

**The Short Food Supply Chain development explained by the phenomenon of rural
gentrification: the case of Limousin, France**

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Abstract: This study aims to meet work on rural gentrification carried out by geographers and sociologists and work in relationship marketing. Our aim is firstly to identify more precisely the profiles of SFSC consumers and producers in Limousin in mobilizing variables of relationship marketing and secondly to confirm the SFSC development as a commercial demonstration of rural gentrification.

Keywords: Short Food Supply Chain; rural gentrification; gentrifier; relationship marketing; consumer behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Long considered to be a marginal distribution approach, farm sales, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or other collective farmers' shops, in other words Short Food Supply Chains (SFSC)¹ are expanding today (21% of French farmers market their products using SFSC). Indeed, it can be seen as a resort for consumers frightened by recurrent food crises or seeking responsible consumption. Short food circuits are deeply rooted in sustainable development (Initiatives, 2006): from an economic point of view, they would contribute to a fairer trade by allowing farmers to regain control of the added value; socially, they would reinforce the link between producers and consumers, help farms to keep in business and contribute to local development; finally, from an environmental point of view, they would favour the use of sustainable agriculture and reduce the carbon footprint.

Limousin, a region in western France, had about 1440 farms in 2012 using short circuits to market their products, mainly in farm shops. These farms are located in an area that has experienced a high turnover of its population, with new entrants whose socio-economic and cultural profile is different from established people, leading Limousin to be the site of a rural gentrification (Richard and Dellier, 2011).

This observation brings us to wonder about the link between this phenomenon of gentrification and the development of SFSC. Is SFSC a response to the expectations of neo-rurals willing to build their environment according to the image they have?

In this perspective, we will firstly introduce the notion of gentrification and defend the interest of studying its relationship with SFSC. Next, we will present our research design and the methodology proposed to respond to our issue. This research, which is still at an

¹ In this study, SFSC should be considered as a distribution channel characterized by short distance and one middleman at most between producers and consumers.

exploratory stage, will open the way for a future operational phase of collecting and processing data.

THE CONCEPT OF GENTRIFICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS

Mainly geographers and sociologists have studied the concept of gentrification. However, among the large number of studies, it seems interesting to address some questions in the specific context of marketing, particularly in the field of consumer behavior. After recalling the origin and basic elements of the concept of gentrification, we will introduce a few marketing approaches to this concept. Finally, we will develop our thinking about the relationship between rural gentrification and development of short food circuits.

The concept of gentrification

The concept of gentrification emerged in the early 1960s following the work of a sociologist, Ruth Glass, intrigued by the influx of a relatively affluent population in popular districts of London: *'One by one, many of the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class... Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed'* (Glass, 1964). Following these initial observations, numerous studies have since taken place in other cities (New York, Paris, Vancouver, etc.). They have highlighted different types of change regarding the social composition, the housing stock and the commercial landscape of gentrified neighbourhoods.

The explanation of gentrification has resulted in the emergence of two main schools of thought (Boyle and al., 1998). The first has been developed by Smith and addresses gentrification in terms of production (Smith, 1996). According to this geographer, the low rents found in the suburbs of major cities after the Second World War led to a movement of

the real estate capital (houses, businesses and industries) in these outlying areas at the expense of city centres. As a consequence, city centres' property values decreased, giving rise to a so-called *rent-gap*. Thus, developers were attracted by the potential returns generated by the rehabilitation of city centres, hoping to receive very high levels of rents and commercial leases. Gentrification is therefore seen as the result of financial speculation from investors. Ley, the founder of the demand-side explanations of gentrification, criticized this way of perceiving the phenomenon (Ley, 1996). According to Ley, the evolution of the settlement of city centres could be explained by businesses relocations, manufacturing industries leaving inner city and being replaced by service companies. As a result, the working classes have gradually given way to white-collar workers of the finance, culture and services sectors, whose expectations and preferences were more consistent with an urban way of life (Butler, 1997). Gentrification is then the result of those individual expectations, which brings us to introduce more thoroughly the choices made by the actors of gentrification, the so-called gentrifiers.

Gentrification and consumption

A lot of geographers and sociologists have also addressed this issue of choice of gentrifiers. In this humanist vision of gentrification, the choices appeared to be explained by three distinct variables (Rérat, 2012).

1) The profile of individuals. The ideal type of gentrifier corresponds to a small-sized household of the upper middle class (single person or couple without children) under 35, working in the service sector and with a high level of qualification (Ley, 1996). But beyond this typical profile, an upper middle class diversity has been established (Warde, 1991), that can be explained by the different moderator variables of gentrifiers' choices:

- The position on the life course: it is important to distinguish people living alone, couples without children (*‘Dinkies’*) and families, the latter being in the minority (Karsten, 2003).
- The gender: gentrification could be explained by the changing role played by women in the workplace and in their homes (Warde, 1991; Kern, 2010).
- The sexual orientation: the impact of the gay community on the phenomenon of urban gentrification has been studied repeatedly (Deligne and al., 2006). Studies consistently show the relationship between the gentrification process and the development of dedicated shops (bars, restaurants, etc.) (Giraud, 2011).
- The growth of a transnational elite: executives most frequently coming from globalized financial companies and with very high purchasing power are super-gentrifying the city centres (Butler and Lees, 2006) and are calling for the opening of outlets that meet their specific expectations (one example is *‘La Jeune Rue’*, a Paris commercial project oriented around design and high-end food products).

2) The trajectory of individuals: this is the location and characteristics of housing they held, hold or will hold (Van Criekingen, 2002).

3) The motivations of individuals: the literature distinguishes two different approaches to explain people choices (Tallon and Bromley, 2004):

- The prevailing approach is to consider cities as places of differentiation, in the sense that they offer a lot more spaces of consumption, leisure and trade compared to suburbs (Caulfield, 1989). Cities enable their inhabitants to adopt prestige consumption or lifestyles associated with artists, illustrated by the attendance of cafes, trendy shops, etc. (Ley, 1996).

- Another approach highlights commercial and practical aspects of urban life (Hjorthol and Bjornskau, 2005).

The relationship between gentrification and consumption seems appropriate to highlight a marketing analysis; it has however been rarely addressed by the management literature. As Ilkucan and Sandıkcı (2005) note, *‘despite the existence of a voluminous literature on gentrification, a consumption-oriented understanding of gentrification, which is attentive to the community-place-consumption dynamics and actual practices of the gentrifiers, is absent.’* They underline the importance of studying the consumption of gentrifiers whose manifestations are clearly visible in a given area (Zukin, 1987): *‘Gentrification’s consumption markers are explicitly identified with a specific type and use of space.’* Ilkucan and Sandıkcı (2005) thus come to assimilate gentrified places as consumption communities. This notion of ‘consumption community’, introduced by Boorstin (1967), refers to informal groups expressing shared needs, values or lifestyles through distinctive consumption patterns. Also, in the gentrified neighbourhoods, the retailscape would be the expression of the existence of a sense of community and be a proof of the gentrifiers’ consumption practices and lifestyle.

Rural gentrification and short food supply chains

If gentrification is generally associated with an urban environment, it is also evident in rural areas (Phillips, 1993). Hence what is called rural gentrification can be defined as *‘processes whereby middle or service class households are moving into villages and displacing local, working class groups, and often in the process also refurbishing, extending and converting properties’* (Phillips and al., 2008). The theoretical corpus is largely inspired from the one developed for studies in urban areas (Guimond and Simard, 2010) and both production-based and demand-side explanations of gentrification can be found (Darling, 2005). In the latter, the gentrifiers are seen as ‘consumers’ of rural areas, hence highlighting *‘a tendency to displace*

long-time residents, commodify space, and involves a shift in landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption' (Bryson and Wyckoff, 2010). Among the motivations of gentrifiers can be often found the search for environmental quality (Richard, 2010), put forward by the media presenting the campaign as a bucolic and idyllic location, '*a refuge from the urban evils*' (Mathieu, 1998). This observation also led Smith and Phillips in 2001 to substitute rural gentrification by the concept of 'greentrification' and many researchers to focus on the environmental consequences of this phenomenon. Richard and al. (2014) questioned specifically on the impact that rural gentrification could have on short food circuits, as this distribution mode is seen to have multiple environmental virtues (Chiffolleau, 2008). The purpose of their study, the Limousin region, indeed displays distinctive features favouring this issue:

- A large part of the clientele of SFSC lives in the countryside due to a significant imbalance in population between urban and rural areas;
- The countryside has a large proportion of neo-rurals with a distinctive socio-cultural profile: higher socio-professional category, higher level of qualification and diplomas, some quite important environmental and / or social motivations;
- This profile, differentiated with respect to long-time residents, seems to be simultaneously observed in SFSC clients and producers.

This link between rural gentrification and short food supply circuits needs, in our view, to be developed by mobilizing the concepts and tools of marketing. The greentrification would result here in a change in the business environment by promoting the development of new modes of distribution in accordance with the expectations of customers and producers.

THE MODEL AND THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this second part, we will have an overview of marketing research on short food circuits. This state of art will supplement the information previously seen to justify the study of the link between rural gentrification and SFSC. Thus, the integration of work in geography and marketing will lead us to define our research questions and to build our research model, and we will introduce our research methodology.

The approach of short food circuits in marketing

Marketing researchers have been interested in short food circuits for several years now. In this context, main work has focused on the close relationship that consumers may have with producers. Based on different researches on this concept of proximity (Damperat, 2006; Bergadaà and Del Burchia, 2009), Hérault-Fournier, Merle and Prigent-Simonin (2012, 2014) propose a study of the link between proximity and trust in the context of different forms of direct sale, then complemented by a typology of consumers on the basis of this perceived proximity. While all types of short food circuits have been studied in marketing, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has a special general resonance among researchers. After focusing on the consumers' motivations to join CSA, marketing specialists have placed the CSA in the context of relationship marketing. In fact, Dufeu and Ferrandi (2011) tried to model the relationship between perceived proximity, satisfaction, trust and commitment towards CSA. From a more theoretical point of view, this search for personal proximity with producers is situated both in a goods economy and a link economy as described by Cova (1997).

Whether on CSA or more generally on local food products (Merle and Piotrowski, 2012), these various studies highlight a particular consumer profile. To be more specific, customers of short food circuits have an educational level above the average of the population, live in

families and have full-time jobs. Environmental aspects (health and environmental quality of products) on the one hand and social aspects (membership in the same social group) on the other are the two main motivations of this population. In the case of CSA, support for local and non-conventional agriculture is also expressed (Bertrandias and Pernin, 2010). It is important to highlight that this consumer profile is very close to the ‘gentrifier consumer’ observed by Richard and al. (2014) in their investigation of the short food circuits conducted in Limousin.

By contrast, works in marketing have limitations regarding the producer profiles. Dufeu and Ferrandi (2011) and Hérault-Fournier and al. (2012) have noted the importance of investigation in the knowledge of producers’ behavior and their willingness to engage in a relationship with consumers, but no research has been reported. To carry out a study including both consumers and producers would be an interesting research direction to demonstrate that short food circuits might be the result of a rural gentrification phenomenon.

The research issues

Our research raises questions about the profiles of both the consumers and producers of short food circuits. Based on a review of the literature, the convergence of profiles of both actors and even their adjustment seems to be a feature of gentrification. This is highlighted for example by research work on builders in French region of Corbieres (Perrenoud, 2008) or on SFSC in Limousin (Richard and al., 2014). In the countryside, the gentrification phenomenon would facilitate exchanges and comprehension of producers and consumers and promote the establishment of ‘*alliances*’ based on common values. This convergence of profiles that brings consumers and producers closer together on the basis of common interests, values or motivations is the focus of our research. More broadly, work on the relationship between urban gentrification and consumption show that the business landscape is shaped according to

consumption communities present in the gentrified neighbourhood (Ilkucan and Sandıkcı (2005). Thus, in this study, we aim at ensuring that the use of short food circuits by both consumers and producers is a consequence of gentrification in rural areas of Limousin.

The study of the convergence of consumers and producers' profiles should be not only based on socio-demographic or shared motivation variables and should include proximity variable, as shown in the marketing literature on short food circuits. Also, we want to explore this notion of proximity not only for consumers but for producers using SFSC too. Then, the idea is to define consumer and producer profiles based on socio-demographic, shared motivation and proximity variables, in order to highlight a gentrifier-consumer and gentrifier-producer profiles. At this stage, questions we need to answer are:

- What is the profile of SFSC consumers in rural areas of Limousin? Does the gentrifier-consumer profile exist?
- What is the profile of SFSC producers in rural areas of Limousin? Does the gentrifier-producer profile exist?
- Is the convergence of these profiles the sign of the existence of a gentrification phenomenon illustrated by short food circuits?

These questions can be synthesized by the following scheme:



Each question corresponds to a phase of research with a specific methodology as discussed in the following section.

The research methodology

In this research, we aim at explaining the development of short food circuits by using a marketing approach of rural gentrification. This exploratory work will serve to initiate the transposition of the concept of gentrification of the field of geography to the field of marketing and allows us to develop research issues and variables used to identify gentrifiers' profiles.

Besides, along with the works in geography, works in relationship marketing (especially those dealing with the link between proximity and the 'trust-confidence-commitment' sequence: Dufeu and Ferrandi, 2011) are also used to help identify gentrifiers' profiles. Thus, variables used to highlight gentrifier-consumer and gentrifier-producer profiles are: neo-rural situation; level of qualification and diplomas; shared motivations; proximity.

On a practical level, a qualitative study will be conducted to validate the variables used for setting up the gentrifier-consumer and the gentrifier-producer profiles. This first stage of operational research will then be complemented by a quantitative survey conducted in the SFSC Observatory in Limousin-Poitou-Charentes.

Regarding field observations, we have considered the short food circuits' typology developed by Chiffolleau (2008) and built on French legal terminology. Chiffolleau has identified three factors to define and differentiate between short food circuits: the number of intermediaries, the collective or individual nature of the sales system and the geographical distance between the place of production and the point of sale or consumption. Thus, the author has defined 17 forms of SFSC that will not be considered in our study for the sake of clarity. Given the need to study both the consumer and the producer, we will collect information in the context of

what Chiffolleau has called 'direct sale' or 'sale by the producer himself.' Furthermore, we need to observe the possible differences in consumer and producer profiles according to the method of sale: individual (farm shops) or collective (collective farmers' shops) forms of direct sale as well as Community Supported Agriculture (this last form seems to require real commitment from both actors; Chiffolleau (2008) ; Dufeu and Ferrandi (2011)). This research is thus a continuation of the work initiated by Richard and al. (2014). Our aim is to validate their assumption that the development of SFSC in Limousin can be explained by the phenomenon of rural gentrification.

CONCLUSION

SFSC has been along for a while, but its current success has the interest of researchers in humanities and social sciences and especially in marketing in recent years. Our study lies in the particular context of rural areas of Limousin where the development of short food circuits (farm shops, collective farmers' shops and CSA) seems to be correlated with a change in the structure of the territory that could be described as rural gentrification.

We have chosen a singular way in reviewing and crossing researches in geography, rural economy as well as relationship marketing. This exploratory research has allowed us to highlight gentrifier-consumer and gentrifier-producer profiles to work on our research question: to what extent the phenomenon of rural gentrification may explain the development of short food circuits in Limousin?

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