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**Localised Agrifood Systems:  
concept development and diversity of situations**

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**Key words:** food, territories, local resources, territorial identity, innovation processes.

**Summary:** Localised agrifood systems are a type of organisation of agrifood activities, in which territorial dynamics play a decisive role in terms of the coordination between stakeholders and the development of production activities. The aim of this paper is to analyse: (i) the construction and evolution of the SYAL concept, (ii) the integrated character of the SYAL concept and its conceptual basis, (iii) how activities are linked with territories and the factors involved in territorial anchorage, (iv) the diversity of situations and how the SYAL concept operates.

## **Introduction**

The concept of “localised agrifood systems” (SYAL) appeared in 1996 at a time when rural societies were in crisis and food and environmental problems were worsening. SYAL was defined as “production and service organisations (agricultural and agrifood production units,

marketing, services and gastronomic enterprises, etc.) linked by their characteristics and operational ways to a specific territory. The environment, products, people and their institutions, know-how, feeding behaviour and relationship networks get together within a territory to produce a type of agricultural and food organisation in a given spatial scale”. (Muchnik 1996; Muchnik J. Sautier D., 1998).

Thirteen years later, we can verify that the concept of SYAL has become widespread. Various groups have been established and have contributed to the process: a scientific interest group (GIS)<sup>1</sup> which focuses on the subject in France, the European Research Group (ERG) SYAL<sup>2</sup>, the SYAL network in Latin America and four international congresses<sup>3</sup>. SYALs can be characterised by: (i) their interdisciplinary nature and dynamic conceptual frameworks; (ii) the diversity of situations confronted; (iii) the growing institutional demands concerning the usefulness, or otherwise, of the SYAL concept as a tool to guiding territorial innovation processes.

In the current context, which is characterised by volatile prices and social, economic and financial crises, the analysis of the phenomena of the localisation/delocalisation of agricultural and agrifood activities emerge as a priority, raising several questions: what are the factors that determine the competitiveness of local activities? Will SYALs withstand the pressure of the global context? Would it be more suitable to generate territorial dynamics as a way of adding value to local resources?

The objective of this paper is to analyse:

- the construction and evolution of the SYAL concept
- the integrated character of the concept and its conceptual basis
- how activities are linked with the territories and the factors of territorial anchorage
- the diversity of situations and how the SYAL concept operates.

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<sup>1</sup> GIS SYAL (*Localised agrifood systems*) created in 2001 in France by six institutions: INRA, CIRAD, the University of Versailles - Saint Quentin, University of Montpellier I, Sup Agro de Montpellier and Agropolis International.

<sup>2</sup> European Research Group Syal, founded in 2008 with 24 partner research and teaching institutions in eight European countries. A SYAL research and development network was set up in Latin America.

<sup>3</sup> a) Congresses: I “SIAL: products, businesses and local dynamics”, Montpellier – France, Octobre 2002; II “Rural and territorial Agroindustry” (ARTE), Toluca – Mexico, December 2004; III “Food and territories” (ALTER), Baeza-Spain, Octobre 2006; IV “Food, Family Agricultura and Territories”, Mar del Plata-Argentina, October 2008.

## **I The construction and evolution of the SYAL concept**

The SYAL concept was gradually developed around questions linked to the accelerated processes of change that we observed. During the 1980s, our work in Latin America confirmed the existence of spatial concentrations of small agrifood enterprises, called Rural Agro industries (AIR: from “agroindustrias rurales”), for example: *Panela* (whole sugar cane) in Colombia, *tapa de dulce* (sugar cane dessert) in Costa Rica, *chuño* or *moraya* (types of dried potato) in Bolivia or Peru, *farinha* (cassava flour) in Brazil or rural cheese factories in Ecuador. “Why take any notice of these backward industries, which are doomed to disappear?” was the classic question posed by neo-liberal economic thinkers who consider that non-competitive enterprises should be reconverted. So we considered the real importance of these “backward” industries, which were not even included in national statistics. Then we began an ambitious research program: identifying and diagnosing the rural agricultural industries in various Latin American countries (Boucher F., Muchnik J., 1995). The results were surprising. Based on local know-how and technology, these AIR were able to: (i) significantly improve the added value obtained by rural producers, (ii) improve family farmers’ incomes, (iii) generate a number of significant jobs in rural areas, (iv) contribute to the food security of the population, both in rural and urban areas.

In the face of rapid economic and social changes, it was necessary to question the innovation processes that would allow AIR to fit into the framework of new spatial specialisations for production activities even though they are traditional production systems. Consequently, the main issues raised were innovation processes and the links between local dynamics and different socio-economic spaces. How can the specific tacit knowledge of the territory be combined with coded generic knowledge? to add value to local agrifood resources? What type of collective training would allow people to develop these innovation processes? Given that local products were increasingly destined for consumption outside the territory, the certification of origin emerged as a significant problem. European regulations (AOC, IGP and others) are sometimes difficult to apply within different institutional contexts. This is particularly the case for products not destined for export and which depend on local control requirements. In this case, how can value be added to products with a territorial reputation? Local cheese production is a good example. Various investigations on the *queijo de coalho* in

Brazil (Requier-Desjardins D., Boucher F., Cerdan C., 2003), Cajamarca cheese in Peru (Boucher F., 2004) and Cotija cheese in Mexico (Linck T., 2005), among others, provided partial answers to these questions.

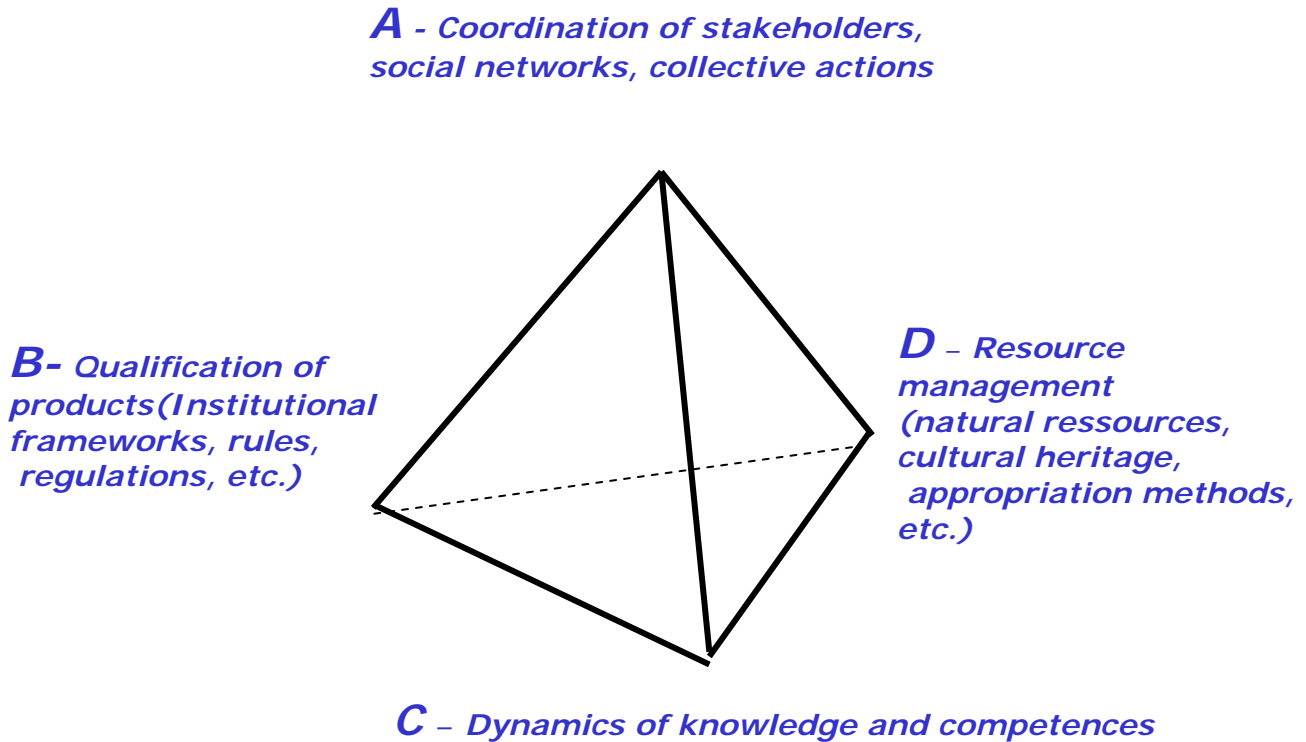
In the 1990s, bigger issues emerged, such as: environmental problems, sustainable development, reproduction of biodiversity, organic production, multifunctionality of agriculture and rural areas, etc. Product qualification and certification methods diversified. When dealing with these issues, how relevant is the SYAL approach as a frame of reference for evaluating a type of local tomato on the banks of the La Plata River (INTA, INRA, UNLP, 2003), or the development of “proximity” tomato production in the eastern French Pyrenees (Bressoud F., Parès L., 2009), or for analysing the links between product quality and biodiversity evolution (Bérard, L. et al., 2005)? SYAL concept began to be interpreted in two ways: (i) as a concrete object, a group of visible agrifood activities that are territorially established; (ii) as an approach, a way of handling the development of local resources, even if the “system” does not exist as such. More recently, the acceleration of localisation/delocalisation processes has led us to consider how the territory can serve as an assembly factor for different territorial activities (agricultural or agrifood enterprises, gastronomic, tourist or cultural activities, etc.). What synergies might exist between different activities in such a way as to reinforce their territorial anchorage? (Muchnik J., Sanz Cañada J., Torres Salcido G., 2008.) A third meaning of SYAL has begun to emerge: SYAL as an institutional tool, which can be used by administrative bodies in their planning programs.

## **II) Integrated research object and concepts employed**

SYALs can be applied to diverse situations, ranging from products destined for local markets to those destined for export, products historical rooted or relatively recent ones. In order to structure the available knowledge of SYALs, we have identified four families of research objects. It is the interactions between these research objects that will help us understand the diversity of existing agrifood systems, their emergence, stability or the crises they are facing.

The interest of the SYAL approach is its capacity to take account of the different combinations and levels of integration.

**Fig. N°1**  
**SYAL – Research Objects**



**Integrating stakeholders, practices and uses:** Integrating production and consumption, the relation between food identities, mechanisms for product qualification (IG, registered designation of origin, etc.), production techniques and the reproduction of biodiversity is just one example. Integrating different activities, it is the territory and not the product that determines the SYAL, inasmuch as it takes into account different sectors of territorial activities, as well as other rural territorial uses (tourism, culture, etc.). Therefore, integrating different activities becomes one of the objectives of the approach.

**Integrating spatial-temporal scales:** The territory of a SYAL is not a continuous space. It is one of belonging, in which a combination of different activities can be carried out in areas that are often physically far apart. Thus, rural, urban and peri-urban dynamics can be integrated with this approach. Different time scales should also be integrated both diachronically,

because we are often confronted with a situation where the localisation of resources has developed over time and is subject to the constraints and processes of innovation in a short time span, and synchronically because different activities grouped together in a SYAL have different time rhythm.

**Integrating disciplines:** The study on SYALs requires an integrated approach between biotechnical sciences and social sciences, given that the territorial anchorage of activities depends on a combination of material variables (soils, climate, product characteristics, etc.), and immaterial variables (know-how, skills, institutions, etc.). Let us be clear that interdisciplinary is not an initial condition. Instead, it is the result of a research process, the existence of a common goal being one of the conditions for the success of this process.

### **Conceptual bases**

**Industrial districts, clusters and SPL:** the SYAL concept was primarily based on non-conventional economic schools, which studied concentrations of enterprises linked to one particular territory. Concentrations of enterprises of this type were labelled in different ways and were found to share certain specific assets in common (knowledge, territorial institutions, coordination methods, etc.). These assets allow them to produce external economies and, in consequence, improve their marketing position. This can be illustrated in particular by the concepts of “industrial districts”, “local production systems” (SPL) and Cluster (Porter, 1998). Towards the end of the 70s, several Italian researchers working on the economic development of certain regions in the north of Italy, contributed to the “aggiornamento” of A. Marshall’s “industrial districts” concept : “...it is the local environment, the meeting point of natural and human history, that supplies the production organisation with some essentials, such as employment, entrepreneurial spirit, material and immaterial infrastructure, social culture and industrial organisation” (Becattini, Rullani, 1995). In France, the “Institut de Recherche Economique sur la Production et le Développement” (IREP-D) at the University of Grenoble-2 also tackled this issue with the concept of “local production systems”: “the emphasis is on collaborative relationships between enterprises, relationships between the production system and the socio-institutional system, the know-how and worker mobility in the agglomeration of production, the role of local institutions and specific resources of the territory” (Courlet, Pecqueur, 1996).

**Territory:** Gradually, as research on SYALs has developed, we have observed that “spatial density” was not the determining factor and that the diversity of SYALs meant that they could not be assimilated into “clusters” (groups of activities concentrated in a limited space). The “competitiveness” of SYALs appeared to be more associated with the territorial specificities of products, people and institutions, than to external economies linked to the density of businesses in a given place. The determining factor in SYAL cases seems to be the social networks that develop the links between food and territories.

The territory is understood as being “a developed space, socially constructed, culturally labelled and institutionally regulated” (E.Lopez, J.Muchnik, 1997). This “feeling of belonging to a territory” (Ph. Tizon, G.Di Meo, 1996) on which social relationships are founded is inseparable from the idea of “territoriality”. To a large extent, this explains economic behaviour, which is difficult to understand if market mechanisms alone are considered. The process of developing territoriality is consequently a material and cultural process in which individuals transform the space they inhabit, steered by guidelines and values, which give meaning to their lives in society.

Some SYAL are based on a single activity and others include various types of activity. The evolution in the global environment (social, economic, environmental, etc.), has influenced the development of diversification in agriculture. Rural tourism, restoration, gastronomic festivals, etc. have contributed to this diversification. In order to adapt to this evolution, producers have to acquire new skills involving new functionalities for farming and agricultural spaces (S. Lardon y al. 2004). These have had a determining influence on environmental and rural landscape changes and contribute to modified the place and role of territory in agri-food approaches.

### **Eating as a "total social fact" and identifying references**

Socio-anthropological concepts made a very important contribution to the development of the SYAL approach. Foods are the only consumer goods that are incorporated (*in-corporis* - literally, they are introduced into the body), and, therefore, they play a particular role in the identification processes of individuals and societies. The specific place occupied by food products constitutes one of the main specificities of the SYAL concept. Marcel Mauss defines eating as a "total social fact" (Mauss M. 1935), a fact which put in move all social relations.

The act of eating depends of variables of a very different order: composition and characteristics of food, consumer health, their cultural identity, the dynamics of the territory in which the consumer lives, the evolution of landscapes and rural societies. In the food phenomenon approach, we cannot isolate biological factors from social ones.

Cultural identity and knowledge are determining factors in consumers' choice of food. The concept of identity, in its static form, could constitute a double-edged sword. For this reason, we focus our approach on the analysis of identities in motion, identification processes, deconstruction/reconstruction of identities through contacts and interchange between different cultures. The history of cultural identities linked to food is a good example of this evolution. The "identity references" play an important role in these processes. They are defined as the "sensitive and memorial bases on which we build our varied ways of inhabiting the world according to different relationships with ourselves and others" (E. Ortigues, 1989). Spoken references are at the root of territorial feeling and symbolise two types of relationship: social references (language, place of origin, religion, etc.), that define the belonging of the individual to a community; and individual references (name, surname, job, etc.), that differentiate individuals from one another.

### **III Factors of territorial anchorage, links between activities and territory**

#### **1 Context and factors of localisation**

"Globalisation" is linked to a change in the technological paradigm, which is characterised by: (i) the computer science revolution and its impact on communications, management, transport and logistics; (ii) the digitalisation of productive functions (design, production, distribution, etc.), and the possibility for some businesses to decide to be located in diverse places on the planet, which leads to a process of "modularisation" or "fragmentation" (S. Berger, 2006). In some industrial sectors, such as textiles or computer technology, there are good examples, which illustrate this process, in which components made in various places are assembled by one firm; (iii) the increasing access that people have to information on-line and its consequences on different levels (training skills, marketing circuits, etc.); (iv) in the field



of agricultural production and food processing, the change in the technological paradigm is linked to scientific revolutions in molecular biology and genetics, which have led to unprecedented leaps in the artificialisation of living organisms and raise the question of the social management of these changes. In this sense, regulating the localisation/delocalisation processes of productive activities is an essential question.

### **Agrifood systems... local or localised?**

We can relativise about this semantic difference according to language. In France, when the GIS SYAL was created, a discussion about the choice of “local” or “localised” terms emerged. With hindsight, this apparently banal discussion was nothing of the sort. The term “local” refers to an inherent quality at any given moment, the term “localised” relates to a process, a system that has been localised, which was not always in that place and with no guarantee that it will remain there forever. Human history teaches us that human beings and their skills, species of plants or animals and their derivative products, are continually on the move. Many products, which seem so typical today - meats from the Argentinean *pampas*, Bordeaux wines or Italian polenta - were also localised once upon a time. At a given time, human beings adapted and created the skills and technology to anchor products like this locally. It has been historically documented that the opposite process is also possible: apparently deeply-rooted local products can disappear. For this reason we prefer the metaphor “territorial anchorage” to describe the incessant journey of humans, products and skills. The production of buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*), originally from North-East Asia, was introduced to Europe during the Crusades and was widely disseminated. In France, the production of *sarrasin* or *blé noir* (buckwheat) reached 500,000 tons in the 19th century, mainly in Brittany where it was used to prepare the famous “*galettes bretonnes*” (Breton pancakes), a typical dish from the region. Today, the production of buckwheat in France has all but disappeared (approximately 5,000 tons), and some projects are attempting to start again its cultivation. In Latin America, there is the example of quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*), a basic foodstuff of the indigenous population (quechuas, aymaras, etc.). Its cultivation gradually decreased after the Spanish conquest until it disappeared in certain regions (North East Argentina, for example). Some 10 years ago, quinoa was rediscovered by North American and European consumers, thanks to its nutritional qualities. Production start again, the “fair trade” label is appearing in supermarket aisles. However, early research into the subject seems to indicate that it is not as fair as is

alleged and that a negative impact on soil fertility has been detected in some quinoa production zones designated for export (Carimentrand A., 2006).

The tomato, which originally came from America, is another example of this incessant journey. After centuries of strenuously attempting to overcome European taboos<sup>4</sup> and adapt to the soil and preferences in its new home, this Solanaceae (*Solanum lycopersicum*), seems threatened with expulsion from certain regions of Western Europe. New hydroponic greenhouse production techniques have partly served to detach the tomato's quality from the edaphic conditions of the site of production and from producers' know-how. Some wealthy producers have begun delocalising production to North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, etc.), while preserving functions of distribution and sales to meet the European market. In the eastern Pyrenees region in France, many producers are resisting this trend. A sector of consumers disgusted by the taste of standard tomatoes constitutes a potentially valuable market. Thus, naturalisation projects for tomato production are beginning to surface along with short producer-consumer circuits for their commercialization.

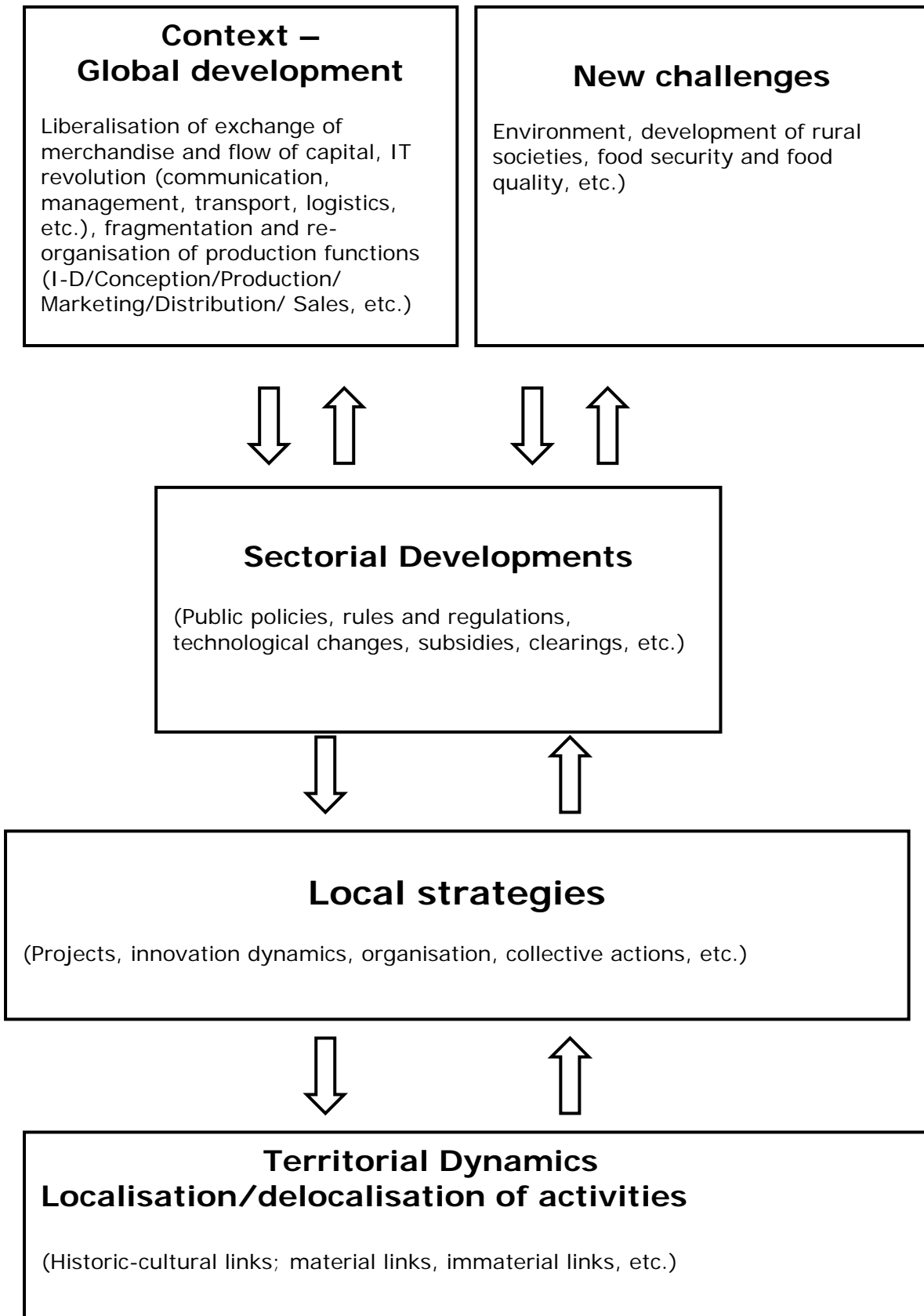
Insofar as the European Union will gradually have to make concessions to the WTO regarding the protection of the farming sector, the phenomenon described in the case of the tomato will be amplified. However, it is important to point out that we are not dealing with an inevitable fact. Experience shows that the processes of localisation/delocalisation do not only depend on the context. They also depend on the reactions of territorial inhabitants and institutions. Figure N° 2 outlines this analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> The tomato (from the nahuatl « *tomatl* ») reached the south of Europe in the 16th century; its red colour and tempting look aroused the suspicion that its content was satanic. It was, therefore, classified along with the Belladonna plant and mandrake root. Feared for its supposed toxic nature, it took 2 centuries to reach French kitchens with the French revolution. Even in the 19th century, recipe books advised boiling it for 2 or 3 hours before use, although it seems historically unlikely that fresh tomato salad is a recent culinary innovation.

**Fig. 2**

**Localisation/delocalisation of agrifood activities**



## 2 Territorial links of agrifood production

The various experiences studied show us that the territorial links of agrifood production can be highly diverse, both in terms of quantity and quality (Fourcade C., Muchnik J., Treillon R., 2005).

**Historic Links**, through origin and people's references of identity. As we have already indicated the feeling of common belonging to one history and one place constitutes an emotional basis for the emergence of volunteers, leaders and projects oriented towards the territorial anchorage of production activities. In the absence of shared links, common guidelines or codes, geographic proximity is more likely to lead to conflict than cooperation. Common references of identity are constructed through a historic-cultural process. This strengthens the various types of territorial coordination and facilitates the definition of rules for regulating collective actions. The regeneration of the Guerande salt mines in Brittany from the 1970s ([www.seldeguerande.com](http://www.seldeguerande.com)) can be considered as a successful example of the role played by historic links with a territory.

**Material links**, through soil type, climate, landscapes, characteristics of food products, etc. It is important to underline the role of material conditions in the localisation/delocalisation processes. The environmental impact and the strong links with the reproduction of natural resources is one of the SYAL specificities in comparison to other production sectors. In addition, it is one of the reasons that justify the existence of a differentiated policy for the farming sector. Delocalising computer production is one thing; delocalising the production of Spanish oranges or French sugar beet has consequences, which are qualitatively different. Specifying the relationship between a product's quality and its territory, through denomination of origin or geographic references, can help products to take root in a territory. However, this approach is limited to certain products and regions. Therefore, it is necessary to develop different strategies according to the specific conditions in each territory in order to strengthen the links with the territory in some cases, or to relocate products when they cannot withstand the conditions of the global context. It is important to underline the fact that there are no predetermined products or production systems. Instead, there are human beings with projects in society, which build or destroy territorial links.

**Immaterial links**, through the image of the territory, its culture, tastes, skills and traditions, through the so-called “intangible heritage”. In many cases, a territory can establish and preserve the image of a product based on material conditions, even though material conditions may change drastically with time. An interesting example is that of the world-famous Grasse perfumes in France. Production began in the 16th century when flower cultivation was introduced to the city and the surrounding areas to hide the foul smells from the tanneries. Thus began a long tradition of perfumery in Grasse. Initially, essences were obtained from locally produced flowers. Four centuries later, although the perfumes are now composed mainly of synthetic fragrances, the carefully protected *savoir-faire*, identity of entrepreneurs and territorial image have maintained the dynamic of this local production system. Numerous examples could be given on the role of intangible heritage, including the role of cultural festivities associated with local dishes. The *Festival du Piment D'Espelette* (Red Pepper Festival) in Espelette in the French Basque Country is interesting in this respect. The first festival, which was organised in 1967 and has been repeated every year during the last weekend of October, was an important factor in the construction of territorial image and the product's symbolic value. Today, the red pepper benefits from an AOC (denomination of origin); this example shows the interest of products apparently of secondary importance for local gastronomy and territorial development.

## **IV Diversity of situations and how the SYAL concept operates**

SYAL concept covers a wide range of situations.

### **Historical diversity**

There are systems, which have been rooted over a long time period. The production of olive oil in the Mediterranean or *tortillas* in the Mesoamerican region could both be given as examples. There are also localised agrifood systems, which have been established relatively recently, such as cheese production in Cajamarca in Peru or Somoto *rosquillas* (type of corn biscuit) in Nicaragua. In all cases it is important to: (i) define the periods of the historic process, define the characteristics of these periods, the big changes that have occurred and the main variables (technical, social, economic, etc.) that have determined the qualitative changes; (ii) characterise the current situation by deepening the analysis of system diversity,

which coexists at any given moment (going back to the previous examples, we can state that the historic process has led to a large diversity of systems for producing *tortilla* in Mesoamerica or olive oil in the Mediterranean); (iii) develop scenarios for the possible evolution of these systems and their territorial links.

### **Spatial organisation diversity**

The different schools of thought and the various authors who have analysed the industrial districts, SPLs or “clusters” (Becattini, 1987; Courlet Cl., Pecqueur B. 1992, 1996; Schmitz H., Nadvi N., 1999), agree on one point: the geographic concentration of these systems. This aspect is not evident in the case of SYALs if production and processing units are considered as being part of the same system. A recent study of nine SYALs in Latin America shows that the spatial density of production units is rather low (C. A. Correa, 2004)<sup>5</sup>. To make reference to “proximity” in these cases, we can refer to “territorial proximity”, in order to include what certain authors distinguish as “geographic proximity” and “organisational proximity” (A. Rallet 2002; A. Torre, M. Filippi 2005). From a conceptual point of view, “SYAL territory” may link different activities that take place in discontinued spaces. For the study of these systems, the concept of “identity reference” has the necessary heuristic qualities to explain the different types of relationship between social partners. Contributing to explain the functioning of territorial networks and the construction of standards and rules, which regulate the development of these production systems (Touzard J.M. et al., 2005).

### **Economical and social organisation diversity**

The links with the market can be very different, ranging from Syal that add value to their produce in local markets to those that are aimed at national or export markets. Social organisation and coordination between stakeholders are conditioned by market type, required quality standards and commercial regulations. **The coordination relates to the producer and their strategies.** For example, in order to satisfy the quality assurance requirements for the exportation of “organic coffee”, producers are obliged to work together because it is practically impossible to tackle these challenges individually. In other cases, the need for organisation is less evident, leading to systems in which producers who work together coexist

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<sup>5</sup> for example: 0.03 production units/sq. Km for sour tapioca starch in Cauca-Colombia; and 0.04 production units/sq. Km in the case of the Salinas cheeses in Ecuador

with those who have more individualistic strategies. This is the case with many “typical cheeses” in local markets. The SYAL approach must include the study of social inclusion/exclusion mechanisms and, therefore, analyse the different types of producers and strategies. “Individualistic” producers may be as important as those who work together, from the point of view of understanding how these production systems works.

## **2 How the SYAL approach operates**

From an operational point of view, the SYAL approach is of interest mainly for three reasons.

**Linking elements in a system:** All systems are unstable, their evolution (consolidation/disaggregation) depend on the interactions (forces of cohesion or repulsion) between the elements in the system (Morin E., 1980). Linking the elements within a system is a way of increasing its stability and systemic efficacy. As we have explained, SYAL is an integrated approach that provides a suitable methodological tool to enhance the links concerning local agrifood production: (i) linking producers and consumers (direct sales, farm visits, festivities, etc.); (ii) linking different territorial activities (production, services, cultural activities, tourism, etc.); (iii) linking rural and urban dynamics.

**Territorial specifications:** In the current context, one of the questions raised is that of differentiating the offer. What type of differentiation will be recognisable to the consumer (quality assurance labels, identity labels)? What price differential will be accepted in such a way as to make production more economically viable? Many elements of the system may be concerned by territorial specifications: (i) products and know-how (through various classification methods: origin references, production standards, commercialization shapes, etc.); (ii) jobs (history, skills, etc.); (iii) rural landscape; (iv) heritage (architecture, gastronomy, etc.). The use of territorial specifications contributes to rooting production activities within a territory and to positioning them in various markets.

**Activating territorial resources:** Increasing the value of local resources involves placing oneself in a dynamic process. The challenge is not to “return to tradition” but to reinvent it in order to modernise it. Making first-rate ham from a relatively “forgotten” breed of local pig involves a process of innovation on a technical, social and economic level. Territorial partners

need to join together around projects in order to determine how to manage them in real time and redefine/renegotiate the objectives if necessary.

## **Conclusions**

The concept of localised agrifood systems (SYAL) contributes to the construction of a territorially based agri-food paradigm. It is an integrated concept, which takes account of different links so that we can understand the organisation and function of a group of productive, social and cultural activities, which make up a system.

In the face of today's challenges (environment, food, energy), it is essential to specify the significance of a territory within the diversity of existing agrifood models. The analysis of links between foods and territories is central to this approach, given that food cultures are a specific component of territorial cultures. Foods have a particular status among consumer goods. They play a fundamental role in the construction of identity references for individuals and societies. There is a close link between product qualities, how consumers recognise quality and the prices they are prepared to pay.

We have shown that the local character of a product or the absence of local character is not a fixed attribute. For different activities in a given space at a given time, the territorial variable can either be significant or negligible, depending on the case. Several forms of territorially based or non-territorially based production can even coexist for the same type of product. If we look at what happens over a medium to long period, we observe that products and know-how are in constant flux. Similarly, we have observed important changes in the territorial anchorage of these products and know-how: some products leave, others become localised, others remain by modifying their anchorage in a given place.

Given the process of localisation/delocalisation of productive activities, we consider that the territory acts as a factor that assembles, like a stakeholder who has the qualities and intelligence to organise collective strategies. Here, intelligence is understood to mean the capacity to react, to formulate and coordinate projects. It is a collective intelligence, resulting from interactions between diverse public and private territorial stakeholders. It is not the sum of individual intelligence, hence its systemic nature. The quality of territory as assembler is based on territorial solidarity, feelings of belonging and common values, which provide



structure and meaning to social networks. This capacity to assemble, to promote and orient processes of innovation linked to other social and economic spaces can equally be associated with the capacity to anticipate. This is because it is not just a question of defending local products at all costs. In some cases, it is also a question of planning reconversion strategies, by using processes to activate territorial resources. Approach the problem in a scientific way is important to avoid the trap of “localism”.

In the short term, strengthening territorial specificities could constitute a strategy for rooting activities in a territory and for improving market position. The difficulty is to develop strategies, which link the short and medium term. On one hand, we can maintain that it is the people, with their social organisation, who develop links to a place, to a territory. Therefore, from this point of view, there is no set solution. There is no determinism as far as the localisation of activities is concerned. On the other hand, it is important to consider the main streams, the technical, economic, environmental and legal changes, to which regional dynamics have to adapt. Now, if the historic approach has any interest, it is to make us more objective about everyday issues, to help us avoid getting stuck so that viable alternatives can be developed over time.

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## **Joint Annual Meeting**

**AFHVS (Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society)**

**ASFS (Association for the Study of Food and Society)**

# **Agrifood localised systems**

**Syal (Systèmes agroalimentaires localisés)**

**José Muchnik INRA / ERG Syal**

**State College- Pennsylvania- USA 28-31 mai 2009**

# **Localised Agrifood Systems**

**I SIAL : Integrated research object**

**II Territorial links of agrifood production**

**III Diversity of situations**

**IV How the SYAL approach operates**

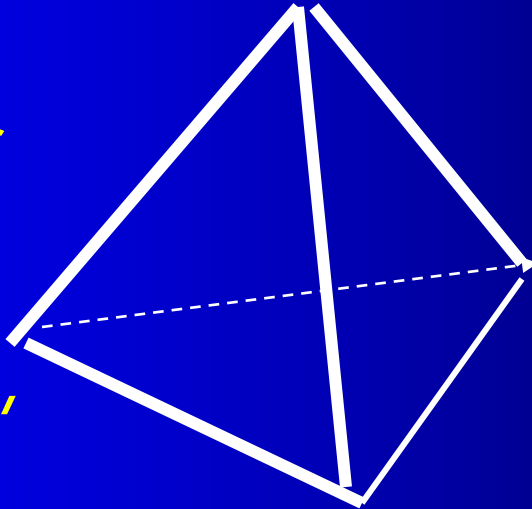
# I SYAL concept (first definition)

“production and service organisations (agricultural and agrifood production units, marketing, services and gastronomic enterprises, etc.) linked by their characteristics and operational ways to a specific territory. The environment, products, people and their institutions, know-how, feeding behaviour and relationship networks get together within a territory to produce a type of agricultural and food organisation in a given spatial scale”

(Muchnik 1996; Muchnik J. Sautier D., 1998).

# SYAL – Research Objects

*A - Coordination between stakeholders,  
social networks, collective actions*



*B- Qualification of  
Products  
(Institutional  
frameworks, rules,  
regulations ...)*

*D – Resource  
management  
(natural resources  
cultural heritage...)*

*C– Dynamics of knowledge and  
competences*





**Integrating stakeholders, practices and uses**

**Integrating spatial-temporal scales**

**Integrating disciplines**

# Concepts employed

- **Industrial districts, clusters and SPL**  
(Becattini, Rullani, 1995; Courlet, Pecqueur, 1996; Porter, 1998)
- **Territory** "a developed space, socially constructed, culturally labelled and institutionally regulated"  
**Territoriality.** "feeling of belonging to a territory" on which social relationships are founded (Ph. Tizon, G.Di Meo, 1996)
- **Identifying references** "sensitive and memorial bases on which we build our varied ways of inhabiting the world according to different relationships with ourselves and others" (E. Ortigues, 1989).  
**Eating as a "total social fact"** (Mauss 1935)

# Territory

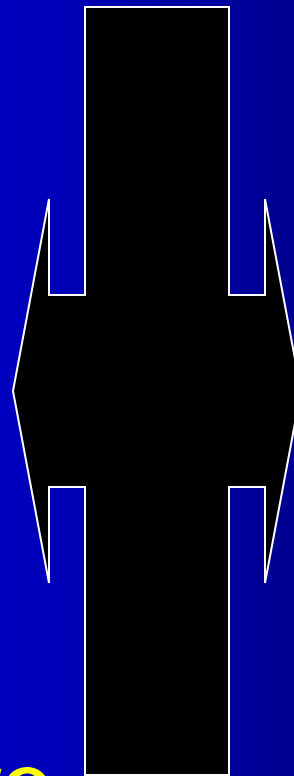
“a developed space, socially constructed, culturally labelled and institutionally regulated”

Physical space

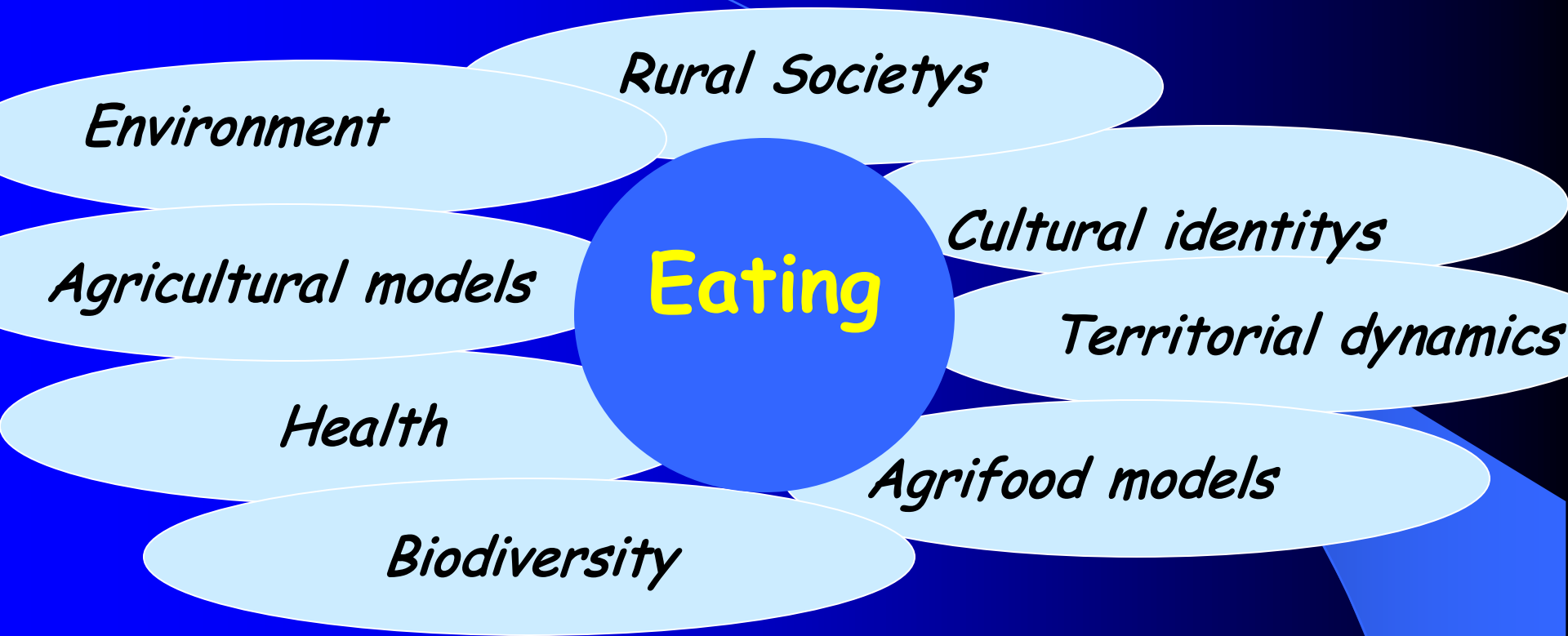
Social project

Cultural references

Institucional structure



Territory



**Eating as a "total social fact" (Mauss 1935)**

# II Territorial links of agrifood production

**Historic Links**, through origin and people's identity references, belonging to one history and one place constitutes an emotional basis for the emergence of volunteers, leaders and projects oriented towards the territorial anchorage of production activities.

**Material links**, through soil type, climate, landscapes, characteristics of food products, etc. It is important to underline the role of material conditions in the localisation/delocalisation processes.

**Immaterial links**, through the image of the territory, its culture, tastes, skills and traditions, through the so-called "intangible heritage".

# **III Diversity of situations**

## **Historical diversity**

**Very old and very recent systems (examples)**

## **Spatial organisation diversity**

**Different spatial concentration and organisation of activities included in the system (examples)**

## **Economical and social organisation diversity**

**Different links with market and different coordinations between stakeholders (examples)**

# IV How the SYAL approach operates

## Linking elements in a system

(i) linking producers and consumers (direct sales, farm visits, activities, etc.); (ii) linking different territorial activities (production, services, cultural activities, tourism, etc.); (iii) linking rural and urban dynamics.

## Specifying territorial resources

Many resources of the system may be concerned by territorial specifications: (i) products and know-how (ii) jobs (history, skills, etc.); (iii) rural landscape; (iv) heritage (architecture, gastronomy, etc.). The use of territorial specifications contributes to rooting production activities within a territory and to positioning them in various markets.

## Activating territorial resources

Increasing the value of local resources Territorial partners need to join together around projects in order to determine how to manage them.