radical consumer-citizen capable of helping consumer society look critically at its negative externalities? This is certainly one of the objectives of *Action Consommation* which endeavors not only to equip consumers, to help them find their way in the market and to direct them towards an alternative, but also to equip citizens who have to appeal to public authorities and to challenge certain actors. Yet the question of extending these enlightened citizen approaches to the general public remains open, and the organization does not know how to encourage such attitudes beyond its militant circle. Questions of the strengths and limits of this positioning often run through debates within the organization. For example, the question of the temptation of a radical approach posed by certain members close to the anti-growth, and therefore the anti-consumerist movements, triggers controversy within the organization on the extension of positions which, to some extent, are a breach of the social contract underpinning our societies and especially the freedom to consume. At this stage, the groups suggest that their new members proselytize, for they see this is the best means through which other people are encouraged to adopt responsible behaviors. In other words, the organization considers that its members are for the moment in the best position to recruit new consumer-citizens and that this principle can be envisaged only if the temptation of radicalism is excluded, to the benefit of the enlightened citizen. The model of the social entrepreneur developed by Becker (Becker, 1963) seems to describe the specific positioning of *Action Consommation* which aims for an extension of behaviors prescribed by the organization, through the dissemination of behavioral norms in society. The production of information, the diffusion of values and the prescription of behaviors, as well as their institutionalization in forms of public action, are the motivations envisaged by the organization, like those of the groups described by Becker.

The models of extension and diffusion in society envisaged by the different movements also raise questions of their social accessibility.

These questions reactivate an earlier one posed since the beginnings of hygienism, on the capacity of norms produced by dominant social groups to frame the behaviors of the most disadvantaged. Today, questions of this type are found in the literature on alternative food systems, and particularly those based on the principle of food democracy (Hassanein, 2003; Wilkins, 2005; Levkoe, 2006). Some studies show that this food democracy can be seen as almost exclusively practiced by middle-class whites who decree food-related behavioral norms for the underprivileged classes, ranging from diet to environmental responsibility (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002). How is this question posed in the three movements studied?

Artisans du Monde still sees producers as the exclusive beneficiaries of their action. This implies some difficulty in considering as entirely legitimate the claims of traders in the North who wish to make a living from fair trade, as well as a lack of attention to poor consumers who are unable to pay the extra price of fair trade products.

Each in their own way, the AMAPs and *Action Consommation* have undertaken measures to expand the social accessibility of their forms of consumption. Some AMAP groups, especially in Paris and surroundings, have envisaged buying an extra box to give to a needy family. However, due to questions of equity (which family?) and sometimes the difficulty of crossing non-secant networks (who knows a needy family?), these systems have not lasted. Other collectives try to redistribute uncollected boxes to families in difficulty, but this system is also sometimes considered to cause the dis-engagement of those families who failed to fetch their box. The most successful case – and the less anchored in a classical charity perspective - is based on a partnership with a *commune* (municipal area) that enables food vouchers issued to underprivileged families to be used to purchase from an AMAP. This shows that forms of involvement of the public authorities are probably necessary to achieve such results. In 2004 *Action Consommation* undertook to extend the promotion of engaged consumption to the more specific public of consumers with very low, unstable incomes. A public conference-debate was organized but the organization was unable to take the idea further. Organizations for very low-income groups tend to see engaged consumption above all as a luxury for the privileged, which is unaffordable for those who have no choice criterion other than price. These difficulties highlight the limits of approaches which often appear in the public sphere as promoted essentially by the upper and middle classes. They directly raise the question of the expression of forms of governance which have not yet found a means to open up to society as

a whole. In particular, it is highly likely that consumers with the least spending power would wish to deal with other problems if they – as is the case of middle-class consumers in our movements – had to enter into negotiations with the supply side. Today, protest movements relative to consumption have found no solutions for the creation of these more egalitarian conditions of governance, and cannot entirely disregard the current forms of social stratification that still structure consumption.

Conclusion

Research on alternative food systems has strongly emphasized that they offer consumers new access to spaces of co-production (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2004), enabling them to negotiate with producers on some of the specific characteristics of products, or even of production systems (Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine, 2004; Lamine, 2005). These studies have also contributed to the description of consumers' individual engagements in local networks, which enable them to link their choices to political projects (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002). These networks, often perceived as hybrid assemblies of actors and objects, then become the loci of expression of different forms of agency amongst which that of the consumer plays an important part (Goodman, 2002; Lockie, 2002; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). We have ourselves emphasized the dimensions of consumers' empowerment within these alternative networks (Dubuisson-Quellier and Lamine, 2008) to highlight the new negotiation capacities that they can acquire there in local forms of governance around food systems. Without necessarily considering that consumption replaces apparently declining forms of political expression, the idea is to see how consumers envisage forms of political action that are individualized (Michelitti, 2003) or openly collective, through their participation in these alternative food systems.

In this paper we have explored the ways in which these consumer political engagements, often understood as the construction of a new food citizenship, could replace the consumer figure by that of the consumer-citizen. As we have shown, the complementarity of these two positions – political and economic – between the consumer and the citizen entails certain problems. The movements are confronted with the irreducible character of freedom of choice, which may be expressed in these systems in a way that is not entirely different from conventional systems. Consumers can have preferences concerning the variety of the offerings, or wish to practice forms of demand-driven consumption that may not always be compatible with the organizations' political positions. This limit indicates that the

effectiveness of these groups' militancy lies less in their capacity to spread to the masses, than in their daily work on the capacity for articulation between political and collective aspirations, and individual consumption habits.

Based on the empirical observation of the modes of functioning and consumers' engagements in three militant groups promoting alternative food systems, in the fields of responsible consumption, fair trade, and contracts between producers and consumers, we show that the consumer figure remains central. The organizations studied need to explicitly place themselves in opposition to a specific version of the consumer figure, based on a form of direct irresponsibility stemming from the modes of functioning of globalized systems. These movements highlight the fact that, by gradually removing consumers from the problems of production, globalized food systems have made them relatively unaware of the negative externalities produced upstream. Raising their consciousness is therefore not aimed immediately at transforming the consumer into an informed citizen; it should above all enable consumers to be enlightened, that is, involved in networks that enable them to grasp the implications of production and distribution, whether these are environmental, or concern the sustainability of certain economic activities or else the working conditions involved. In other words, it is through consumer practices that citizens' awareness must be expressed. The various trade systems set up by the organizations studied here are in this respect places of recruitment for political engagement, but also, above all, places of recruitment of consumers. The pivotal position of consumption in these forms of political expression is perceived particularly well in the case of the organization promoting engaged consumption, not only because most of its members are themselves part of specific supply chains, but also because they are seeking guidelines for their own consumption practices, over and above any form of more collective political engagement. The citizen figure is not constructed to the detriment or even against that of the consumer; on the contrary, it relies on it to a large extent. Consumers, and with them certain consumerist logics, cannot entirely disappear from these movements, of which they are clearly a mainstay.

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