Community-supported agriculture: from food as commodity to food as being part of the community

• Keywords: Alternative Food Networks, Community-supported Agriculture, Local Food Systems, Sustainable Food Consumption, Grassroots Initiatives
Community-supported agriculture: from food as commodity to food as part of the community

Exploring the viability and attractiveness of community-supported agriculture initiatives in the Netherlands based on three cases-study in and the investigation of local consumers’ preferences.

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Acknowledgement

This paper is the final piece of my Masters in Spatial Planning at the University of Nijmegen. It is the outcome of months of thinking, exchanging, writing and re-writing about local food and alternative food systems. The thesis explores the nature of food relations, the way food is embedded in society and the degree to which alternative food initiatives can provide some answers to the sustainable challenges facing us. The drives behind the topic emerged from a deep personal interest to understand how individuals happen to become more reflexive consumers in an increasingly complex food system. Everyday as consumers, we are facing choices relative to the food that we buy and questions relative to the values we attach to it. Should I buy this? How can this be so cheap? Is this expensive brand really better than the alternative? Which certifications should I trust? Is organic better than local? Is it normal to get strawberries in winter? And so on. By putting into light grassroots food alternatives and alliances, in contrast to the current industrial food system, this paper aims to showcase how environmental and social concerns can be re-invested in food practices. Food is so much more than a daily intake or a commodity, and as such I tried to harness new narratives and processes aiming to replace food at the centre of the community. In regards to the research process, I would first like to thank my supervisor Linda Carton for her guidance and precious inputs. It has been a long run but I’m glad we’ve made it through the finishing line! I would then like to thank all the people who have been involved in the creation of this paper, as respondents, participants or simply as interlocutors interested in the research. Finally I would like to thank my Canisiussingel friends for giving me new lenses to see and understand this topic. Our diversity was our strength and this also applies to all aspects of life. May it be in food, among people, in governance or for the health of our environment.
Abstract

The way we eat has changed more in the last fifty years than in the previous thousands. From small-scale farming under the agrarian area to the monopole of supermarkets today, the relationship to food, and more particularly the relationship between producers and consumers, has never been more estranged. The external environmental and social costs of large-scale industrial farming methods are calling for the development of alternative productions systems, markets and markets-relations. This research focuses on the topic of community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives arising from Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) in the Netherlands. The research aims to explore the ways those initiatives come to emerge and sustain overtime; and whether they constitute niches of innovation which could potentially transform the food provision system, or at least challenge its drives through collective support for change. CSA, by re-embedding market exchanges in social relations, encourages individuals to become reflexive consumer and to shift the understanding of food as commodity to food as being intrinsically linked to the well-being of a community and its environment. Understanding the ways in which local food choices are made, based on consumers’ preferences and capacities, provides insights on the ways values come to friction with the politics behind food consumption. This research, by taking the lens of CSA initiatives, aims to address the complexity behind producing, delivering and consuming food in a sustainable manner.

“Agricultural sustainability doesn’t depend on agri-technology. To believe it does is to put the emphasis on the wrong bit of ‘agriculture’. What sustainability depends on isn’t agri- so much as culture.”

Raj Patel (2009)
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I. Introduction

1.1 Research problem statement

Anonymity in the marketplace of food consumption continues to sustain uninformed decisions by consumers who often unconsciously support food systems that are in conflict with their values. This reality is fostered by long geographical distance (physical distance) and a distance from the production, processing and distribution aspects of food (limited information and awareness) from the consumer side (Chase and Grunbinger, 2014). Individuals have become disillusioned by the large scale production of conventional food systems which are mainly accessible through supermarkets and relying on imported goods (Kearney, 2010). The conditions of production, the actual quality of products and the impact on the environment often constitute substantial drawbacks for consumers who are trying to make sense of the best way to eat without harming themselves, others or the environment. Food-born disease outbreaks and other recent food health scandals have challenged the blind trust of consumers in regards to the food they buy and consume. Due to opaque food chains, it can be said that there is a general lack of trust in food coming from impersonal chains and with anonymous origins (Broekhof and van de Valk, 2012). Social scientists have described the growing ecological and socio-cultural homogenisation and standardisation of the food system as a “placeless foodscape” (Morgan et al. 2006).

Globalisation has complexify food chains to a degree where several countries can be involved in the production of the food that ends at the dinner table. A few multinational corporations are now concentrating most power over the food production, and as a result of their monopoly they retain most of the economic value of the food commodity — a profit going away from small-scale producers (O’Hara and Stagl, 2001). The discontentment relative to the impacts of conventional food systems is impulising individuals to set up or engage in initiatives that provide them with alternatives to the current food system provision. Understanding individuals’ value-system in regards to local food consumption choices and the extent to which local food systems (such as community-supported agriculture) could satisfy them as consumers constitute an important question in exploring food alternatives as hypothetically being the promise of a more sustainable and just future for food systems. The debates relative to the impacts of large-scale, industrial and long-distance food chains have indeed stimulated a shift from sustainable local food consumption as merely an issue at the edge of public discourse to one at its centre (Bohn and Viljoen, 2011). Some of those debates translate the (re)emergence of non-market values which place emphasis on the importance of localising food (in terms of both production and consumption) in order for individuals to (re)connect with food through direct proximity. Local food can not be reduce to a spatial concept in the sense of physical distance between food production and consumption; as local food also brings into question the essence of the concept of place: how to relate to, how to responsibly belong to and identify with a place (Schnell, 2013). It offers the view of food as being intertwined with multiple scales of human-environment interactions and translates the complexity behind “fixing” food in specific landscapes (Hinrichs, 2015). Developing viable local food
economies which incorporate social and environmental values at the core of their processes will require to think about the power dynamics at both supply and demand sides; and to subsequently think about the capacities of local food initiatives to reclaim, strengthen, and promote “food from somewhere” (Campbell, 2009).

1.2 Research aim

The main aim of this research is to understand the ways in which local food systems, and more specifically community-supported agriculture initiatives, compare to conventional food systems in terms of production and consumption patterns at the local level. Hendrickson and Hefferman (2002) see initiatives promoting local food production and consumption as a way to reject systems in which "distant others can structure the shape and use of the local" (p.349). In this view, CSAs do not only fulfil utilitarian functions (i.e. providing fresh and sustainable local food to consumers) but also fulfil social functions (by stimulating social cohesion through increased relationships between producers and consumers as well as by stimulating local empowerment through food sovereignty). Will CSA be capable of stimulating a shift in both production and consumption patterns in order to enable consumers to (re)connect with local, healthy and sustainable food?

The underlying goal of the research is to understand whether CSA constitute emergent niches within the food system and the extent to which CSA are expected to play role at the local level. The research delve into the values and logistics operating behind the emergence of CSA through the analysis of three CSA cases in the Netherlands. The research will also explore consumers’ views about their food patterns and their degree of appreciation for local food in order to evaluate the overall attractiveness of the CSA model. By focusing on the factors influencing consumers’ choices, the research aims to understand whether CSA initiatives could become a viable alternative to the mainstream food provision systems.

1.3 Research question:

What is the potential of community-supported agriculture initiatives in enabling sustainable food consumption patterns at the local level?

(A detailed explanation of the research question terms can be found in the annex section)
1.4 Sub-questions

1. What are the characteristics (ideology and practices) of CSA and how do those characteristics compare to the mainstream food system?

2. How do CSA practices emerge and sustain overtime?

3. Can successful CSA practices co-exist with the mainstream food system?

4. To what extent do CSA initiatives in the Netherlands provide insights on the future opportunities and challenges for sustainable food consumption at the local level?

1.5 Scientific relevance

A significant volume of research effort is being directed toward examining food systems that are regarded as being in some way ‘alternative’ to ‘conventional’ ways of food provisioning and consuming (Maye and Kirwan, 2013). The urgency to deal with the strains derived from the mainstream food system is indeed calling academics to identify viable and attractive alternatives that could support a transition in the food system at both production and consumption levels. In regards to the literature review, there has not yet been comprehensive analysis on who is participating to CSA, the motives behind their engagement and the extent to which CSA could be understood as a reaction to mainstream industrial agriculture and its many problems (Mink et al., 2017).

The research will attempt to grasp whether CSA constitute a niche and the extent to which those niches are capable of enacting grounded social change (by resisting the stranglehold of the main food system in favour of local food alternatives). This topic, by focusing on bottom-up community initiatives, contributes to the literature of grassroots governance (Smith and al, (2005, 2017); Seyfang and Smith, (2007)) by investigating whether grassroots individuals are capable of steering sustainable patterns of consumption at the local level. This changes the focus from food governance understood in terms of vertical relationships within the global food chains to horizontal relationships of production and consumption at the local level. Vertical networks are largely impersonal, hierarchical and with a focus on exchanging goods and services for money (Chase and Grubinger, 2014). By contrast, horizontal networks are more transparent, socially-centred with the aim of generating mutual benefits and interests while being organised around shared governance approaches (Ibid, 2014). Food networks do not exist in isolation but are instead very much interdependent. As emphasised by Ericksen and al (2010) coordinating
horizontal and vertical networks is a “staggering political challenge”. In this regard, investigating the frictions and opportunities behind the politics of food at the local level, by putting in contrast vertical and horizontal networks, can participate to the debate of food governance. The research, by intending to harness the challenges and opportunities facing CSA, aims to assess the potential of CSA for sustainable food production and consumption patterns at the local level.

1.6 Societal relevance

The societal relevance of this research evolve around four key aspects: social, environmental, cultural and political. The first aspect is concerned with two types of social trends: demographic and spatial. The demographic trend of global population growth, with almost 10 billions people expected in 2050, suggest that the needs for food, land, water and other natural resources will grow accordingly (PRB, 2019). The spatial trend of urbanisation is also increasing worldwide, with around 70 % of the population expected to live in urban areas by 2050 (UN, 2019). Urban residents have usually access to a wider array of foods but without land to farm, their food security is dependent on their income and their ability to purchase food products (FAO, 2019). The social trends of population growth and urbanisation coupled with the dependency of urban residents to food systems provision will put unprecedented pressures on countries and systems to ensure appropriate access to sustainable food for all in urban areas. For those reasons, considering alternative food networks such as CSA is socially relevant to the challenges of food security and sustainable cities.

The second aspect relates to the environmental trend, which is concerned with the threat of climate change. The need to feed an increasing population on shrinking natural resources will require to step out of the conventional production and consumption methods and steer those patterns toward sustainable processes (O'Hara and Stagl (2001). The conventional food system continues to deplete natural resources for production purposes (e.g: generating land conversion habitat loss, soil degradation) and poison the environment (pesticides, water pollution, carbon emissions for production and transport etc..) which ultimately stand against sustainable goals for the food system and sustainable goals for consumers (Cohen and Reynolds, 2014). Evaluating food alternatives which are alleviating some of the current burdens on the environment is thus relevant to the issue of finding sustainable pathways for food production and consumption.

The third aspect is concerned with cultural trends whereby ongoing changes in food consumption patterns (e.g with the rising interest for local, organic, fair-trade, vegan products) are gradually changing the preferences and value-system of consumers; thus in turn shaping the food provision system overtime (Chase and Grubinger, 2014). As Robinson (2003) reminds, the social and environmental requirements of our time will not be solve through technical fix but through radical societal transformations. Those transformations can occur through cultural shifts when new meanings and habits are harnessed as part of consumers’ preferences (e.g becoming vegetarian) thus making the food market adapt to meet consumers’ expectations (e.g providing more varied vegetarian
products). This aspect is relevant to understand the ways in which culture and values are influencing food provision and consumption patterns and the degree to which AFNs could enact a radical societal transformation, being driven by a new set of values and preferences which differ from those supported by the mainstream food agro-industrial system.

Alternative local food networks suggest a shift from food as commodity to food as being embedded in community (Starr, 2010). Indeed, alternative food networks such as community-supported agriculture are driven by a will to de-commodify food and the land, and a goal to create an economic space where social divisions can be eroded rather than accentuated (Schnell, 2007). This leads to the fourth aspect conferring social relevance to this research: the capacity for community involvement in local food processes (from production to consumption) and for local empowerment. Understanding the ways in which people can have agency at the local level and re-write their relationship with food, in line with their values and goals, — while simultaneously thinking of the ways in which people are constrained in their ability to make ‘conscious’ food choices, constitute an important entry point when thinking about the politics being the food system.
II. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The need for a sustainable food transition

“Food becomes a signifier for political, social and ecological struggles that are otherwise easily ignored”

Goodman (1999)

The food system can be perceived as a catalyst for many issues going on in the world today such as the depletion of natural resources for agricultural purposes or the asymmetrical power between those who can access fresh, healthy and nutritious food and those who cannot. Those issues are leading to unsustainable production and consumption patterns; with at the two end of the spectrum overconsumption and underconsumption (Robinson, 2003). Current trends of population growth and climate change are putting unprecedented pressures on the food system to ensure that the near 10 billions people expected for 2050 will be ensure access to food that will not compromise their health or the health of the planet (Holden and al. 2017). The current food system is driven by productivity and characterised by the search for profits, efficiency and short-term planning (Goodman and al. 2012). Those aspirations are in opposition with the need to acknowledge the environmental and social challenges inherent to the food system, challenges that crucially need to be addressed and supported to steer food production and consumption toward a sustainable path (Chase and Grubinger, 2014). Therefore, current neoliberal industrial models structuring food systems need to be altered if we are to progress on the goals set by the Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nation by 2030. Traditional top-down approaches are failing to initiate a transition toward sustainable food systems due to political and economic interests and an overall lack of priority given to safeguard the commons. For this reason, bottom-up alternatives food networks appear as a promising niche to enact changes in the food system (Veen and al. 2012). Initiatives that are emerging at the grassroots level have the benefits of being carried by a local vision while enabling the empowerment of local actors. Alternative food initiatives relying on strong social networks are providing both producers and consumers with alternatives to the mainstream food system by changing the way food can be produced, processed, distributed, bought and consumed (Tregear, 2011). Alternative food initiatives are far from being homogenous but at the core of their value-system lies a convergent call for sustainable transition (Wald and Hill, 2016). Such transition toward sustainable food patterns will not be achieve through a technical fix, as prophesied by the technocratic industrial ideology, but through a deep socio-cultural transformation allowing individuals to (re)connect with food and the way they think about it. By being small-scale, decentralised and localised, alternative food networks have the capacity to provide entry points for individuals interested by food sustainability and sustainable food consumption patterns; while also showing opportunities for larger scale transformations in the food system (Harris, 2010).
2.2 Alternative food networks

Alternative food networks (AFNs) have emerged as a response to the multifaceted contradictions of the unsustainable food system and the exploitative trading relations embedded in the global supply chains that support its growth and (extended) reproduction (Goodman and al., 2012). A general definition for AFNs is given by Jarosz whereby they are “commonly defined by attributes such as the spatial proximity between farmers and consumers, the existence of retail venues such as farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) and a commitment to sustainable food production and consumption.” (2008). The focus of AFNs is made on ensuring the viability and vibrancy of local and/or regional food network among all stakeholders (e.g suppliers, producers, workers, retailers and consumers) (Ibid, 2008). Fundamental to their vision, AFNs business model gives customers the opportunity to perceive themselves (and be perceived by producers) as actively involved in value co-creation processes (Brunori and al, 2012). Alternative food initiatives (AFIs) can be seen as operating under the broad umbrella of AFNs. The impact of those initiatives can be seen with the increase in sales of food that are local, regional, seasonal, organic and fair trade. AFNs constitute a flow of food products that connect people who are concerned with producing and consuming food in ways that are countering the dominant (or conventional) industrial market logic (Maye and Kirwan, 2013, Whatmore and al, 2006) (see table 1).

AFNs, through their alternative food initiatives, are far from homogeneous. (Wald and Hill, 2016). They reflect however a common interest toward promoting local food that is both healthy and sustainable and that participate to more direct relationships between producers, consumers and the land. Local food can be defined as: “a system of producing, processing, and trading, primarily of organic and sustainable forms of food production, where the physical and economic activity is largely contained and controlled within the locality or region where it was produced, which delivers health, economic, environmental and social benefits to the communities in those areas.” (Holt, 2005). The quality of alternative food products derived from AFNs distinguish them from other products that are supplied by supermarket chains and mainstream food manufacturers (Martinez et al, 2010). Incentives are made not only on the values and expectations for product themselves (the way they are produced and consumed, if there’s an internalisation of the “true” cost of food..) but also on non-market values (such as the impact of those products on local empowerment, local economies and community cohesion). Contradictions and controversies about food are creating new impetus toward supporting and enabling initiatives that promote sustainable and healthy local consumption patterns (Harris, 2010).

Two key aspects are inherent to AFNs: short food supply chains (SFSCs) and social embeddedness. First, SFSCs is concerned with creating supply chains that endorse a transparent value-laden information in regards to the type of production practiced, the origin and overall quality of the production (Veen et al, 2012). Those short supply chains involve a limited number of economic actors who are mutually committed through close geographical and social relations between producers and consumers. SFSCs are indeed characterised by direct marketing and face to face inspirations (May and Kirwan, 2013). SFSC has been a popular concept to understand the complexity of food chain analysis.
Social embeddedness refers to the idea that economic behaviour is embedded in, and mediated by, a complex and extensive web of social relations. Academic work focusing on social embeddedness recognises the role of social connectivity and reciprocity as key aspects of both economic life and alternative initiatives. The concept is a relevant tool for AFNs as it allows to explore the complex interplay between the ‘economic’ and ‘social’, and between ‘the politics of scale’ and ‘values’ in food consumption choices. Within AFN, local food economies are directly sustained by interpersonal ties and agricultural initiatives based on trust. Studies have shown that collaboration among local food initiatives adds capacity and builds trust which can eliminates time and costly steps in the food chains; and as a result help save money for both producers and consumers. Innovations arising from AFNs’ efforts and translated in alternatives for local food initiatives reflect a new set of values and expectations away from the corporate mainstream in ways that consumers are encouraged to become aware of the conditions of production behind the products they consume, thus becoming “reflexive consumers”.

Two types of discourses regarding the rise of AFNs are taking place: on the one hand, some scholars are pointing out the failing of grassroots projects due to the power of mainstreaming forces exerted by both a globalising food industry and the ideological influence of liberalism movement. Such critique suggests that AFNs favouring the development of horizontal relationships around food initiatives do not exist in a vacuum but are very much impacted by broader vertical integration of the food chain. They are influenced by institutional and structural forces that might constrain the ability of AFNs to enact real changes in the local food provision system (due to economic, social and political constraints). The monopoly of big multinational corporations is constraining the market opportunities of local small-scale farmers while also influencing consumers food choices toward specific food products which have attractive prices, imageries and convenient delivery methods. This creates power imbalances whereby imported food from the other side of the globe is cheaper and easier to consume than products from nearby farmers. People might value fresh, local and organic food with a transparent production chain but those values might come into friction with their own socio-spatial limitations.

An additional critique relate to the potential exclusionary and elitist nature regarding efforts to relocalise food provisioning. Indeed, May and Kirwan (2013) found a significant limitation in the AFN literature whereby social relations and the social structure behind alternatives food initiatives might be substantially determined by relationship of power and inequality, thus only benefiting those who can afford to pay the price. This challenge of ensuring that localised food system does not only serve the most well-off in society is a central aspect in shaping food provision systems that are: sustainable, accessible and inclusive to people from various socio-spatial background. In this regard, efforts to localise food should be aware of the potential for reflexive politics and ensure that local food processes in production and consumption ensure inclusive and democratic outcomes. Those two aspects are seen as inherent to the potential failure or success of AFNs and suggest the need for increased efforts toward stakeholder inclusion.
On the other hand some scholars are bringing forward the hypothesis that AFNs such as community-based agriculture initiatives could bring the promise of an alternative food movement which could addresses the issues aforementioned in the previous critics through social innovation and networking. Alternative food initiatives hold the potential of providing counter-hegemonic frameworks that are socially and environmentally driven due to their core aspirations of stepping away from industrial logics and mainstream world views about how food should be conceived, produced and consumed.

Table 1: Contrasts in networks between conventional and alternative food system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional</th>
<th>Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Postmodern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufactured/processed</td>
<td>Natural/fresh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass (large-scale) production</td>
<td>Craft/artisanal (small-scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long food supply chains</td>
<td>Short food supply chains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs externalized</td>
<td>Costs internalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationalized</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized</td>
<td>Difference/diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensification</td>
<td>Extensification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monoculture</td>
<td>Biodiversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogenization of foods</td>
<td>Regional palates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypermarkets</td>
<td>Local markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrochemicals</td>
<td>Organic/sustainable farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-renewable energy</td>
<td>Reusable energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food</td>
<td>Slow food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disembedded</td>
<td>Embedded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ilbery and Maye, 2005
2.3 Community-supported agriculture

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) constitute a promising alternative to production and consumption patterns which could have the ability to transform the agricultural system (Guthman, 2004; DeLind, 2002). Indeed, this type of system model transcends conventional boundaries between producer and consumer as well as between rural and urban (Vijfeijken, 2015). Broadly explained, CSA are contractual agreement between farmers and a group of consumers. The latter has agreed to pay a set price (for example prior to the farming season) and in return, receives fresh and local products (e.g weekly baskets of vegetables, fruits or dairies from the farm). By paying for the products in advance, consumers are sharing the costs of production risks and other vulnerabilities (Mink et al, 2017). The CSA approach is unique in that it seeks to reshape the very nature of buying and selling agricultural goods by forming alliances between farmers and consumers (Ostrom, 2007). This model can be perceive as a win-win situation whereby producers can establish long-term relationships of trust with their customers while consumers become aware of the origin and conditions of production behind the products that they consume (Réthy and Deznény, 2013). This way, consumers can participate to the enhancement of local sustainability by supporting local and small-scale producers. Henderson and Van En summed it up as follow: “food producers + food customers + annual commitment to one another = CSA + untold possibilities” (2007, p.p. 3). In the thesis, the phenomenon of CSA will be discussed in term of social innovation (or as a ‘niche’ in Geels & Schot’ term (2008)) in order to analyse the (re)configurations of social practices at the local level; and how those configurations are in turn tackling (or being tackled by) current challenges within the local food system. Seyfang and Smith define social innovations as practices that “lead bottom-up solutions for sustainable development, solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved” (2007).

Critiques have been made about the ability of CSA to enact tangible change on the agricultural system as those initiatives only make a difference for a relatively small amount of individuals located in particular places (Goodman et Al., 2012), or with particular resources and attributes (Guthman, 2011). Because conventional agriculture can produce much more quantity of food due to their intensive industrial methods and due to growing concern about ensuring food security for an increasing population; many doubts remain that CSAs could become realistic options at the large scale (Paarlberg, 2009). However, those critiques should be balanced against the potential ability of CSA to promote a new social economy of food relying on horizontal networks. Through information dissemination, knowledge sharing and collective approaches to local issues, CSA could also be anticipated to hold a multiplier effect and thus weight in the debate of viable alternatives to the conventional food system. The benefits of CSA lies in the direct relation between producers and consumers resulting in a set of functions and trust as a kind of guarantee system which reduces the need for global certification labels, lowers production costs and increases the autonomy of locally set quality standards (Heyland, 2017).
2.4 CSA as grassroots initiatives

Grassroots initiatives are defined as “groups of people trying to create solutions to challenges as they see them, adhering to criteria that diverge from mainstream institutions and practically expressing core social values” (Gernert et al., 2018). Grabs et al. further define grassroots initiatives as “including any type of collaborative social undertaking that is organised at the local community level, has a high degree of participatory decision-making and flat hierarchies” (2016, p. 100). Grassroots initiatives generally engage the voluntary contribution of time and resources of the organisations’ members to achieve a particular shared cause (Ibid, 2016). In this regard, grassroots initiatives are collective and participatory processes occurring and being strengthen at the local level. Grassroots initiatives, as radical niches of innovation and experimentation, can act as incubators of social change by providing alternative strategies to deal with pressures such as environmental change (Feola and Nunes, 2014). They can provide alternative to systems provision such as by developing their own local food systems. This is based on the premise that grassroots individuals have together the knowledge, tools and capabilities required to enable their own innovative solutions (Smith et al. 2017).

The aim of grassroots initiatives is to help others access the mechanisms for building alternatives in order to improve the quality of life of local residents. (Gernert et al., 2018) The scale and vision of grassroots initiatives can vary, but their nature is usually defined by the fact that they are acting autonomously from the state which suggests a divergence in development interests, away from profits and political gains toward social and environmental goals. As a result, the most prominent role of grassroots initiatives lies in enabling transformations in the values and beliefs surrounding regime systems (e.g food system); by putting knowledge and drive into action. What is particularly significant with grassroots initiatives is their capacity to control both the processes and outcomes of their work (Ibid, 2018). Grassroots initiatives related to local agriculture could provide an empirical ground where new social, environmental and economic opportunities could arise in a value-oriented way. In the Netherlands, grassroots initiatives are increasingly being regarded as a promising form of local development (Boon & Dieperink, 2014).

2.5 Food Politics and scales

Critics have pointed out that much of the work on AFNs have “taken-for-granted set of assumptions about the naturalness of spatial scales that treats the local and the global as ontologically given categories around which to contest the politics of food” (Wald and Hill, 2016). Scales are understood here as holding both dynamic and fixed features whereby local food is dependent on the socio-spatial characteristics present at the local scale while also being greatly influenced by global scale processes (e.g liberal market logics). Those features of scales are important to understand the role of food systems in regards to the ability of producers to sustain their business despite the stranglehold of big food corporations over the market and in regards to the ability of consumers to make choices in line with their value system. The possibilities for resistance are often contingent to the socio-spatial aspects of the politics of scale, thus food choices on the consumer side do
not occur in a vacuum but are often constrained by several variables (e.g. accessibility, prices, time). Scale, according to Wald and Hill (2016), is the result of a process of contestation as the scale at which food processes takes place should be seen as connected to larger societal and economic struggles. Focusing on scaling the dominant economic, social and political processes occurring at the local level allows to gain insights on the ways particular aspects of food production and consumption are controlled. As mentioned previously, CSA are grassroots initiatives which are proposing new forms of collaborative and participatory approaches focusing on value co-creation processes at the local scale. This represent a cultural shift toward an horizontal integration of the food chain based on trust and reciprocity; a shift that still has to compromise with the economic, social and spatial context in which food consumption choices occur, as well as with the different food scales that are impacting local food systems.

2.6 Beyond physical boundaries: fixing food with the concept of place

The role of place is particularly significant to the understanding of the multiple scales of human-environment-food interactions. Local food is indeed much more than the physical distance between the production and consumption sites as it encompasses questions of how to relate to a place, how to responsibly belong to and identify with a place (Schnell, 2013). Thus, central to the understanding of the embeddedness of food is the understanding of place itself. CSA initiatives offer the possibility to connect social and economic relationships to the physical reality of place. Place in this regard is not incidental to the construction of "local food" imaginaries, it is central to it (Schnell, 2013). As Casey (2001) has argued, “there is no place without self and no self without place”. In this view, local food consumption cannot be reduced to a generic understanding but should harness with it particular contexts, embedded with particular practices and particular people: that is to say, eating from a particular place. Food thus become a key part of the narrative that establishes connections to a place (Schnell, 2013). Indeed, “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan 1977, p. 6). Concepts of 'local' and 'place' are increasingly being used as practical efforts to repair the social and environmental harms of placeless foodscape — and create value in the process (Hinrichs, 2015). In this view, increased attention is given to proximity, as a response to the distancing between food and consumers generated by global food systems.

Proximity can be divided into three categories regarding to local food: (I) geographical proximity (produces are grown and processed where it is consumed) (II) relational proximity (direct social interactions between producers and consumers) and (III) proximity of values (such as traceability, quality, authenticity, sustainable practices..) (Hinrichs, 2015). Through relations of proximity within a particular place, food becomes a mean by which people recognise themselves as part a broader community, environment and economy. As Born and Purcell (2006) cautioned, proximity does not always results in benefits or repair but depends on the capacity of a particular place to realise specific strategic goals. They coined the term 'local trap' to illustrate the tendency to embrace local-level planning and organisation uncritically. Nevertheless the resurgence of 'local' with its central focus on place appear as a logical countermovement for those with anti-corporate and anti-globalisation ideals. In regards to CSA initiatives, the aim is to de-commodify food and the land in the intent of reconstituting rooted connections with a particular place (Starr, 2010). Fixing food with the idea of place embraces more than spatial components such as distance and boundaries but encompasses the many elements that render a place unique (e.g physical environment, biodiversity, people, values, traditions, specific practices...).
2.7 Food sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty emerged as an alternative paradigm with strong sentiments against corporate-led globalisation and with emphasis on local-level democratic control over production (Jarosz 2014). Movements of people across the world are fighting for food sovereignty such as La Via Campesina which is one of the largest social movements in the world, bringing together more than 200 million small and medium-scale farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous peoples, migrants and agricultural workers from 70 countries (Via Campesina, 2019). This international movement has since 1996 promoted the “right to feed oneself” which encompasses several aspects such as land rights, agro-ecological practices, domestic market protections and cultural preferences (Starr, 2010). A common definition for the concept was given at the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali, 2007 stating that “food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” (La Vía Campesina, 2007).

Food sovereignty can be framed as a form of localism, whereby sovereignty is regained over the economy and the food production (Hess, 2008). Six defining principles have been developed throughout the International food sovereignty movement whereby food sovereignty: (I) focuses on food for people (II) values food providers (III) localises food systems (IV) puts control locally (V) builds knowledge and skills and (VI) works with nature (Global Justice Now, 2019). At the core, food sovereignty implies new set of social relationships that aim to be free from oppression and inequality for all people, racial groups, social classes and generations (Nyeleni 2007). The concept of food sovereignty provides an interesting lens to understand power dynamics within the food system which could help evaluate the politics behind food. As Micheletti (2003) argues, considering political consumption allows to “politicise what we have traditionally conceived as private consumer choice and erases the division between the political and economic spheres”, thus challenging the views of politics as only been constrained to a political system and attached to the nation-state. By rethinking what is meant by political participation, new normative understandings can be made which include concepts such of “responsibility taking” and “virtue traditions” (Ibid, 2003). To sum up, food sovereignty emphasises the positive synergies between agriculture, social justice, dignity and the conservation of nature (La Vía Campesina, 2010).

2.8 The concept of sustainability and its manifestation at the local level

In spite of decades of research, sustainable development remains a contested concept that fails to be theoretically defined or internationally approved. Indeed, the concept of sustainable development has been shaped overtime by long standing debates concerning the goals and the means necessary to foster transformative change. (Hopwood and al, 2003) Those debates arise from different theories who themselves have contesting views
about the means required to deal with environmental and socio-economic issues, as well as the end goals that those means should serve. The most common definition stems from *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report, which interprets sustainable development as a “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*” (UN, 2018) The work of the UN Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) has been a landmark in framing sustainable development while steering its goals toward answering the needs for global forms of human development and natural resources management. The report led to the first Earth Summit, ‘the UN Conference on Environment and Development’, at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which resulted in the formulation of Agenda 21 (UN, 2018). When introducing the report, Gro Harlem Brundtland stated: “the environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions and needs. (…) It is where we all live; and “development” is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable.” (Brundtland, 2018). The report was a milestone because for one of the first time, the correlation between environment health and the viability of social life was being acknowledged. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to harness sustainable development themes from the Brundtland report in its political agenda, with the subsequent report ‘Care for tomorrow’ (“Zorgen voor morgen”; RIVM 1988) creating the foundations for the first National Environmental Policy Plan (Hoppe and Coenen, 2011). The plan emphasised the significance of getting local governments involved in order to achieve national policy plans. The need to give more importance to local governments is emphasised in several international documents, such as in the chapter 28 of Agenda 21 stressing that such focus is significant on the premise that direct linkages exist between local governments and the citizenry; and that development issues are first manifest at the local level (Ibid, 2011). When sustainability is being developed at the local level, strategic opportunities for development can occur due to the intrinsic differences existing between local and national levels in dealing with development problems and solutions (see table 2).

**Table 2. Differences between sustainability at national/regional level and local level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldview characteristics</th>
<th>Sustainability in national/regional level</th>
<th>Sustainability in local level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthropocentric</td>
<td>Biocentric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational individuals</td>
<td>Collective action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of economy</td>
<td>Economic growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralized</td>
<td>Qualitative development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of problem and solution</td>
<td>Supply problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demand Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technocratic</td>
<td>Social relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of EIA, cost-benefit analysis</td>
<td>Small scale decentralization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Self-sufficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Connelly, Markey, et al, 2011)

For Holden the imperatives of sustainable development are articulated around three key aspects and can be applied to both national and local levels: (I) satisfying human needs (II) ensuring social equity and (III) respecting environmental limits. (2017) Those development focuses suggest a shift from development as ‘growth’, to development as the
satisfaction of needs, equity and respect of the environment (Ibid, 2017). Sustainability will have succeed when it will become normalised in society to the point that it is the default behaviour in any circumstance — with shared values and principles guiding local development. In regards to food systems, the analysis of the concept of local sustainability could be structured around three key aspects namely: environmental impacts, social impacts and economic impacts (see figure 1) The first aspect is concerned with ensuring that food production does not compromise natural resources (e.g. land, air, water) in order to ensure the safeguarding of future generations’ needs. Several impacts can be taken into account such as the carbon footprint, the water footprint, the biodiversity, animal and plant health or food loss and waste (FAO, 2014). The second aspect is concerned with the social aspect of food systems, whereby sustainable food should be accessible and inclusive to all. Finally, the focus on economic sustainability suggests the need for the stimulation of innovative business activities with return of profits from investments. If carefully designed, local food system could indeed be consistent with building dynamic provision systems, inclusive societies and sustainable environments. The shaping of those developments could be owned through participatory processes whereby local capabilities and initiatives around food production and consumption could be enhanced and coordinated at the grassroots/local level — while ideally being further supported by institutions, stakeholders and food policy-makers in the future and at larger scales.

**Figure 1.** Sustainability in local food system

![Figure 1](image_url)

*Adapted from FAO, 2018*
2.9 Strategic Niche Management and Multi-Level Perspective

In order to assess the potential of CSAs in influencing local food systems, the Strategic Niche Management (SNM) approach will be used (see figure 2). This approach is an analytic tool which helps understand the development of socio-technological innovations (Kemp et al., 1998). SNM can be relied on in parallel with the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) which aims to understand and guide sustainable transitions (Smith et al., 2005). By situating niches against dominant regimes, both approaches aim to grasp how niches can develop beyond the dominant regime (Loorbach, 2007). Those approaches are based on three levels interacting with each other: the socio-technical regime, the niche and the socio-technical landscape (Kemp et al., 1998). The socio-technical regime refers to “the ‘deep structure’ which account for the stability of an existing socio-technical system” (Geels, 2010, p. 27). The food production sector is an example of a socio-technical regime. Within the regime, several social rules and practices are developed and maintained (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). These rules channel the actions and behaviour of actors (i.e relative the production/consumption of food) in such way that they often constrains the opportunity for alternatives (Geels, 2010; Raven et al., 2010). As such, the current food system is maintained through intensive production modes, consumers preferences, governmental policies and market rules. Changes in the system can be slow to occur due to those factors; a slow motion which does not translate the urgency to steer the food system toward a sustainable path. Thus, a system-wide transformation from outside the regime is required to change the regime (Seyfang et al., 2014). Such transformation is anticipated to take place from the niche level, and in the research, from grassroots initiatives. Because the niche level is not institutionally constrained, innovative strategies can be explore. Niches develop by the means of local projects, linked together by networks and intermediary organisations (Schot & Geels, 2008; Seyfang et al., 2014). Finally, the landscape level refers to the larger context influencing specific sets of dynamics at both the niche and the regime level (e.g political or economic context, normative values..) (Geels, 2002). By means of interaction between the different levels, a regime change — or transition — can occur. Those approaches are expected to be useful to understand whether community- supported agriculture, if adequately supported by stakeholders, could transform or alter the current food system. The literature identified three key processes influencing the successful emergence and growth of niches. Those processes depends on: (1) the management of expectations, (2) the development of social networks, and (3) the learning processes (Kemp et al, 1998; Schot & Geels, 2008). When grassroots initiatives encompass those factors, it is assumed that they could have the potential to constitute a niche and as a result influence the regime. Relying on those processes could help identify the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of particular community- supported agriculture initiatives occurring the Netherlands.
Figure 2. Relation between niche, regime and landscape level

(Sources from: Gernet et al., 2018; Göepel, 2016; Geels, 2010)
Increasing structuration of activities in local practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-questions</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CSA: niches characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How CSA practices emerge and sustain overtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Capacities for co-existence with the mainstream regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Future of CSA and impacts on the socio-technical landscape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Methodology

3.1. Research strategy

The orientation of the research is focused on being exploratory. Exploratory research can be defined by a set of three main goals: “(1) to scope out the magnitude or extent of a particular phenomenon, problem, or behaviour, (2) to generate some initial ideas (or “hunches”) about that phenomenon, and (3) to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study regarding that phenomenon.” (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The research methodology relied on mixed methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the attractiveness and viability of CSA initiatives. A range of methods were used for the data collection such as desk-based analysis, surveys, participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews. Those methods allowed for complex analyses of often non-quantifiable cause-and-effect processes which suits the exploratory nature of the research (Garbarino and Holland, 2009). The research does not indeed pretend to provide conclusive answers but aims to explore the research topic through varying levels of depth (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2001). The three strategies employed were to first investigate consumers’ views on CSA and local food, second to grasp the values and logistics behind the emergence and stabilisation of CSA initiatives and third to triangulate findings with desk-based analysis in order to assess the viability of CSA and evaluate their capacity to transform the current food system.

3.2. Research methods

The research relies on desk-based document analysis, surveys, participant observation and in-depth interviews to explore the research question and sub-questions. The data collected uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to ground people’s experiences and interpretations relative to local food system and CSA with facts and figures. Qualitative methods are described as “inductive, with the purpose of describing multiple realities, developing deep understanding, and capturing everyday life and human perspectives.” (Trumbull, 2005). Given the exploratory nature of the research both producers and consumers needed to be reached out to address the several facets of CSA initiatives. From the consumer side, 100 surveys were gathered in addition to 10 in-depth interviews. The qualitative data was coded and analysed while the quantitative data was turned into graphs and figures in order to better visualise trends and in the intent of generalising findings (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2001). Due to the low rate of returns in regards to producers’ interviews (only one farmer responded out of the 15 contacted) the research relied on desk-based analysis for two out of the three CSA cases studied. The cases-studied are detailed in the section below. In addition to those methods, participant observation was conducted during the months of the research through farms’ visits, open days, regional food markets, food events and informal conversations with actors involved in local food systems. According to De Walt and De Walt (2002) the goal of participant
observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study. Field notes were taken to keep track of the informations gathered informally and/or observed.

Overview of methods used:

- (100) surveys from consumers about food consumption patterns and CSA
- (10) in-depth interviews from consumers about local food consumption and CSA
- (3) case-studies of CSA initiatives in the Netherlands
- (1) in-depth interview with CSA farmer
- Desk-based analysis
- Participant observation

Surveys

The surveys are based on a mixed quantitative-qualitative design. The questionnaire asked respondents open-questions, closed questions and ask them to scale the factors influencing their food purchases. Respondents from the surveys are young adults (between the age of 18 and 30 years old) who have been living in the Netherlands for more than 6 months. The strategy used with this method was snowball recruitment in order to identify study participants with those specific characteristics. The snowball technique relied on the use of several informal (online) social networks to spread the surveys, as a mean to increase the variety in the social context of participants (Hennink et al., 2011). This sample was selected on the basis that the age group is relevant to the topic as respondents constitute a new wave of consumers who are influencing the food provision system through their food preferences and choices of purchase. The majority of them were students (79% of them) and were expected to have some knowledge and insight about the concept of sustainability. Students are predicted to be in the stage of personal development where they can establish a personal framework of values and beliefs on which they will base their future (food) decisions and behaviour (Lustermans, 2016). This age group was also more easily reachable via the use of online surveys spread through social media which allowed for a substantial amount of data to be collected within a short time span. The criteria of having lived in the Netherlands for more than 6 months was significant for the research, as after this time period, consumers can be expected to have develop consumption habits based on their local knowledge and preference for certain types of provision systems (e.g having experienced different shops and/or initiatives and coming back to them on a regular basis due to personal preference). The limits of the
surveys were found in evaluating the context and causality behind the informations gathered from respondents as they shared their own insights on their food consumption patterns. For this reason, this method was used as complementary to the literature and the interviews.

**In-depth Interviews**

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate to an interview in order to share their views on local food production and consumption and more specifically on the concept of 'local'. A sample of 10 people was selected from the 16 people who responded being willing to participate to the interview. The initial intention was to select 5 men and 5 women from diverse background to gain as much representativity as possible. The selection aimed to be randomised but due to outreach issues (with 3 out of the 10 people selected who ended up being unavailable), the selection was mostly purposive. The 10 respondents selected all had a different nationality which was interpreted as beneficial to understand the diversity of perspectives regarding food and locality. The number of 10 respondents was enough to not hear recurrent information from participants which is referred to as 'information saturation' by Hennink et al. (2011). This method was useful to engage in-depth with participants about their personal views, subsequently allowing to capture individual narrative and subjectivity. The open and flexible nature of this method allowed participants to share their view on the nature and characteristics of local food.

The interviews varied from 45 to 90 minutes; they were then transcribed, coded and analysed. In addition to interviews with local consumers, one in-depth interview was conducted with a farmer from one of the CSA initiative Twee Linden in order to gain insights from a local producer’ view. The farmer was seen as a gatekeeper playing an important intermediary role between the research and the studied community (Hennink et al., 2011). The farmer allowed the gathering of valuable information regarding local community and local food patterns, as being at both ends of the food production and consumption spectrum. In regards to the data collection process, participants to the in-depth interviews and the surveys were ensured confidentiality and anonymity if desired. The names used in the thesis have been changed accordingly. In addition, there was an oral informed consent for the interviews. All this together means that were no ethical issues during the data collection process (Hennink et al., 2011).

### 3.3. Validity and reliability of the research

The construct validity usually indicates the operational measures for the concepts (Yin, 2009). One method to verify the construct validity of data is to have a triangulation verification to encourage convergent lines of inquiry (Kumar, 2014). Triangulation verification means to rely on multi-resource, multi-methods and multi-respondents, in order to ensure that different sources of data come validate the findings. The data gathered in fieldwork was triangulated with secondary data from reliable sources such as scientific articles, regulations, statistics and reports, which ensure a certain degree of reliability for
the research (Bryman, 2008). The quality of the research can be evaluated based on several criteria from social research: internal validity, external validity and reliability. First, the internal validity is concerned with establishing causal relationships between two or more variables (Ibid, 2008). Given the exploratory status of the study and the first attempts to grasp the factors influencing local food consumption, the internal validity of the research is low. Second, the external validity asks from the research how generalisable are the (potential) causal relationship across persons, settings, and times (Drost, 2011). The external validity of this research can be judged as medium, as general conclusions can be drawn for the population target of 18 to 30 years old consumers due to the size of the sample (100 respondents). The outcomes can only be generalise to the same population and do not represent the views and preferences of other consumers (younger, older, living in a different place...). The research reviews consumption patterns in specific places and in specific networks of local social relations. In this regard, the local experiences and their understanding by consumers are qualitatively different from those experiences at other geographic scales (Tuan, 1977). Finally the reliability of this study is concerned with the replicability of the methods used. Reliability relates to the consistency of measurement, or to the stability of measurement over a variety of conditions in which basically the same results should be obtained (Nunnally, 1978). Providing that the context, topic of study and population target remain the same, the procedures, if reproduced, should generate similar outcomes.
IV. Setting the context

Country profile, location of CSA & population targets

4.1 Country Profile

The Netherlands has a highly developed agro-food industry complex and is a leading country in terms of food production and trade. The Dutch agriculture is divided into three broad areas of production: crop, dairy and livestock and horticulture (Lintsen et al. 2018). The moderate climate of the country, its fertile soil and flat land offer the near perfect conditions for farming. But with a total land area of 33,893 square km and a population of 17 millions people, the Netherlands would not appear at first as having the necessary resources for large-scale production (CIA, 2018). However, the country places itself as the number two exporter of agricultural products, second only to the United States, which has 270 times its landmass (Viviano, 2017) In 2017, the Netherlands broke its own export
record by exporting 91.7 billion euros, an increase of 7 percent by comparison to the previous year (Government.nl, 2018). The country has more than 55 percent of agricultural land and most exported products are fresh fruits, vegetables (e.g. first exporter of onions and chilies), dairies and eggs, meat and numerous kinds of flowers (CIA, 2018). The Netherlands also exports a wide variety of agricultural technology, ranging from greenhouse lighting, robotics, and irrigation systems to drought-resistant seeds. (Lindenthal et al., 2018)

The country has been successfully capitalising on technology and innovation to increase productivity and profitability, becoming a model in Europe and overseas. The efficient Dutch infrastructure (e.g. ports, airports) and transport system play a pivotal role in facilitating the routing of products at a high pace. Dutch techniques of specialisation and intensification have been proven favourable for large-scale production, with for example the adoption of greenhouses. The reliance on greenhouses has been instrumental to the strides made in Dutch agricultural development. Indeed, greenhouses have allowed producers to adopt year-long climate-controlled agriculture which greatly stimulated the growth of yields. Greenhouses have the advantages of extending the growing seasons, protecting the production from pests and predators, reducing the need for water, energy and pesticides while allowing the producers to customise their greenhouse according to their needs. The OECD report of 2015 found that the Netherlands has managed to maintain and even increase its agricultural production while reducing the required input. For example, since 2000, Dutch farmers have managed to reduce their dependency on water by as much as 90 percent (Viviano, 2017). Based on the Total Factor Productivity (TFP), which analyses the total output growth relative to the input of labor and capital, the Netherlands were found having a productivity level that is five times higher than the European average (OECD, 2015).

The country is not only a leader in agricultural export and trading, but also reputed for its extended and up-to-date agricultural knowledge. The university of Wageningen, nestled in Food Valley, is regarded as the world’s top agricultural research institution. The work from the university has been key to the development of the Netherlands' agricultural systems and processes while also benefiting other countries around the globe through the development of various programs (e.g. rice innovation in India, artificial insemination for dairy breeders in Kenya or water quality in Bangladesh). According to Wagemans (2009), the main issue with Dutch agriculture is that most efforts are concentrated on the economic sustainability of the country through the strengthening of exportation and trading processes as well as through the safeguarding of the competitive position of Dutch farmers in the world market. Those economic interests are rendering the prospect of developing more local and short food chains difficult. The number of small farms (under 10 hectares) has declined by 56 percent, from 59,310 farms in 1990 to 26,190 farms in 2015. On the other hand, the number of large farms has increased by 3.5 times, from 690 farms in 1990 to 2,390 farms in 2015 (Van Veen et al. 2018). In the current system, land and subsidies are mainly allocated to those who can extract the most money from the ground (Ibid, 2018). This system is the result of policy choices that are rewarding economies of scale and liberalisation over sustainable land use (Veen et al, 2012).

Small farmers with values favouring sustainable practices are often constrained by the fact that those preservation efforts are not captured in the market price of land, thus disadvantaging farmers. Access to land has become a growing issue in the Netherlands,
with first a very limited availability for a high price; and second the uncertainty of security of tenure for new farmers leasing the land. A survey carried by Toekomstboeren, an initiative that aims to strengthen sustainable and socially responsible agriculture, found that only 13 percent of the new farmers surveyed owned the land they were working on, 15 percent were under a multi-annual lease contract and 72 percent had contracts of less than a year — or no contracts at all (Toekomstboeren, 2018). Those findings suggest alarming outcomes for new farmers, with mainly the fact that the lack of security of tenure makes it difficult for them to develop a strong consumer base and to engage in sustainable agriculture. Farmers will indeed be less likely to invest their time, money and ideas in their business and their land if they are unsure about being able to reap the rewards of their efforts. As a result, the current policies do not seem to support the flourishing of small scale innovation thus rendering the agricultural system less diverse and less resilient.

4.2 Overview of the three CSA cases: exploring the niches

Three initiatives of CSA were selected to explore niche development in the local food regime of the Netherlands. Two of them are located in North Brabant while the third one is located in Gelderland. The selection was based on several factors such as the fact that: those initiatives were small-scaled (between 2 and 6 hectares), producing locally grown vegetables, the fact that they had an organic certification, more than a 200 consumers-base, a strong commitment to sustainable development and that they were situated within a 55 km radius from Nijmegen. The following section provides an overview of those initiatives, their organisational characteristics and the values behind their businesses; to understand how those niches emerged and sustain overtime. As Rotmans et al. (2010) explains, niches are were local alliances are created to stimulate innovation and where experimentations take place. Those initiatives provide insights on the opportunities and challenges of alternative food systems in regards to their integration to bigger socio-economic food networks.
Map.2 Locations of the three initiatives in the Netherlands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSA initiative</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Biologisch Tuinderij de Twee Linden</td>
<td>Reek, North Brabant</td>
<td>&gt; 2 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biologisch Tuinderij de Antoniushoeve</td>
<td>Croy, North Brabant</td>
<td>6 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biologische Tuinderij de Lijsterbes</td>
<td>Groesbeek, Gelderland</td>
<td>4.5 hectares</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Biologisch Tuinderij Twee Linden can be found in Reek, a village in the Dutch province of North Brabant. It is located in the municipality of Landerd, about 3 km east of Schaijk. Since 1992, Meino the owner has been cultivating organic vegetables on open ground and in his 1000m² greenhouses. The total area used for production is of almost 2 hectares. Throughout the year, Meino produces around 40 different types of vegetables without using chemical-synthetic pesticides. There, cultivation is done according to the requirements of organic farming. In total, the organisation proposes three different types of packages: vegetables, fruits and potatoes. As the owner explained, his company was one of the first to propose a combination of the three packages as he thought it would be easier for consumers to purchase all produces in one place at a more advantageous price.
Prices of weekly packages:

1-person: €8.75 (fruits and vegetables): 6 to 7 different products per week
2- person: €8.75 (vegetables)
3- to 4- person: €12.5 (vegetables)

Currently they have around 550 customers to whom they deliver packages every week. The number has been fluctuating overtime but since its start, Twee Linden had around 2,500 customers in its system. The organisation started by delivering packages near Reek, before gradually extending its sector to other places such as Nijmegen, Oss, Grave or Uden. In total, they have 25 collections points in 16 places around the Netherlands, where customers can pick up their vegetable package. Customers subscribe for a payment period of 8 weeks which allows the farmer to anticipate demands and organise the production accordingly.

Twee Linden is partnering with Ekoplaza, a Dutch chain of organic food supermarkets which offer them a notable selling platform. In addition to the packages, they have a local farm shop attached to their houses, next to the fields, where people can come pick their vegetables or fruits. The store has the particularity of being self-managed, meaning that there is no one in the store when customers are doing their shopping. This system emphasises the importance of trust among the producer and his customers, which is an important aspect of CSA’s ideology — aiming to create strong social ties within a business context. Twee Linden organises yearly open day events where people can come and visit the fields and greenhouses, share some freshly cooked food from the production, some ideas and recipes and feel part of a same community. A newsletter is sent to members every 8 weeks to keep them informed about the company’s development and events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 3.</strong></th>
<th>Facts Twee Linden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Reek, North Brabant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start year</strong></td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>small-scale and varied horticultural business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of participants</strong></td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Produce</strong></td>
<td>Organic vegetable (+40 types), fruits, onions, potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price of packages</strong></td>
<td>1-person : €8.75 (vegetable / fruit combination) 2-person : €8.75 (vegetable) 3 to 4-person: €12.50 (vegetable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>2 members + 1 person helping during the harvest season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subscription</strong></td>
<td>8 weeks period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital</strong></td>
<td>Investment from producer and capital from memberships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1 a) Organisational characteristics

Meino is in charge of the production side of the company while his wife Antoinette deals with the administrative aspects of the package delivery such as the orders and the payment. To assist them during the peak season, they also have an employee who helps Meino with the planting, harvesting and handling of products. Both Meino and Antoinette are in charge of the company which enables them to control the financial budget, the membership prices, their income, the produces they cultivate as well as the events they organise. At the beginning, in order to acquire the land and invest in it, Meino was working two different jobs in addition to doing the harvesting work. As he explained, those efforts paid off and the company started to build up and extend its customer base.

4.2.1 b) Farmer’ insights on the current food systems

As Meino explained while we took a tour around the fields: “the food system as it is now is completely out of balance, people assume that what they get from supermarkets is good but they don’t actually know where their food comes from. They have lost the connection to food, and supermarkets take advantage of it, trying to make money out of it. And it is threatening for the future, especially when they follow hyped trends like with organic products. It’s too cheap and doesn’t reflect the true cost of the products. It’s threatening farmers who are trying to make a living within this competition” (Interview, 2019). Four key aspects were addressed by Meino: (1) the lack of transparency of produces from big food chains (e.g about the quality, origin, nutritional content), (2) the fact that the current food system doesn’t not internalise the true cost of produces (e.g impacts on the environment), (3) the reality that it is difficult for farmers to catch up with the prices proposed in supermarkets (e.g with organic products for example) and (4) the acknowledgement that there is a lost connection between food and consumers. CSA aims to overcome those four issues derived from the current food system in the intent of promoting healthy produces which are sold at a fair price to knowledgeable consumers; for farmers to have fair wages and for them to be able to internalise external costs relative to food production.

4.2.1 c) Farmer’ insights on the CSA system

For him, CSA is the best system when thinking about the future of food, because both producers and consumers share the outcomes of the production. He emphasises that “people don’t just stand for themselves but also for the farmers. At the end, you connect
with each other and it creates some kind of mutual dependency” (Interview, 2019). He explained that doing CSA farming allowed him to have the freedom to lead his small company, to emphasise in his work the importance of nature and diversity and to produce quality food. Some challenges were evoked such as the fact that “to develop your company, you need enough financially freedom and some delivery modes do not reward as much. Especially in the lower season in the winter, you have to adapt and sometimes purchase from other producers” (Interview, 2019). CSA farmers have indeed to compose with several variables (weather, seasons, pests…) to keep the packages well filled all year long. Seasonal irregularities (e.g. drought, flooding…) can be difficult to deal with for small producers. This is when the CSA logic becomes interesting: if the season is not good and the packages tend to be less filled (e.g during the winter), when the season gets better (e.g during Spring) the customer gets more. “That’s the best way I think because the costs are shared and not only on the shoulders of the farmer. There’s currently a lack of acknowledgment of this but if you explain it to people, most of them understand” (Interview, 2019). Because in the current food system most of those variables are hidden from consumers, little care is given to the reality behind producing food: that it takes time, efforts, care and a bit of luck regarding the environment to have a good harvest and healthy produces to provide to consumers.

4.2.1 d) CSA and the role of environmental responsibility

For Meino, caring for the environment is central to his food production. As he explained: “We believe working together with nature is very important. Nature takes a major place in our company. (By cultivating diversely), the landscape will become richer and more attractive for everyone. Insects and other animals find their place among vegetables as natural pest and disease control agents. (…) Our company also attracts special and even rare species and it is a feast for the eyes”. (Interview, 2019) According to him, there is a mutual dependency between a farmer and his environment which entails a set of responsibilities toward ensuring the application of sustainable practices. Among others, those practices include low to no use of inputs, maintaining biodiversity, reducing food miles and increasing seasonal eating. One key aspect of CSA found in Twee Linden is the farmers’ objective to safeguard the environment (i.e., water, air, soil) by limiting the negative environmental impacts of food production, distribution, and consumption (Samoggia and al., 2019).

4.2.1 e) Farmer’s views on consumers’ food preferences

Since he started his company, Meino builded up a loyal customer base which has supported him for a long time, approximately 15 years. But as the farmer explain, the new customers have different preferences for their consumption and usually they do not stick with one provision system. They are more mobile and expect very diverse produces all year long. The fact that consumers don’t get to decide what goes in their packages can either enhance their interest for the food they receive or hinder their interest (if they discover new produces, if don’t like the produces or if don’t want to prepare them). In regards to consumers preferences, Meino explained that “I’m a farmer and the packages are a way to sell my produces and have a connection with people but if people start telling
what they want, it’ll be too much time consuming” (Interview, 2019). There are thus two
groups of people: those who are satisfied with novelty (e.g. forgotten vegetables or varieties
they would not have chosen themselves) and those who would rather have the choice.

4.2.1 f) The mindset behind CSA initiatives: the imperative of (re)-
connecting with food

According to Meino, even if the CSA system could be changed toward more customisation,
the point is not about making selections. It is about getting healthy produces that are grown
locally and which generated as little impact as possible on the environment. It is about
changing the way food is perceived and purchased. As Meino further explain: “I think it’s
about the process learning of customers. It’s not about changing for customised packages
but for example giving the produces they don’t like to their neighbours. If they like the
system they can learn to adapt, if sometimes they don’t like certain vegetables, they can
give it away or learn new ways to cook it. It’s about the mindset’ (2019). CSA aims to
change the relationship between consumers and produces in order to reconnect them with
important aspects of food which have been brushed aside (out of convenience) in the
current food system; those can include: the diversity, the authenticity, the freshness, the
quality and the seasonality of produces or the ways to prepare them. This idea to
(re)connect to the reality behind food production is well illustrated by Meino when saying
there is typically two types of consumers: those who find a snail in their salad and think it is
good, and that they’ll put it in their garden and the other group who would at the contrary
be very turned off. This suggest the dichotomy between acknowledging that food grows
from the soil (and relies on different organisms/factors to do so) and the fact that
supermarkets have conditioned consumers to seek perfect food (e.g in terms of size,
colour, aspect, pre-cut food, no dirt or insect in it..).

In regards to the impacts of CSA on consumers, several feedbacks were noted. One
subscriber from Twee Linden wrote his enthusiasm for new types of produces by writing on
the guest book “thank you for getting to know Yacon. Never seen or eaten it before” (Twee
Linden, 2016). Another subscriber from a family of 5 wrote “we have already eaten more
vegetables this week than we normally do in a month!” (2013). Those comments show the
positive outcomes of eating from local producers through the discovery or appreciation of
healthy and seasonal products. Acknowledging the multitude of varieties among produces
is central to reconnecting consumers to the diversity of nature — by opposition to the “one
type fit all” provision system from big chains which offer very limited produces’ varieties
(e.g Cavendish banana or Hawkeye apple).

As Meino added at the end of the interview: “people don’t realise about their bad eating
habits until someone gets ill and they start considering good food as important to stay
healthy. At the same time people are getting older than before so they are doubting the fact
that bad food is poisoning them because they live longer. There is a lack of connection
between food and health” (2019). CSA initiatives such as Twee Linden aim to replace food
at the centre of human life, not just as daily intake but as something that touches
everything: the health and quality of life of all beings as well as the health of the
environment.
### 4.2.2 Biologisch Tuinderij de Antoniushoeve

![Picture credit: Antoniushoeve](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 4.</strong></th>
<th>Facts Antoniushoeve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Croy, North Brabant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start year</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Small-scale and varied horticultural business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce</td>
<td>Organic vegetable (+60 types), fruits, potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of packages</td>
<td>1-person: €7.95  2-person: €10.25  3-person: €13.50  4-person: €16.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>2 members + 1 permanent employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscription</td>
<td>Very flexible: consumers can start/stop whenever they want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>Investment from producer and capital from memberships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Stall with cooperative Zuidemrkt in Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement</td>
<td>Farm shop, food classes at local school, open day event, newsletter, food recipes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2 a) Organisational characteristics

The biologisch Tuinderij de Antoniushoeve is run by two young farmers: Max and Elsa who are passionate about biodynamic agriculture. Since 2016, they work on their small-scale and varied horticultural business, delivering weekly vegetable packages and participating to local food markets. They work with a permanent employee who assists them with the plantation and harvesting. Throughout the year, they grow around 60 different types of vegetables on a soil that is cared for with organic manure and compost. For them, the pursuit of more local food supplies echoes the needs for healthy food and healthy environment. The horticulture business takes place on more than six hectares and is located in Croy, between Aarle-Rixtel and Helmond in North Brabant. Packages are being delivered weekly in 13 pick-up points in Laarbeek, Gemert, Helmond, Geldrop, Stratum (Eindhoven) and Nuenen regions.

Prices of the weekly packages:

1-person : € 7.95 (all packages contain 6 different vegetables, including 4 meal vegetables)
2-person : € 10.25
3-person : € 13.50
4-person: € 16.50

4.2.2 b) Business activities and social events

The biologisch Tuinderij de Antoniushoeve has a field shop, open every Saturday from May to mid-October, where consumers can come and purchase freshly harvested vegetables as well as seasonal fruits. During the day, people can come and visit the garden where the vegetables are grown. Open days events are also organised to connect members together and for them to see, taste and help with the production. Subscribers can access the newsletters that keeps them informed about the development of the company, the opportunities and challenges faced by producers as well as the content of the packages. On the website and in the newsletters, recipes are available to give inspiration to consumers, using the vegetables and fruits from the packages. Since a year, the company also has its own vegetable stall in the cooperative Zuidermrkt in Amsterdam. Every Saturday, the cooperative organises a neighbourhood market with farm-fresh and organic products. There, the company of Antoniushoeve proposes fresh vegetables, fruits and juices. The cooperative is ruined by local residents who coordinate the event weekly and decide what will be sold in the stalls. All members are working on a voluntary basis. The cooperative has more than 500 members and was self funded in 2011. After having covered the initial spending to set up the market, the cooperation is now able to invest its profit without the approval of third parties in projects in the neighbourhood. Those projects are selected through a voting system among members and generally aim to contribute to the development of a greener neighbourhood, with a focus on healthy food and nutrition. The cooperative also has fund aiming to invest in “good education about food for children in Amsterdam, especially children from families where good food is not self-evident” (Zuidermrkt, 2019).
4.2.2 c) Biodynamic agriculture: the step further

In the course of 2019, the company aims to switch its agriculture from biological to biodynamic. Biodynamic agriculture is an alternative farm management mode which aims to provide ecological sustainability through the quest for a balance between the production system and the environment. Biodynamic farming was born from a series of agricultural lectures in 1924 given by Austrian philosopher and social reformer, Rudolf Steiner. He suggested a set of practices and principles to growing food sustainably such as composting, relying on mixed farming systems with animal manures or applying crop rotations for example. This form of management endorses an holistic approach toward agriculture and views farms as “living organisms” where every element are interconnected (Paull, 2011). In the current food production system, specialised and intensified practices are not showing appreciation for the embeddedness of produces in their natural environment. As Steiner stated “we’ve lost the knowledge of what it takes to continue to care for the natural world” (1924c, p.10). The philosopher was critical of the way living things were “neatly pigeonholed into separate species and genera” adding that “it is not how things are in nature. In nature, and throughout the universe, everything is in mutual interaction with everything else” (1924c, p.138). In order to obtain a biodynamic certification, delivered according to the Demeter standards, producers must comply with EU organic regulations (requiring a two-year conversion period) in addition to a year where producers must include the use of eight mineral and plant-based preparations to activate soil life and plant growth on the land (Winkler, 2018) The positive outcomes for soil quality was validated by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) who carried a study on the biodynamic system. They found that with biodynamic management, “soil organic matter (humus) content remained stable for the first 21 years of the trial while it declined in all other systems” (FiBL, 2019).

Max and Elsa strongly believe in sustainable soil management, stating that: “ground quality is of paramount importance for us because this is the basis for healthy food and biodiversity” (Tuinderij de Antoniushoeve, 2019). For this reason, they have joined a group of farmers who jointly conduct peer evaluation under the supervision of the Demeter Foundation. For them, the goal is to develop on several aspects attached to food production which are usually not taken into account in conventional agriculture such as the: environment, biodiversity, economic resilience, animal welfare and farmers personal development. The company of Antoniushoeve will received the Demeter quality mark for its vegetables in 2020, a certification which is recognised in more than 60 countries. Among other things, they aim to reduce their supply in nitrogen, rely on biodynamic preparations, allocate more space for the natural environment and its biodiversity and increase crop rotation to enhance soil quality. For the farmers of Antoniushoeve, the two focuses for the coming years will be on biodiversity and composting (Newsletters, 2019). Together with Brabants Landschap, a nature conservation organisation aiming to safeguard the biodiversity of Brabant, they are making plans to enhance the physical environment of the farm to suits the needs of the local fauna in order to, as they put it, “create more opportunities for each other” (Ibid, 2019).
4.2.2 d) Members of Caring Farmers: motivations and vision

Max and Elsa are members of the Caring Farmers. The Caring Farmers is an organisation which emerged through the concerns of three farmers: Annette, Ruud and Geert. They were appointed by the ministry of agriculture, with thirteen other farmers, to give their own advice and practical vision about the needed future for agriculture in the Netherlands. The document which followed the meeting was not in line with the three farmers' goals, which impelled them to come up with their own elaboration of a draft for guidelines in order to submit it again to the ministry. In order to proceed to the realisation of their ambition for local agriculture, with the key aim of ‘no external inputs’, the three farmers realised that “we can never do this alone” (Caring Farmers, 2019). For this reason, they decided to set up Caring Farmers in order to let individuals with similar ideals unite (farmers, consumers, scientists..). The code of the Caring farmers (that farmers need to endorse to join the organisation) includes (1) working on the adage “no external inputs” (2) going one step further each year and to be held accountable for this annually (3) exchanging knowledge and experience with other Caring Farmers and (4) subscribing to the newsletter. The activities of Caring Farmers evolve around information dissemination (between farmers, in papers and social media, toward consumers), representation, lobbying, contribution to agricultural education and consultation with NGOs to stimulate new agricultural processes. Working as a Caring Farmer implies a strong willingness to reinvent the agricultural business. Farmers are trying to harness alternatives that will encompass a humane design within the food system, “so that decent returns can be made again in a social context that is characterised by respect and appreciation for farmers” (Caring Farmers, 2019). In regards to the current food system, which has been increasingly specialised over the last decades, Caring Farmers “do not simplify (specialise) their companies, but focus on diversity (complexity)” — thus in the intent of increasing resiliency. The concept of sovereignty is central to their vision whereby they want, as farmers, to be able to make their own choices every day about production matters, without being constrained through external dependency. This implies a different set of relationships with chain partners as well as completely different relationships with consumers and citizens.
4.2.3 Biologisch Tuinderij de Lijsterbes

Table 5. Facts Lijsterbes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.</th>
<th>Facts Lijsterbes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Groesbeek Breedeweg, Gelderland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start year</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>small-scale and varied horticultural business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of subscribers</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce</td>
<td>Organic vegetable (+60 types), fruits, potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price of packages</td>
<td>1-person: € 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-person: € 8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-person: € 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-person: € 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>4 members + extra hands during the harvest period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscription</td>
<td>4 weeks period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The biologisch Tuinderij de Lijsterbes is located in Groesbeek, a town in the province of Gelderland. The company has been supplying organic vegetable packages in the Nijmegen region for about 20 years. They grow their vegetables on 4.5 hectares of land and cultivation is done according to the requirements of organic farming that is without using chemical-synthetic pesticides. They produce more than 60 different types of vegetables throughout the year in addition to fruits and potatoes. Their focus is on supplying seasonal produces including forgotten vegetables. In total, they harvest and prepare 750 packages and deliver them weekly door to door to consumers.

Prices of the weekly packages:

1-person : € 8 (around 6/7 produces per package)
2-person : € 8.5
3-person : € 12
4-person : € 15

In line with their sustainable vision, the packages are delivered with electric buses powered by solar panel, and the paper bags containing the produces are reused by the company if returned in good shape to the delivery person. Subscribers can access the newsletters that keeps them informed about the development of the company, the opportunities and challenges faced as producers as well as the content of the packages. The content in the package varies according to the quality of the harvest (based on seasonal, weather, pests-free factors). As the company reminds "we normally deliver seasonal vegetables. This means that the packages in the summer and autumn period are richer filled than in the late winter and spring period" (Tuinderijdelijsterbes, 2019). This precision highlights an important characteristic of CSA: the fact that both producers and consumers share the benefits (or downsides) of seasonal and/or harvest changes. When the seasons allow for more variety, such as in Spring and in Autumn, consumers get a richer content in their packages; by comparison to the Winter and Summer periods when local and seasonal vegetables tend to be less diverse. This suggests the need for CSA members to take into account variables that are often hidden from them, in supermarkets for example, when they are offered produces on a yearlong basis (e.g raspberries in winter). Members have to adapt their consumption to the reality behind sustainable and local production, with the realisations that food takes time to grow, that the harvests can be threatened by several factors (weather, pests), or that seasonal eating can be less diverse depending on the period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Facts Lijsterbes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3 a) Organisational characteristics

The team consists of Erik and Sandra, Marieke and Noor. In the summer period they are also extra helping hands on the land. Erik and Sandra where initially taking care of the company before have Marieke and Noor joined them. The delivering staff is composed of three people: Francine, Anne and Janus; and the monthly newsletter is written by Romilda van der Wal. The company works with Ekoplaza and also supplies vegetables to local food initiatives.

4.2.3 b) Values and logistics behind the CSA initiative

The Biologisch Tuinderij de Lijsterbes aims to keep its members informed of the company’s development and through the newsletters, important informations are being shared. They provide extensive details about the produces they offer in the packages, the new varieties they select (and the reasons why) as well as the ways consumers can prepare them. As they explain: “by showing in the newsletter the different possibilities and preparation methods of certain vegetables, we hope to make you enthusiastic for some culinary experiments” (2019). CSA, as niches, have personalistic approaches that are experimental, decentralised and multi-issue (Starr, 2010). In order to harness consumers’ needs and interests in their practices, strong communication is key. For this reason, the company decided to undergo a survey, which was placed in the packages and returned to the delivery person, in order to assess consumers’ degree of satisfaction. This way, customers can voice their interests and issues and reach the producer in an efficient manner. Out of the 750 subscribers, 450 of them returned the survey. The results from the survey indicated that consumers judged important that vegetables were local, from the region.

But as the survey also showed, consumers also want variation in their packages which can become difficult for small-scale producers during lower harvesting periods. As the company explains “especially in the winter, we cannot ignore the fact that the range is simply a lot less than the range in the supermarket” (2019). As a result, seasonal and local eating will always be a curtailment if compared to the assortment proposed in supermarkets, where everything from around the world is available. As the company points out: “that dilemma is that you as a grower, but also as a consumer, must be able to find the wealth in the restriction” (2019). This joins to the idea formulated by Meino, the owner of Twee Linden, whereby consumers must adopt a new mindset regarding local and seasonal food offered by CSA initiatives. The added value and taste of farm-fresh, poison-free and locally harvested vegetables should not be undermined due to a lack of selection or diversity in the packages— as the very goal of CSA is to reconnect with a type of food that follows the natural cycles of harvesting by contrast to supermarkets where everything is available at all times. As a result some people consciously accept this aspect as a logical part of local production while others prefer to combine different provision system: from the packages and from personal purchases in other shops.
4.2.3 c) Social activities and partnerships as inherent to CSA

The company proposes to members to participate to open days and harvest days, in order to connect them directly to the food they will consume in the packages. They also link themselves to other local initiatives in order to enhance social ties in their community. Last year, they helped the Nijmegen neighbourhood initiative Van Tuin tot Bord with the planting of fresh and local vegetables. Van Tuin tot Bord is an initiative in Nijmegen-Central where local residents grow vegetables together and prepare neighbourhood meals from the harvest. Out of the initiative, cooking classes are proposed and two neighbourhood restaurants are open every week. In the neighbourhood restaurants, guests enjoy a tasty healthy meal with fresh vegetables from their own neighbourhood. This offers a place for local residents to meet, create new contacts and exchanges ideas for the development of the neighbourhood. As one volunteer explained “preparing something together and helping people, I like that. Getting a clear task is important for me. You are doing something together, with a product at the end, that is very satisfying. Sometimes we are surprised ourselves what comes out of the oven!” (Monica, 2018). In return for their inputs, the company of Lijsterbes received some help from volunteers to assist with the harvests in the fields (e.g pumpkin harvest). This is a win-win situation for producers and members of local initiatives as knowledge is being exchanged for the benefits of local developments, by relying on social networking — and practical actions can follow which can assist producers during the busy periods of the harvest.

4.2.3 d) Land tenure and organic certification

The company of Lijsterbes addressed two important issues for small-scale growers relative to the land: land tenure security and organic certification. First, they shared with members their disappointment when the owner of one of the pieces of land they rented decided to sell, thus ending the lease of the farmers. They wrote that it was “a nasty surprise, but we have now adjusted our schedule”. The land was used as food fields and helped broaden the crop rotation — which is healthier for the land and soil quality. Without strong security of tenure, farmers are subordinate to the owners’ choices which can leave them and their company in vulnerable situation (Van Veen et al. 2018). The company tackled this problem by entering into a partnership with Gordon’s Spoor, a colleague bio-company in Groesbeek. A second issue was pointed out in the newsletters about organic certifications for CSA: “two years ago we had the opportunity to lease some extra land and we did. However, this piece of land was not yet organic and it took two years before the conversion was in place. From 2019 the land is now certified organic, but the vegetables that are growing on it are not”. Obtaining an organic certification can be difficult for small-scale farmers due to the price (people come twice a year to assess the produces) and due constraining procedures (e.g the two years it took to convert the land). This does not necessarily reflect the quality of the products, which can be grown in a sustainable manner and according to organic guidelines. Supporting small-scale farmers in securing their land tenure as well as facilitating the obtention of certifications for their business is thus very important for the viability and success of local initiatives, who still struggle to emerge on the market scene.
4.2.3 e) The threat of climate change and the grassroots responses

Local producers are working directly with the land, they have extensive knowledge about the elements influencing the production and most of the time they have witnessed the impacts of climate change. In 2018, producers from Lijsterbes wrote “President Trump knows for sure; climate change is a fable. Unfortunately we know differently. Now that we are taking stock after this exceptional dry and warm summer, we see a very clear trend in recent years. The climate is already changing”. Most farmers have been doing this work for decades, they know their country and its characteristics but they now have to face many versatilities with the climate that they can not control. They are facing a new situation that demands for a lot of adaptability despite a low visibility on future trends. As the company further explain: “our sowing and planting agenda from ten years ago is simply no longer adequate in 2019. We are living in a different time. As the temperature rises and the pattern of our seasons begins to change, it is more difficult for us to look ahead and plan ahead. We see that pests who normally inhabit in the south are also increasingly present here” (2018). In regards to those irregularities, the company tried to come up with its own environmental strategies in order to conduct less burdensome business operations: they have installed solar panel on the roofs which charges their electric cars and powers the groundwater pump. They are taking a critical look at plastic and paper and they are aiming to replace their tractors with sustainable alternatives. They also try to invest in landscape management and enhance biodiversity by creating places for birds in their fields. They point out that “this has enormous added value for the field birds that hibernate in the Netherlands such as the Linnet, Reep, Partridge, Yellow-bunted and Skylark. The non-harvested seeds serve as food for them in the winter” (2018). As a result, they do not view their work in isolation from nature but as an integral part of caring responsibly for the environment.

4.3 Conclusion

The three cases explored above provided insights on the values and logistics behind the emergence of alternative food initiatives. They addressed the opportunities and challenges behind the development of sustainable agricultural practices at the local level. The cases demonstrated a strong commitment to the CSA ideology in regards to their willingness to reconstitute rooted connection between produces and consumers by engaging in practices of food de-commodification (Starr, 2010). The three initiatives were actively engaged in strengthening social relationships with members through various activities and projects that would connect them around food. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli found that CSA differ in this view from other provision systems in regards to the production of “emotional immediacy, confidence in outcomes, direct participatory involvement, and personal engagement” (2007). The initiatives also demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainable development through increased effort for environmental preservation and conservation. Their methods of production aimed for organic and seasonal produces, healthy soils and increased (bio)-diversity. According to the Strategic Niche Management theory, niches are understood as (1) socially desirable innovations serving long-term goals,
such as sustainability and (2) radical new innovations which are contrary to the existing infrastructure, practises and regulations (Schot & Geels, 2007) Those characteristics suit the nature of the initiatives studied whereby small networks of actors support novelties on the basis of expectations and visions. (Geels, 2010) As such they can be considered as niches, also understood as “spaces where practices differ from regimes and mainstream markets and where innovations can develop and experiments can be performed” (Hoppe et al., 2015).

Three key processes influencing the successful emergence and growth of niche where identified in the literature review. Those processes depends on: (1) the management of expectations, (2) the development of social networks, and (3) the learning processes (Kemp et al, 1998; Schot & Geels, 2007). The embracement of a strong vision and goals was central to the development of the studied initiatives. According to the CSA’s inclination, the aim of producers was not to produce food for profits but food for people, with respect to the environment providing for the production. As part of the co-creation value system surrounding alternative food production and food consumption, the producers from the initiatives aimed to create a sense of belonging between the place where the food was produced (origins), the produces and the consumers. Managing the expectations is interpreted here as the commitment from producers to inform and involve consumers in the local food projects that they are carrying (e.g through open day events, newsletters, at markets, through cooperatives..) (Hoppe et al., 2015). The management of expectations also refers to the way in which niches are presented to the public and whether they keep the promises to which they have committed themselves (Hoppe et al., 2015). Through the CSA system, producers have committed themselves to produce fresh, healthy and organic vegetables which are delivered by mean of sustainable practices.

The second aspect characteristic to the success of niches relate to the development of strong social network. The initiatives detailed the importance of having a loyal customer-base, facilitated by the mean of the subscription system. The partnerships between the cases and other local initiatives (e.g market cooperative, neighbourhood cooperative) suggested that niches do not evolve in isolation but are very much influenced and supported by knowledge and resources owned by various actors at the local level. The third aspect influencing the successful emergence of niches is concerned with the learning processes. The learning processes of niches refer to their capacity to recognise and address the needs, problems and possibilities of initiatives in order to further their development. Again, this involve relying on a strong social network in order to facilitate knowledge sharing. As Seyfang et al. (2014) remind, it is important that actors be willing to share the lessons their have learned. Through various ways, the cases aimed to participate to the co-creation of local knowledge-building and knowledge-sharing (e.g classes about food in schools, participation to educational programs, open days events..). This spread of knowledge goes beyond market exchanges to include “enjoyment and fulfilment in the transmission and extension of knowledge as well as in the products to which the knowledge is attached” (Lee, 2000).
V. Consumption patterns and CSA: exploring consumers attitudes

5.1 Overview of respondents' profiles from 100 surveys

Table 6. Respondents’ profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Age               | 60% between the age of 18 to 24  
40% between the age of 25 to 34 |
| Place of residence| Netherlands (for more than 6 months)                                        |
| Gender            | 68% female,  
32% male                                             |
| Nationality       | 77% are from the EU                                                          |
| Occupation        | 79% are students and  
13% are employed (the remaining 8% is either self-employed or unemployed) |

The objective of the surveys was to analyse consumers’ perception of their food environment, their food consumption patterns and food preferences to better examine the attractiveness and viability of CSA initiatives. In other words, the surveys asked about respondents’ relationships with food and whether the CSA model could suits them as consumers.

5.2 General food consumption patterns

When asked about the different places where respondents were getting their food, 99% of them answered from the supermarkets, 28% answered from farmers market, 16% from organic shops and less than 7% from cooperatives, online, from their own garden or from dumpster diving. This first finding undoubtedly validates the stranglehold of supermarkets as the main provision system for food consumption. Respondents indicated shopping at those particular places out of convenience (81%), for the location (77%), for the price (63%), the quality (37%) and the diversity (33%). This suggests that criteria other than those based on the products themselves had more influence on consumers when selecting places to shop at.

The main reason for preferring certain places over others was mostly due to the price difference of the products (74%). The three main criteria influencing respondents’ purchases were based on the price (91%), the quality (74%) and the taste (73%) of the products. Respondents were asked whether they were growing their own food: out of the
100 sample, 64% replied negatively, 34% said they were growing a little (e.g. aromatic herbs) and 2% said they were growing products such as their own vegetables.

5.3 Scaling criteria regarding personal consumption choices

In the surveys, respondents were asked to scale the degree of importance they attached to particular food characteristics such as the origin, the quality or the price. Respondents could select a number on a scale from 1 to 5. This was done in the interest of finding which variables were influencing them before making purchasing choices related to food.

- **Graph 1. Importance attached to the origin of the product:**

- **Graph 2. Importance attached to the quality of the product:**
• **Graph 3.** Importance attached to the price of the product:

• **Graph 4.** Importance attached to the packaging:

• **Graph 5.** Importance attached to social certifications (e.g. fair trade):
- **Graph 6.** *Importance attached to environmental certifications:*

- **Graph 7.** *Importance attached to the seasonality of products:*

- **Graph 8.** *Importance attached to organic certifications:*
We see that the decision-making process behind food purchasing choices is a complicated one, one that takes into account several quantifiable and non-quantifiable variables including: social, cultural, environmental and economic factors. Those factors are summed up as followed:

- Freshness/taste/nutritional content
- Organic or low-input growing methods
- Ecological sustainability
- Knowing where food comes from
- Support of local economies
- Personal connection with farmer
- Seasonality
- Support of small-scale business
- Community creation/sustenance
- Connection with place and with local ecology
- Stewardship of local environment
- Open space preservation
- Reducing carbon footprint

Adapted from the surveys and Schnell, 2013
5.4 Consumers’ views about their own diet

According to Ridder et al. (2017), a diet is a pattern of food intake that meet certain demands that are relevant to weight or health. As the authors explain “diet is different from eating behaviour which we consider as a more unconstrained behaviour that may be guided by individual habits or ingrained social and cultural standards but not so much by distinct requirements. In view of such requirements, people cannot afford to simply eat what is on their plate or what they like, but have to base their food choices in consideration of the health consequences, including weight status. In other words, they have to regulate their food in view of a short-term or long-term health goal” (2017). The World Health Organisation (WHO) include in an healthy diet: fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains, low fats, sugars and salts intakes. Currently, too many people follow unhealthy diets due to the preponderance of highly processed food, food high in energy, fats, sugars and salt while not eating enough dietary fibre found in fruits, vegetables and nuts. (2018) This can lead to health issues as exemplified by the numbers of people being overweight. The WHO found that worldwide, obesity has nearly tripled since 1975. In 2016 the estimates gave 39% of adults aged over 18 years old as being overweight, while 13% were obese. (Ibid, 2018). In order to evaluate their own food consumption, the survey asked respondents to scale how healthy they thought their diet was, by selecting a number on a scale from 1 to 10.

• Graph 9. How healthy did respondents perceived their diet:

According to the survey, the majority of respondents thought about their diet as being healthy (53% selected between 7 and 8 out of 10). 20% of respondents selected 6 out of 10, 14% selected 5 out of 10 or under while the remaining 13% selected 9 out of 10 or above.
5.5 Degree of respondents’ satisfaction with their current consumption patterns

Respondents were asked whether they felt satisfied with their current consumption patterns. 54 of them answered positively while the remaining 46 answered negatively. Among the reasons given for feeling satisfied with their current consumption patterns, respondents explained that: their diet made them satisfied and aligned with their values (e.g., being vegetarian, vegan), that they ate healthy, seasonal or diverse food, enough fibre intakes or because they cooked for themselves. Despite their contentment, most respondents wish that they could improve their consumption patterns through increased quality (e.g., organic, certified products) and/or reduced environmental impact (e.g., no packaging). One respondent highlighted that finances were a constraining variable in purchasing products: “I have a healthy and tasty diet but I wish I could buy more expensive organic and environmentally friendly products though, instead of the cheapest possibility” (Samia, 22).

Respondents who did not view their consumption patterns as healthy explained that there were lacking diversity in their diet, had low fibres inputs, too much processed or junk food, too much meat or unhealthy snacking habits. Several respondents mentioned not purchasing enough quality products due to spatial constraints (e.g., difficult access to particular shops/initiatives), time constraints (e.g., not having enough time to let production and other factors such as packaging play a role in their consumption choices) or due to financial constraints. One respondent explained “some food could be produced better, but I do not have the resources to change that. In some cases that’s because I am not willing to pay more and in other cases it is because there is no “good” product available” (Leila, 28). When talking about the food provision system, some respondents mentioned being aware of the profits derived from food consumption and wished they could channel their inputs through more ethical and sustainable provision system. One of them wrote: “I think I buy way too much processed food, plastic package, unhealthy food with too much sugar, fat and salt even if I can not always notice it, and I also think that I give money to the wrong people” (Jack, 25) Another respondent mentioned that he would like to “buy to the producer directly, and go only to markets, not supermarkets” (Rafael, 30).
5.6 Degree of purchasing power

In regards to their purchasing power, respondents were asked whether they felt like they could afford the type of food they valued. The majority answered positively at 59%, while the remaining 41% did not felt like they could. Respondents were then asked which type of products they would like to purchase if they had the financial freedom to do so. The recurrent answers provided that respondents wished for more organic products, local and seasonal products, products with social and environmental certifications and more quality products from specialised shops (such as meat from the butcher or fish from fish shops and markets).

5.7 Degree of trust

*Figure 2. Question: Do you feel trust toward the food that you eat?*

When asked about whether they felt trust toward the food that they were eating, the majority of respondents answered yes (63%). Those who answered yes explained that they trusted the provision systems where they were getting their food for the quality and the fact that they could ask directly where and how they were produced. Respondents mentioned that they believed that the quality control done in the Netherlands was satisfactory enough with for example, respondents saying “I trust the food industry standards in Europe” (Marc, 25) and “in Europe compared to the United States for example I know where the food comes from and I know there are more restrictions on pesticides and other additives” (Valery, 23). Several respondents explained that they trusted the food they bought due to the fact that they are not getting sick from it. The reputation of shops such as supermarkets was also an important factor for respondents with some of them saying: “I usually buy at Albert Heijn as it is generally assumed to be a trustworthy supermarket” (Paul, 19) and “I believe the supermarket I shop at is of high quality so I trust it” (Wouter, 23).

For respondents who answered that they did not felt trust toward the food they were eating (37% of them) several recurrent reasons were given. Some people based their judgement on the lack of clear and honest information for the products they purchased with one
person saying: “labels for instance are not that transparent for the consumers. I can’t trust any food that isn’t vegetables or fruits because it is too much processed, I don’t have a clear idea of how it is made, where and with what” (Lena, 26). Others based their lack of trust on previous experience, with one respondent saying “I don’t trust the food that I eat because the food I buy in the supermarkets doesn’t taste like the food from my grandpa’s garden (for instance vegetables, eggs and chicken)” (Luc, 27) and another explaining “I somehow don’t trust the food because I had a few bad experiences here in the past” (Martin, 24).

Some respondents mentioned the hidden interests behind certain companies which results in drives for profits over quality. Respondents answered that “I do not trust the food I eat because businesses are evil. They do everything for profit” (Laura, 31), and “you have no idea about the production process and often what is actually in the food. Marketing tends to beautify the product or straight up lie to you. Doesn’t matter what kind of product either, all brands do this always and I don’t like that” (Amy, 29). Another respondent mentioned the lack of education about food as an obstacle for trusting it, as he wrote that “for most of my life I was uneducated about the origin of my food and the welfare of farmers and animals. Since there was no effort to make it clear to me from a young age I believe there are still many truths hidden from me and society about the true origins, processes and treatment of our food” (Michel, 20). Respondents answered fearing that their food contains too much chemicals, with one of them saying “I feel that if I eat non-organic food I get a lot of pesticides in my body” (Griet, 28).

5.8 Consumers’ awareness about the conditions of production

![Figure 3. Question: do you feel aware of the production processes behind the food you eat?](image)

The survey asked respondents whether they felt aware about the production processes behind the food they were eating. In total, 51% answered yes while the remaining 49% answered no.
5.9 Respondents’ interest for food-related activities

Respondents were asked whether they would be interested in participating to food-related activities and/or events (e.g training, classes, community-gardening, as a member of a local initiatives). The majority answered that they would “maybe” be interested (48%), 38% said they would be interested while the remaining 14% answered that they would not be interested.

5.10 Respondents’ experiences with CSA

Figure 5. Percentage of respondents who have already been part of a CSA initiatives

Out of the 100 people surveyed, 10 of them have already been members of a CSA initiative. Respondents explained the type of local food initiatives they joined and their motivation to do so:

“I have bought vegetable packages from local producers for a couple of years. You had to pick up your own package at a pick-up point every week. It was a way to support local producers and have fresh, seasonal and good quality products within a 10-20 km
radius.” (Peter, 21)

“In Gouda there is a local CSA run by locals with local farmers. I think it’s an incredible initiative and I’m proud to support it, even if the food is more expensive. Local seasonal food is important to me” (Ana, 26)

The respondents who have not yet been part of a CSA initiative (90% of them) selected that the main reasons for this were: the lack of information (for 69% of them), the lack of time (52%) the lack of accessibility (40%), financial reasons (14%) and due to personal beliefs/interests (5%).

5.11 Attractiveness of CSA model for consumer

Figure 6. relative to the question: is the idea of weekly delivered vegetable packages attractive to you?

Out of the 100 person surveyed, 57 of them answered founding the idea of weekly delivered vegetable packages attractive to them, while the other 43 did not think so.

Table 7. Example of answers relative to the attractiveness of the CSA model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas, 24</td>
<td>“It sounds like a convenient way to get my vegetables, hopefully with less plastic packaging than in supermarkets.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica, 29</td>
<td>“Time saving, convenient, possibly more healthy option”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole, 20</td>
<td>“Easy, seasonal and local is always good! And more trustworthy than big supermarkets”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents found the idea of weekly delivered packages attractive mainly because it was a convenient way to get fresh, seasonal and local produces. Using this mode of purchase was thought as practical because it allows consumers to save time and it was thought as ethical because it supports local agricultural economies rather than supermarkets and favours more sustainable practices (such as less packaging, less transport, less chemicals). This type of system was describe as more trustworthy by respondents as the origins, conditions of productions and quality of products could be known more easily due to proximity factors.

**Table 8.** Example of answered relative to the unattractiveness of the CSA model:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eddy, 20</td>
<td>“I prefer to choose by myself”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max, 28</td>
<td>“I would rather just eat what I'm craving at the moment and not be dependent on what's in a package I got.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisa, 23</td>
<td>“It would give me another subscription and I have enough of those”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents who did not find the idea of weekly delivered vegetable packages attractive expressed that they would rather choose the produces themselves as they were worried about the quality and content (quantity and taste) of the packages. Someone explained: “I want to see the food before I buy it” (Olly, 26). People answered that this type of system was not flexible enough because “it pressures you to use what they deliver and can give you less freedom in cooking” (Martin, 24). The fact that the packages were not customised and with a fix delivery time-line was anticipated by respondents as potentially constraining (e.g subscription system, timing) or unfit for their lifestyle (e.g fear of wasting due to the fact that respondents did not eat at the same place on a continuous basis).

### 5.12 Pricing

Out of the 100 surveys, 57 respondents were willing to give an estimate about the price they would be inclined to pay as consumer for a weekly delivered organic and local vegetable package (1 person). The average price of those estimations was of €16,75 per week. In order to coin this number with an estimate average price for the vegetable packages, calculations were based on the three CSA initiatives examined in the cases of study. The average price of the vegetable packages was found as being of: €8.23. The disparity between what people would be inclined to pay and the actual cost of the vegetables packages in the surrounding region of Nijmegen suggests that respondents were mostly likely unaware about the practical aspects of those initiatives and their relative costs. Indeed, respondents were on average willing to pay twice the price that the actual cost of the packages.
5.13 Conclusion: co-existence of CSA with current food regime

The surveys aimed to grasp respondents’ views on the CSA model: whether the logistics and values of the initiatives would suit them as consumers. Based on the sample surveyed, the main source of food provisioning comes from supermarkets. The Dutch retail sector is indeed fairly consolidated, with two of the largest food retailers controlling 54 percent of the market share (Albert Heijn and Jumbo) and two discount retailers controlling 15.7 percent of the market share (Lidl and Aldi). (Feddema and Yen, 2019) (see figure 7)

Figure 7. Market share of Dutch Supermarkets

![Market share Dutch Supermarkets](image)

Source: Feddema and Yen, 2019

The three main reasons for buying products from supermarkets was the convenience, the location and the price. The majority of respondents were satisfied by their consumption patterns (54 percent) while the rest expressed concerned regarding the food they were eating. The absence of proximity factors (geographical, relational and of values) made most respondents worried about their food purchases. Indeed, they indicated a mistrust in impersonal food chains due to quality, transparency and environmental concerns. The standardisation of food from large food retailers was an issue for most respondents who realised the impact on the food quality through their homogenisation (size, colour, shape) and a reduced quality in taste and nutrition. Research as shown that the nutritive value of food has indeed declined with the industrialisation of the food system, generating concern regarding consumes’ health (Ikerd, 2001). This come as no surprise because the “industrial agriculture derives profits primarily from quantity factors: acres farmed, head produced, yields per acre, rates of gain, and the cost efficiency of large-scale production. Quality factors affecting prices typically are incidental to profits and are often associated with cosmetic appearance rather than nutrition” (Ibid, 2001).
The dichotomy between quantity and quality was addressed in the surveys as respondents were aware of this reality although many replied favouring quantity over quality due to financial constraints. As Chase and Grubinger (2014) remind: “in each food system sector the market is dominated by an oligopoly, or a cartel, where a small number of corporations have disproportionate influence, not only on prices but on the type of products available”. This overwhelming influence was mentioned by Meino, the farmer from Twee Linden who explained that supermarkets were aiming to attract more customers based on their increased interest for local and organic produces. The outcomes of incorporating this type of products in supermarkets means that organic agriculture becomes more mainstream and large scale, thus “abandoning its roots as a radical alternative to conventional agriculture and becoming just another cog in the industrial agribusiness machine” (Schnell, 2007). The industrialisation of organic food production has allowed large producers to meet the minimum requirements relative to organic production at lower costs than could “the philosophically committed organic small-scale farmers” (Ikerd, 2001). In this view, Meino reminded that big retailers did not internalise the true cost of the produces, thus generating many harmful outcomes (on the environment for example).

In addition, the harnessing of organic and local products in big supply shops means that independent farmers are left to deal with their economic survival. Indeed, small-scales farmers “often lack economies of scale and infrastructural resources to keep their prices low enough to effectively compete with larger growers” (Dunning, 2015). The case of Antoniushoeve illustrated this aspect with the difficulty of small-scale farmers to acquire organic certifications (due to financial and time constraints) despite committing themselves to sustainable practices. In the survey, several respondents mentioned their awareness of the unequal power dynamic between big retailers and small-scale producers. The acknowledgement lead them to consider more sustainable and ethical initiatives that would suit their value system. Indeed, the domination by just a few companies can increase consumer and producer interest in alternative products and business approaches as a way to regain some balance within the vertical and corporate world of supermarket chains (Chase and Grubinger, 2014). For several people in the surveys and in the interviews, the two were not mutually exclusive but seems as complementary (e.g getting local vegetables and fruits at the local market and buying the rest from supermarkets). Social changes in regards to consumption patterns are expected to occur from slow and long-term shifts in beliefs and values (Starr, 2010).

The viability of alternative food initiatives would thus depend on the ability of those initiatives to attract and retain participants in a context where autonomous forms of motivation can be sustained over time (Haxeltine et al., 2016). This relates to the first characteristic of niches concerned with the management of expectations. Values offered in CSA and AFNs are indeed shifting from “predictability and standardisation to historicity, diversity, and meaning” (Ibid, 2010). Out of the 100 people surveys, 10 have already been a part of a CSA initiatives. The other 90 persons explained that they have not yet been part of such initiatives due to lack of information, time and access. This suggests the need for more strategies of information dissemination about alternative food initiatives occurring around consumers and more mechanisms facilitating a convenient and quick access to the produces in order to fit consumers’ daily life and needs. For the majority (57 percent of respondents) the idea of weekly delivered vegetable packages was attractive. The question is then how to increase the outreach of people who share the same values.
regarding food production and food consumption preferences. The capacity of CSA to co-
exist with the current food regime would thus depend on the logistics, or the ‘blind spot’
behind involving new participants in alternative initiatives; the co-creation of a value system
in which participants can identify with and it will also depend on the ability to secure the
place of small-scale organic producers in the region food distribution system. Those three
aspects are key to strengthen in order for alternatives to not remain marginals, on the
outside looking in, but to have influence inside of the food regime (Rozyne, 2014).
VI. Consumers’ view on local food

In the intent of gathering respondents’ perceptions about what local food systems mean to them as consumers, 10 in-depth interviews were carried out with respondents from the surveys. Respondents were selected on a voluntary basis and were given the opportunity to share their personal experiences and insights on local food consumption. This helped the research gain more detailed information about the term 'local' while allowing to address complex topics such as decision-making, beliefs-system and behavioural patterns (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011).

6.1 Overview of the 10 participants’ profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Between 20 and 30 years old (average age: 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of residence</td>
<td>Nijmegen, Netherlands (since more than 6 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>10 different nationality (see annex x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>50% males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50% females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>100% were students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2 Understanding of local food

For most respondents, local food meant a type of food being sold within a short geographical distance from its production site, with little reliance on transportation in order to ensure reduced ecological impact (particularly reduced carbon emissions). One participant explained that to her, local food meant “food produced within the region as opposed to being imported from a different country or transported from another region within the same country” (Garima, 24). Another participant said that “local food means grown by a known person in a known place to me” (Asli, 24).

6.3 Interpretation of ‘local’

Participants were asked to explain what did the word “local” evoked to them. Several persons associated local to produces that were fresher and healthier due to the physical proximity of the production site. With local food, no time is wasted in transportation or storage which increases the quality of the produces. In addition, local produces were associated with seasonality whereby produces grown locally were more likely to follow natural cultivating patterns. The term also holds social meanings with one participant
explaining that for him, “local evokes a sense of community in which a society provides its own sustenance” (Michel, 20). Another participant expressed that “local can mean authentic to the sociopolitical group belonging to the said area” (Vladas, 28).

6.4 Approximate distance that would qualify as local

When asked to evaluate the physical distance that would qualify as local to them, respondents struggled to come up with a metric. The answers given varied greatly between respondents and are aggregated as follow to showcase their diversity:

Table 9. Distance that would qualify as local based on participants’ answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michel (20)</td>
<td>Between 30 to 40 km but does not see distance as a variable of locality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mario (24)</td>
<td>&lt; 50 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katja (29)</td>
<td>&lt; 50 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila (27)</td>
<td>&lt; 30 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos (20)</td>
<td>&lt; 100km but does not see distance as a variable of locality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asli (24)</td>
<td>Country level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garima (24)</td>
<td>Anything that can be available for consumption on the same day of the harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy (29)</td>
<td>Anything that can be available for consumption within half a day from the harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladas (28)</td>
<td>N/A “I never actually thought about it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tugberk (24)</td>
<td>Any product that can be bought within two days after being harvested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As highlighted by the answers, the term ‘local’ does not resonate the same way for participants. The physical distance of what defines ‘local’ can greatly vary, from less than 30 km to the country’s boundaries level. Two participants even explained that when thinking about locality, they did not perceive distance as a key variable. According to one of them, focusing on the various processes through which the produces are going through is more relevant than the distance covered from production to consumption sites. For others, the focus was made on whether the food could be consumed the same day of the harvest.

6.5 Local food versus global food

According to participants, the main differences between local food and food found in big global chains such as in supermarkets were (I) the quality of the produce (physical difference e.g size, shape, colours) (II) the sourcing and traceability, and (III) the ecological impact (e.g packaging, transport, chemicals). As one participant explained:
“local food do not have labels such as “grown in Mexico”. Their natural state is much more visible. They do not consume plastic to be sold. I can trace them to the producer and can have a conversation maybe about the fertilisers and stuff she or he uses. I feel that in supermarkets I have no option and have no idea what I am eating” (Asli, 24).

Transparency and trust were recurrent terms when discussing about local food characteristics. However, participants had converging views toward the convenience of getting food from bigger supply chains: it is simply easier as everything you need is in one place. One participant emphasised: “I think the food you get from supermarkets provides a convenient and safe choice for most of the society, which is mostly one-size-fits-all approach to nutrition. With local foods, it's more tailored for the particular area and population.” (Vladas, 28)

Table 10. Estimated percentage of local produces in consumers' weekly shopping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Estimated percentage of the share of local produces in weekly shopping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michel (20)</td>
<td>10 - 20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mario (24)</td>
<td>20 - 30 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katja (29)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila (27)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos (20)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asli (24)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garima (24)</td>
<td>40 - 50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy (29)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladas (28)</td>
<td>10 - 25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tugberk (24)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on participants’ responses, the average estimated percentage of local produces in their weekly shopping is of 32 % (see figure 1).

Figure 8. Average share of local produces in weekly shopping
6.4 Perceived advantages from buying local food

Three types of motivations for buying local food were discerned from participants’ interviews. First, according to them, buying local food has the advantages of ensuring a type of food that is fresher, tastier and healthier than produces which have to travel the globe to reach the shops. Those produces have traceable origins which can reassure consumers about the conditions of production and the actual quality (e.g. composition) of produces. Second, local food is expected to encompass more sustainable practices by eliminating several steps in the production, handling and delivery of produces. Finally, the third main advantage of buying local food pointed at the capacity to support local farmers and local economies. As one participant explains: “I believe that by buying local food, I will not make a who knows which company rich by buying the products from supermarkets, instead I would contribute to the local economy. I think that if consumers saw this logic, there would be more demand” (Asli, 24). Power dynamics within the food system were also pointed out by another participant who said that: “buying local foods will help the local economy and farmers instead of big shitty corporations. It is a good way to support the community and the environment provided that the local food comes from more ethical sources” (Michel, 20).

6.5 Perceived disadvantages from buying local food

Among the reasons given for not buying local food, four of them were recurring in the interviews. The first reason given was that local food was less diverse than the food proposed by bigger food chains. As one respondent explained: “most of the non-local food I buy is branded and you can’t really find locally such as Korean kimchi or Nutella” (Michel, 20). Aside from the attraction of imported goods, participants explained that they needed to complement their local food purchases with other products (e.g. rice, pasta, cereals) which they could not find on the weekly markets. The second reason given as a disadvantage was the lack of convenience and accessibility to local produces. Indeed, if most participants were enthusiastic about the farmers’ markets, most of them also found the opening days constraining (e.g. every Saturday in Nijmegen). As a result, one participant explained: “supermarkets are easier to go and find what you’re looking for” (Tugberk, 24). The lack of accessibility to local produces was also mentioned as an obstacle by one participant who said that: “it can be difficult to find a place where to buy local products as sometimes even in the markets I’m surprised to see how some products are not local at all” (Carlos, 20). The third disadvantage of buying local food was associated with the pricing, whereby local food (especially if certified organic) tended to be more expensive than non-local food. Finally, the fourth reason given has an obstacle from buying local food was the regulatory process, anticipated to be less rigorous than other international standards (e.g. at the EU scale). As one participant mentioned: “it is hard to check whether farmers conform to safety and health regulation for growing and producing their food. Regulating them would either mean investing more money to check on the produces or mechanisms to check the toxicologically of the produces for example” (Michel, 20).
6.6 Attractiveness of local food

Out of the 10 participants, 9 answered they wished to purchase more local food, especially if the purchasing step was rendered more convenient and accessible. One participant answered that they had no preference regarding local food.

6.7 Conclusion: degree of appreciation and understanding of local food

From the interviews two trends become clear: first consumers are interested in local food because they are aware that proximity can be a mark of quality. For the majority, local food was associated with healthy, fresh and seasonal characteristics. The geographical proximity of food ensured freshness, traceability and transparency; and consumers are able, if they want to, to see with their own eyes the production sites. This reality is not possible with imported good. The social proximity with producers was praised by participants as it enabled them to connect directly with farmers, allowing them to ask questions about the conditions of production and the produces, thus gaining knowledge about the food they purchased. For most respondents, buying local food also meant investing in local economies and supporting nearby farmers. This leads to the third proximity variable: the proximity of values (see figure 2). Several values were referred to in the interviews such as the fact that local produces were more authentic, sustainable and ethical than produces from distant food chains (Hinrichs, 2015). As pointed out by Shnell (2013), by buying/preferring local food, consumers are enlarging the sphere of whom and what they care about, creating connections of proximity that have often been severed by the global marketplace. As a result, food becomes a mean by which people recognise themselves as part of a broader community, environment and economy. Although the interviews showed a genuine appreciation for local food, with 90 percent of participants expressing that they wished to buy more local food due to the aforementioned reasons, participants were also unsure about the criteria defining ‘local’. This links to the second trend where participants’ own understanding of what local means often evolved in regards to the degree of physical proximity, whereby local food should come from rather short supply chains. The delimitation of local was blurred: is local relative to a place, a region or the country level? Central to the discussions of local eating, the concept of food miles has appeared as a mean to evaluate the distance that food travels before reaching the consumption site. A manifestation of this can be seen with the “hundred-mile diet”, a challenge aiming to get people to eat as much as possible from within 100 miles of their home (Schnell, 2013). The idea of using miles or distance to assess local food is seen by Delind as “too superficial, too quantifiable for nurturing or expressing this deeper commitment” (2006). In this view, local is best understood as being based on a sense of place rather than a sense of distance. As Ostrom points out: “it is through building common ground among consumers and farmers based on their identification with a ‘locality’ and their common interests that the social capital needed to address the very real, practical barriers to local food distribution can be addressed” (2006). Local food would thus translate a willingness to reintegrate food
production and food consumption within the context of place and based on proximity factors relative to that place (Schnell, 2013).

**Figure 9: Local food and proximity: defining factors**

*Based on interviews and a study from Hinrichs (2015)*
VII. Conclusion

This concluding chapter will summarise the findings made from the literature review and the empirical research. In the research, CSA initiatives have been explored according to the SNM theory and were compared as niches, being socio-technical innovations flourishing at the grassroots level. The cases studied in the Netherlands would indeed fit the definition given by Gernert et al. (2010) of grassroots initiatives, as “groups of people trying to create solutions to challenges as they see them, adhering to criteria that diverge from mainstream institutions and practically expressing core social values”. Indeed, CSA initiatives aim to generate changes in the food system, by showing that alternatives to the mainstream food regime exist, and that those alternatives (in terms of practices and models) could lead to more sustainable outcomes. This research was conducted to answer the following question: what is the potential of community supported agriculture initiatives in enabling sustainable food consumption patterns at the local level? The scale and vision of the initiatives studied varies but their nature, drives and values unite them around a same prospect: enabling the development of food production and consumption alternatives at the local level and in a sustainable manner. The overarching aim of CSA initiatives, as illustrated by the cases, suggests a willingness to reconnect consumers with local and sustainable food, and to reconnect food with the concept of place. In order to delve into the potential of CSA initiatives, the following section will summarise the answers of the research sub-questions.

7.1 Answers to the sub-questions

1. What are the characteristics (ideology and practices) of CSA and how do those characteristics compare to the mainstream food system?

CSA initiatives are characterised by direct relationships between producers and consumers (Heyland, 2017). They can be seen as alliances where farmers commit to consumers in ensuring the quality, traceability and transparency behind the food they produce while consumers commit to farmers through a subscription system enabling long-term planning and the sharing of production risks (Mink et al. 2017). The organisational characteristics as well as the vision and goals of those local food systems differ drastically from those guiding the global food regime. CSA initiatives are organised as horizontal networks, they are socially-centred with the aim of generating mutual benefits and interests for producers and consumers (Chase and Grubinger, 2014). This contrasts with the mainstream food regime which is largely impersonal, hierarchical and focused on exchanging goods and services for money (Ibid, 2014). As a result, the contrasting networks and incentives behind alternative and mainstream food system have given rise to “contested knowledge claims, which define material practices and advance competing constructions of quality, modes of governance, and political imaginaries” (Goodman et Al, 2012). CSA initiatives are emphasising the importance of localising food in order for individuals to (re)connect with food through direct proximity. Three types of proximity were explored: geographical
proximity (physical), relational proximity (social) and a proximity of values (cultural) (Hinrichs, 2015). Through relationships of proximity, the initiatives studied have shown a desire to reintegrate food production and food consumption within the context of place (Schnell, 2013). Based on the research and the literature review, the notion of globalised food has been shown as conveying worry about distance while the rise of local food is generating an increased interest for models pursuing proximity in food relations. (Hinrichs, 2015). Local food initiatives are indeed aiming to reclaim, strengthen and promote “food from somewhere” (Campbell, 2009). As pointed by Delind “what are needed are ways of thinking and feeling about local food that cannot be easily appropriated and/or disappeared by the reductionist rationality of the marketplace and that can balance and reframe an economic orientation with more ecological and cultural understandings of people in place” (2006). Local food is countering the facelessness of the current food system by locating food in places, and by acknowledging producers and consumers as local actors connected together and being part of a same community. By transforming the relationship between producers and consumers, CSA are responding to the political and economic landscape which heavily constrains small-scale farmers, by making things happen at the grassroots level with resolute utopianism (Starr, 2010). Those initiatives are not alternative only in methods (production part) but aim to reconfigure the thinking of the food system as a whole (Schnell, 2007). The intent is to close the gap between people and their food supply, by taking into account all the elements (environment, people, resources..) which are intrinsic to the production of food. With CSA, new narratives are emerging to understand the story behind the produces that consumers purchase as a mean to de-commodify food. This again contrast with the mistrust, abstractness and anonymity of globalised market (Schnell, 2013). In this view, the growing interest for local food is perceived as a logical countermovement for those who do not believe in corporate and global logics; and who are trying to find alternative to the mainstream provision system.

The nature of those food alternatives is to generate positive value along the three dimensions attached to the concept of sustainability namely: economic, social and environmental (FAO, 2018). Through the cases studied, the CSA initiatives selected aimed indeed to focus on developing viable economic models through a subscription system, to stimulate social exchanges at the local level and to participate to environmental safeguarding through the application of sustainable production practices. Emphasis was placed on increasing the sense of community belonging through activities (e.g open day events, local markets, classes) and through learning mechanisms enabling collective knowledge-sharing at the local level. As Gernet and al. (2018) emphasises, it is “the local understanding and knowledge of civil society which can synergise new ideas, system dynamics and sustainability”. The production of healthy food does not occur in a vacuum but is very much grounded in the holistic understanding of the interconnection between all the elements allowing to cultivate the land. Thus CSA niches are driven by “ideological commitment rather than profit seeking; the protected space is created by values and culture as opposed to regulation or subsidies and they tend to involve communal ownership structures and to operate in the social economy often relying on voluntary labour, grants, or mutual exchange” (Gernet and al., 2018). In this way CSA, as grassroots innovations, aim to stimulate bottom-up changes in the way food is perceived and bought, away from mainstream food practices. CSA comprises a different set of attitudes, behaviours and perceptions regarding food production and consumption, while being
driven by collaborative action. (Ibid, 2018). From the surveys, respondents demonstrated an interest for such new form of collaboration as they understood the benefits of eating sustainable food produced locally. The benefits involved the support of local economies and local actors, the guarantee of getting healthy food coming for short food chains and the insurance of the use of sustainable practices which would minimise the impact of production on the environment.

2. How do CSA practices emerge and sustain overtime?

As niches, CSA do not have to adhere to the logics of wider systems in which they are embedded which allow them to experiment with diverse solutions and projects (Gernet et al., 2018). CSA initiatives emerge due to the support to novelties from small networks of actors (e.g local producers and consumers), on the basis of expectations and visions (e.g sustainable values, short food chains preferences, horizontal relationships, transparency and traceability..). As stated by Kemp et al. (1998) and according to the SNM theory, niches emerge and sustain overtime if the three processes paramount to their development are strengthen and stabilised. Those processes were identified in the literature and depend on (1) the management of expectations, (2) the development of social networks, and (3) the learning processes (Kemp et al, 1998; Schot & Geels, 2008). If grassroots initiatives such as CSA initiatives encompass those factors and if they are able to deal with external influences (e.g markets, users preferences..) then it is assumed that they could be viable as niches. All three elements were present to some degree in the cases studied.

In order for expectations to contribute to niche building and niche development, expectations need to be made robust (by being shared by a growing amount of actors), to be specific enough to give practical guidance, and to provide direction for learning processes (Schot & Geels, 2008). Managing expectations implies to adjust visions to circumstances while taking advantage of windows of opportunity. For CSA initiatives, the cases have demonstrated flexibility and persistency in their endeavours despite experimenting challenges in their production (e.g weather irregularities, issues with pests or with their land tenure). Customers from the CSA cases were kept informed through the newsletters or face to face about those challenges as well as being informed of the new opportunities for the organisations (e.g new land acquisition, new partnerships or use of new practices). The inclusion of customers in CSA practices is an important aspect of managing their expectations which was exemplified by the invitations of CSA members to open days and other food related events in order to keep them involved and increase transparency through direct proximity. The cases demonstrated a willingness to gain public acceptance (or consumers’ preference) through the building of shared expectations for food production and food consumption. Gaining public acceptance through the management of expectations is central to the successful emergence and stabilisation of niches; as in the case of CSA initiatives, it is the customers who make the CSA business viable by subscribing to the vegetables packages and thus supporting producers and their production. The emergence of strong social networks is also key to the stimulation of the growth of grassroots initiatives as they often depend on the involvement of different actors,
resources and knowledges to develop. The three cases studied have shown that the CSA model gives the opportunity to local producers and local consumers to perceive each other as partners who can all be involved in value co-creation processes evolving around food (Brunori and al, 2012). This was exemplified by the search of CSA initiatives to cultivate strong ties with their customers so that producers’ customer-base could be maintained through trust and loyalty and as a result ensure the maintaining of their mutual-commitment. Two out of the three initiatives studied started more than 20 years ago which has allowed them to strengthen social ties with their customers. Ties were also made among CSA producers and other local producers to mutually benefits each others (e.g exchange of skills, resources, informations, expertise). The CSA cases also engaged themselves with other local actors and initiatives such as food markets, schools to provide food classes to students or with local restaurants to broaden their network and their outreach. According to the social network theory, when A (in our case producers) and B (consumers or local actors) connect through a system such as CSA, they are not only creating value of sharing/ engaging with each others skills and ideas but they are also creating a bridge between those two networks. Such bridge is very significant to allow the diffusion of knowledge about alternative food models and the harnessing of new values into practices (e.g preference for local and sustainable eating). By engaging in CSA initiatives, individuals often become aware of the impact of food production and realise in turn their agency as consumers and local actors.

The process of developing social networks is key to the development of CSA initiatives and key to create a constituency behind this type of model. Finally, learning processes contribute to niche development in that they generate first-order learning through the accumulation of facts and data from practical experience. CSA initiatives’ knowledge is being shared, from producers to consumers in order to disseminate information about the model and its practices. Social learning processes are crucial for enabling changes in consumers’ cognitive frames and assumptions (second-order learning). Indeed, because they are no known solutions to the issues of unsustainable food production and consumption, several reframing through learning need to occur in order for CSA to gain ground as an alternative. Learning processes relative to CSA initiatives can refer to: practical aspects (how and why is the food produced in a specific way), to market and user preferences (learning what consumers purchase, where and why), to cultural and symbolic meaning (what do consumers value in food and what meaning does food has for them) or to the societal and environmental effect (what are the differences in effects between food coming from CSA initiatives and food from globalised food chain). The three processes from the SNM theory (managing expectations, building social networks and enabling learning mechanisms) have been shown as inherent to niches development and gave insights on the elements needed for CSA initiatives to emerge and develop.

3. Can successful CSA practices co-exist with the mainstream food system?

In regards to the cases studied, two out of the three CSA initiatives have been in place since more than 20 years. This suggests that some CSA initiatives can be viable and persist as alternatives to the mainstream food system, if adequately supported by the right resources and networks. The research and the literature review have shown a growing
interest for food practices that were harnessing social and environmental values although the surveys revealed that respondents had little awareness about CSA initiatives. In addition to a lack of visibility of alternative food initiatives, the interview with Meino from Twee Linden reminded that it was difficult for small-scale producers to compete with the mainstream regime in terms of prices, accessibility, convenience. From the surveys, those three variables appeared as decisive in regards to consumers choices. Indeed, despite convergent calls toward long-term goals for alternative food practices, both consumers and producers found themselves constrained by their immediate environment and resources. The ability of CSA initiatives to co-exist with the mainstream food regime will thus depend on the consolidation of three factors: changes in mentalities (with the realisation that food is more than a commodity), markets opportunities for CSA initiatives (access, visibility and viability of the model) as well as institutional support for this type of sustainable practices.

4. To what extent do CSA initiatives in the Netherlands provide insights on the future opportunities and challenges for sustainable food consumption at the local level?

CSA initiatives in the Netherlands provide insights on the future opportunities and challenges for sustainable food consumption at the local level in that they showcase the difficulty to find a place as small-producers in the food provision system; and the difficulty as consumers to make food choices in lines with their values and capacities. The opportunities behind CSA initiatives relate to their ability to generate sustainable outcomes: in terms of food production, community-building and environmental preservation. The challenges behind CSA initiatives relate to the capacity of generating attitudes’ and behaviours’ changes, especially when those are constrained by the environment of individuals (lack of information, financial and time constraints, lack of access..). As mentioned in the literature, changes in the food system occur as a result of the multilevel interactions between the landscape, the regimes and the niches. Most CSA who intend to challenge the dominant regimes have not yet significantly changed the system (Gernet and al., 2018).

If they can not drive sustainable development alone, CSA initiatives provide the seeds for change and offer a possibility to connect local individuals through shared values and new forms of learning about food production and consumption. They offer the possibility to see consumers as agents of change instead of indifferent shoppers at the end of the food chain. By re-embedding market exchanges in social relation, CSA encourages individuals to become reflexive of their consumption patterns and to see the correlation between food and other spheres of their everyday life. When asking about the successfulness of CSA initiatives, one should not look at the accomplishment made so far but at the long visionary goals that they are trying to achieve. Grassroots organisers behind alternative food initiatives may not lay out the conditions for revolt but they may play a substantial role in guiding the energy (Starr, 2001). CSA initiatives, as innovative niches, are key drivers at the micro-level of the transition landscape. They constitute “geo-political territories of resistance” in which global struggles relative to food can be fought at the micro-level. (Kunze and Avelino, 2015). Their transformative capacity will depend on local institutional cultures, practices as well as on trans-local relations. (Gernet and al., 2018).
In order to support the growth and spread of grassroots initiatives such as CSA — and in the intent of making them accessible to a wider populations, attention should be given on preventing market-based diffusion systems which are inscribed in an industrial capitalist logic to reconfigure them (by transforming their original values and visions to stimulate economic vitality). This is exemplified by the harnessing of organic products in the global food industry. Organic products were initially alternative in regards to their production requirements (being chemical-free), before turning into the hands of big food chains who saw possibilities for profits (Ikerd, 2001). Large-scale producers engaged themselves in intensive farming for organic products in order to propose competitive prices in a food provision system where organic products continue to gain increasing popularity. Indeed, as Gernet et al. (2018) pointed, the successful replication of local food experimentations and the translation of innovative practices into policies, regulations and new market might possibly come at the expense of grassroots control and alter the radical nature behind those initiatives. Indeed, criticisms have highlighted concerns regarding the mainstreaming of alternative agricultural initiatives which often “causes them to revert to prioritising economic outcomes over social values” thus undermining the capacities to challenge the institutional structures in which they are embedded (Dunning, 2015). As a result, the marketisation and politicisation of grassroots innovations should avoid a ‘quest for control’ (van Gunsteren, 1976) and work toward consolidating alternative platforms and networks at the local level. Changes in food preferences on the consumers’ side are expected to happen based on slow long-term shifts in beliefs and values (Starr, 2010). As Hassanein (2003) emphasises, eating habits are correlated to social and political engagement, thus “true citizenship” can only be learned and practiced incrementally. Grassroots initiatives endorse the fundamental project of formulating a “we” within submerged networks by asking critical questions about the meaning behind food and about the ways food is produced and consumed. By bringing into lights the paradigms and tensions behind food systems, alternative food initiatives are aiming to escape “the apparently neutral logic of institutional procedures” (Melucci, 1989). As a result, food practices and preferences can be seen as sites of governmentally and resistance, whereby reflexive consumers and engaged producers can exercise their agency collectively to challenge the dominant food regime by “expanding their control” (Ibid, 1989) and exerting pressures on the system. CSA initiatives are creating new markets allowing consumers to practice their values (e.g for authentic and healthy food which enhances local economies, supports farmers and reduce their environmental footprint). As Smith and al. (2017) points out that, if CSA as grassroots innovations do not have the map for more sustainable futures, “they are exploring critical points of departure” (p. 198).

7.2 Contribution to new knowledge

The research aimed to contribute to the understanding of CSA initiatives as alternative food networks, the way they emerge as niches and the degree of receptivity from local consumers in the Netherlands. New knowledge was created from empirical observations and surveys about consumers views on the CSA model: how they perceived it and whether
such model was attractive to them. The specific age group (18-34) gave insights about what young consumers felt about their food consumption patterns and which variables they took into account when purchasing food. The surveys were beneficial to put in perspective the dichotomy between what consumers value and what they purchase; as well as their views on the differences between the mainstream food regime and the alternatives to the regime. The in-depth interviews provided insights about the understanding of local food from consumers. What stands out from the interviews is how different the cognitive framing of local food is for participants. The scale and characteristics of what defines local food varied greatly among participants which suggests a lack of common framework for conceptualising food production in the context of place. The in-depth interview with one producer gave insights on the opportunities and issues of the CSA model, while putting in perspective consumers’ preferences and barriers in regards to the vegetable packages.

7.3 Reflection

(1) reflection on the limitations of the research in terms of theory

Relying on the SNM theory was relevant to analyse the way CSA initiatives emerge but the theory lacked an approach on which adjustments are needed in the socio-technical regime of the food system, for CSA initiatives to develop and gain ground as alternatives. Most of the attention was given on understanding the required social changes regarding food consumption because the research focused on consumers’ choices and preferences. The political and economic elements which would help strengthen the development of niches were not explored enough although they are central to the successfulness of initiatives.

(2) limitations in terms of methodology applied

In regards to the methodology applied, several aspects should be taken into account. The research strategy aimed to delve into the topic of sustainable food consumption and CSA initiatives in an exploratory manner by trying to take into account multiple realities and tackle often non-quantifiable cause-and-effects processes. The theory behind the research aimed to address the nature of CSA initiatives while the interviews and surveys methods aimed to gather data about the perception of CSA initiatives by harnessing their degree of attractiveness among consumers. The sample for the surveys (100 respondents between 18 and 34 years old) can be said to be somehow representative of this age group. However, the sample target does not allow to generalise findings to the broader population. The majority of respondents were still students, thus other group targets (e.g professionals) or other age groups could have generated different responses. In regards to interviews with producers, the number of respondents was much lower than expected despite recurrent efforts to reach out to them. Indeed, out of the 12 CSA initiatives contacted in the Netherlands, only one responded positively for an interview. This is potentially due to the time-frame as the data collection occurred during the summer period which is quite busy for producers. As a result, the research only relies on one CSA producer’s insights about the CSA model and consumers’ preferences which cannot be generalised to other CSA producers’ views in the Netherlands. In addition, the language
barrier in regards to the producer interviewed might have lead to some interpretations, although the core content is believed to have been transcribed accurately. Three case-study were examined to understand the nature, practices and characteristics of CSA initiatives. One of the initiatives was owned by the producer who responded to the interview. The content of this case study is thus more detailed, personal and up-to-date than the two others where informations and data was derived from secondary sources. In order to palliate to this limitation, the newsletters of those two cases-study were analysed in details, as they were luckily rich in informations and spread over a few years. In the newsletters, producers were addressing important messages relative to the organisation as a mean to keep their members informed and involved. This allowed to trace back some of the opportunities and challenges encountered by the cases.

7.4 Recommendations

As seen in the literature review, local food systems held significant benefits for sustainability. Thus, increased attention in research should be given to the logistics and resources which are either enabling or constraining small-scale producers to be competitive with larger provision system (Dunning, 2015). Focusing on the strategies ensuring them a fair access to local markets is thus key to the expansion and viability of local food initiatives. Core to this prospect is the aim to increase food system resilience by decentralising food practices — building on the richness of grassroots innovations to come up with solutions to problems as they see them. In addition, the research has shown the importance of social networking for the emergence of CSA initiatives, as niches against the food regime (Geels, 2010). In the view, increased efforts should be made to spread awareness about alternative food initiatives, their vision, logistics and practices at the local level. As revealed by the surveys, local consumers still have limited knowledge regarding CSA initiatives despite being, for the majority, interested in this type of model. Getting the civil society involved through information dissemination and direct participation could help reshape the current relationships to food, the understanding and the values attached to them. Strengthening local alliances based on horizontal relationship in the food system would challenge the facelessness of the mainstream food system and develop new relationships based on trust, mutual-interest and reciprocity. From those alliances, new values, narratives and imaginaries can be envisioned for the future of food and with them new set of sustainable practices can follow.

In lines with Guptill and Wilkins’s views (2002), increased attention should thus be given to strengthening public-private partnerships between initiatives at the local and regional level (rather than at the national level) as those partnerships have a better chance of achieving localisation objectives as they are more flexible, adaptable but also more willing to enter into collaborative relationships (Dunning, 2015). Stimulating multi-stakeholder partnerships is key to building an understanding of and collaboration on governance issues within the food system, and to support the development of alternative food initiatives (FAO, 2018). In practice, this will imply investing in networking with other organisations in order to learn, adapt and synergise different approaches toward the realisation of sustainable food production and consumption objectives. As Wills (2015) argues, critical questions should also be asked about the political geographies of food: whether power is really devolved
and the degree to which actors are willing to engage and make the necessary changes to culture and relationships in order to fit the needs for a transition in the food regime. Thus, the capacity of CSA and AFN to enact grounded change will depend on consumers’ willingness and capacities to make changes in their food consumption patterns and to unite behind shared values (Brunori et al. 2012).
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### IX. Annex

**Annex 1. Detailed explanation of the research question terms**

| Potential | Considering the barriers and incentives for community initiatives (Feola, and Nunes, 2014; Seyfang and Smith, 2007) and the capacities for transformations in the local food system (Geels, 2010; Schot and Geels, 2008) |
| Community-supported agriculture | Mutual commitment between producer and consumer to enhance direct local food production and consumption through short supply chains and relationships of trust (Réthy and Deznény, 2013) |
| Sustainable food consumption patterns | There are no commonly agreed definition for “sustainable food consumption”. Eating sustainably usually refers to a consumption of food that is safe, healthy, nutritious; that can meet the needs of the less well off at the local scale, that provides viable livelihood for producers, respects environmental boundaries (Holden et al., 2017), minimises the impact of production (e.g reduced energy use), that respect animal welfare and which support local products. Sustainable food consumption patterns must fit people’s everyday lifestyles (e.g feasible, available, affordable and accessible) and should also allow for socio-cultural diversity (Reisch et al. 2006). |
| Local level | There are no generally accepted definition of the term ‘local’, and no consensus on the distance that would determine if the products are local. Indeed, definitions related to geographic distance between production and sales vary by regions, companies, consumers, and local food markets (Martinez and al, 2010). Eating locally usually refers to minimising the distance between production and consumption through short food chains that contrast with the distant food chains of the mainstream food system (Peters et al., 2008). In the research, the local level will be understood in terms of direct proximity between consumers and producers at the regional scale (Feagan, 2007). |
Annex 2. Interview guide CSA member

Introduction
Thank you for taking the time to participate to this research on alternative food networks and community-supported agriculture. The topic of the research aims to investigate the ways in which local food initiatives come to emerge and sustain overtime: and the extent to which those alternatives are expected to play a role in the sustainable development of food systems. The interview should take approximately about 1 hour. I would like to be able to use your name and position in the write-ups of this research, but if you prefer, your answers can be kept anonymous. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to stop the interview at any given time. Do you have any questions before we start?

Respondent profile
- Name:
- Gender:
- Age:

Linking respondent to the organisation:
- What is your position within the organisation?
- When did you get involved?
- How did you became involved?
- Why did you became involved?
- Is it a paid or voluntary activity?
- Do you live near the organisation?
- Did you had any previous knowledge on agriculture?
- Did you receive any training since your involvement with the organisation?
- Do you grow your own food? (— if yes what)

Organisation:
- How did the organisation started? (— where you involved from the start?)
- Which resources where needed to start the organisation? (Financial, social, physical..)
- How many members initiated the project?
- How many members are there now on the board?
- How does the organisation work? (social structure around the food chain)
- How are decisions made among the members?
- How many subscribers/buyers do you have now?
- What is being produced by the organisation?
- In which quantity?
- Is there other food-related activities initiated by the organisation?

Economic viability
- Where did the capital came from at the start?
- Where does the capital comes from now?
- Do you have support from third-parties?
- Is the price for the products paid in advance by consumers (— if yes, in which intervals?)
- Is the economic model of the organisation satisfactory?
- Who is your main consumer group? (target/buyers)
Stakeholders analysis and social viability

- How are the commitments with farmers organised? (e.g written contract?)
- (+ How do you connect with farmers if products are not from organisation)
- What is in for the consumers? (what are the advantages of buying from your organisation)
- How do you deal with consumers' needs (e.g food diversity/preferences)?
- How is consumers’ outreach organised? (e.g communication)
- Can individuals become involved in the organisation? (— if yes, how?)
- Are there any obstacles currently facing the organisation? (— and if so what is the organisation doing to overcome them?)

Values & vision

- Which are the core values of the organisation?
- Do you think those values are important? (— why?)
- Are those values somehow alternative to those of the mainstream food system (often characterised by productivity, efficiency, low-cost..) ? (— why? how?)
- Do you think that food grown locally differ from globalised food? (— in which ways?)
- What could be done to enhance awareness and support toward local food initiatives like the one you are part of? (— what is the organisation doing?)

Final points on CSA model

- What are in your views the advantages of the CSA model?
- What are in your views the disadvantages of the CSA model?
- From your experience, do you think that the CSA model could become viable at the large scale in terms of both production and organisational capacity?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time.
Annex 3. Interview: consumers’ perception about local food

Respondent profile

Name:
Gender:
Age:

Questions

· What does local food mean to you?
· What does ‘local’ evoke to you?
· Could you give an estimate of the relative distance between the production and consumption sites that would qualify as local food for you? (e.g. within x kilometres)
· How does local food compare to the food that you can get from supermarkets?

  o If you buy local products, what are your motivation(s) to do so?
  o What type of local products do you usually buy?
  o What percentage would you say is local among your weekly groceries?

    or

  o If you don’t buy local products, why not?

· Would you like to buy more local food?
· What are in your views the advantages of buying local food?
· What are in your views the disadvantages?
· Is there anything else you would like to add on the topic?

Thank you for your time and inputs!
Annex 4. List of respondents for the interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Asli Ak</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Amy Miner Huang</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Mario Pluchino</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Leila Van Heijningen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Tugberk Goçmenoglu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Cypriot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Vladas Valeika</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Katja Henke</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Michel Van der Meer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Garima Kar</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. Carlos Alvarez Largo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 5. Surveys about consumers preferences and the attractiveness of the CSA model

Thank you for taking the time to participate to this research on alternative food networks and community-supported agriculture. The topic of the research is concerned with food consumption patterns at the local level. As a daily consumer, your views and choices greatly matter to the understanding of the topic. The survey should take approximately about 5 minutes to fill in, and your answers will be kept anonymous and confidential. Thank you again for your inputs, let's begin!

Part 1 : General informations about consumers' background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Type of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What is your age ?</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What is your gender ?</td>
<td>Mixte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed ?</td>
<td>Mixte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Your current activity ?</td>
<td>Mixte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) What is your nationality ?</td>
<td>Mixte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Since how long have you lived in the NL ?</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Where do you usually get your food ?</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Why do you shop at those particular places ?</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) If you do your shopping at different places, is there any differences</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Do you grow your own food ?</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Which criteria are important to you when buying food ?</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2 : Gauging the criteria that matter to consumers

Please, rate the following criteria on a scale from 1 to 5 according to your personal consumption choices :

12) How important is the origin of the product for you ?
13) The quality of the product ? (ex. nutrients content)
14) The price of the product ?
15) The packaging ?
16) Social certifications ? (ex. Fair trade)
17) Environnemental certifications ?
18) The seasonality of product ?
19) Organic certifications ?
20) On a scale from 1 to 10, how healthy do you think your diet is ?

(A healthy diet is understood as eating a variety of foods that give you the nutrients you need to maintain your health, feel good, and have energy. It includes daily fruits and vegetables, protein, carbohydrates, fat, water, vitamins, and minerals.)

Part 3 : Preferences and values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Type of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21) Do you feel like you can afford the type of food you value ?</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22) If you answered no, which type of products would you like to purchase if you had the financial freedom to do so ?</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23) Do you feel trust toward the food you eat ? Please shortly explain why</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24) Do you feel aware of the production processes behind the food that you eat ?</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25) Do you know any producers whose food you buy personally ? (face to face purchase)</td>
<td>mixte</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
26) If the option was available near you, would you like to participate to food-related activities or events (e.g trainings, community-gardening, being a member of a cooperative, following cooking classes...)?

Closed

Part 4 : Evaluating consumers' interests for CSA vegetables packages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Type of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27) Have you ever been part of a community-supported agriculture initiative?</td>
<td>closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Community-supported agriculture (CSA) refers to a system that connects the producer and consumers within the food system more closely by allowing the consumer to subscribe to the harvest of a certain farm or group of farms (e.g delivery of vegetable packages, dairy..)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28) If you have ever been part of a CSA, please describe the type of initiative and your motivations for joining the organisation (either as a member or subscriber)</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29) If you’ve never been part of a CSA, could you select some reasons why?</td>
<td>Mixte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30) Is the idea of weekly delivered food packages attractive to you?</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31) Please shortly explain your answer</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32) If you answered yes, which price would you be willing to pay for a weekly vegetable package (1 person, organic &amp; local)</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 5 : Closing up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Type of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33) Are you satisfied by your current food consumption patterns? Please explain why</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34) Is there anything else you would like to add?</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 6. List of the 100 surveys’ responses (extracts)