



ATTER (Agroecological Transition of TERritorial food systems) is an EU-funded project for scaling up agroecological transitions for territorial food systems through cross-case studies, relying on 16 territorial case studies anchored in five countries (France, Italy, United Kingdom, Brazil and USA) and on the complementary skills of the 19 participating organisations.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101007755

Territorial Food Projects in France

Territorial Food Projects (*Projets Alimentaires Territoriaux*) are defined by the French law since 2014. In December 2022, there are officially nearly 400 all over France and they cover 2/3 of French population. Mostly led by territorial authorities (municipalities, inter-municipalities, *Départements*, *Parcs Naturels Régionaux*, etc.), they have to include a series of key issues and actions (food justice, food education, food waste, territorial anchoring of food supply) and can receive government funding after a public evaluation process, with an increased funding for the related calls during the pandemic. If after a few years of implementation, some positive effects on territorial food transitions are acknowledged, some weaknesses are also being discussed, including their variable contribution to the ecological transition. Moreover, Territorial Food Projects cover very different scales and sizes of population, which raises a debate over the relevant scales to foster food systems' agroecological transitions.

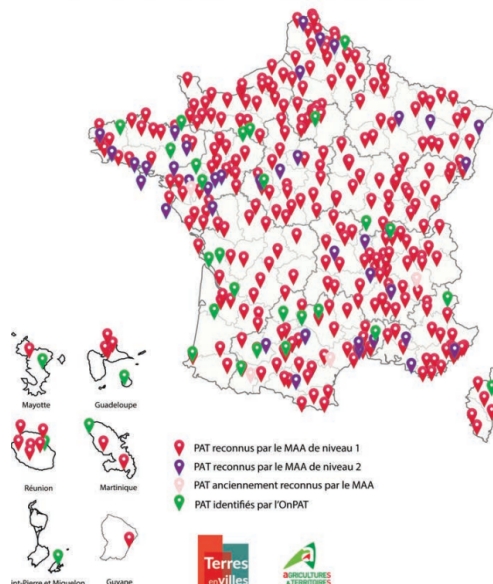
Trajectory and definition

Initially drafted by a green deputy, Brigitte Allain, as an amendment to the 2014 agricultural law submitted during its discussion phase at the National Assembly, Territorial Food Projects were finally defined by this law as having to be elaborated "*in concertation with all the actors within a territory and meet the objective of structuring the agricultural economy and implementing a territorial food system. They participate in the consolidation of localised sectors and in the development of the consumption of products from short circuits, in particular relating to organic production*" (Agricultural law, oct 2014, article 39). This wording obviously highlights the economic lense adopted by the government, despite many stakeholders and networks expected a wider perspective, and despite the inclusion of this public instrument in an agroecological law. However, this definition is open enough to let territories include a diversity of objectives and actions.

Territorial Food Projects are implemented and financed through calls for projects framed and carried out by the French Ministry of Agriculture (National Food Program) with an annual budget that ranged between 1.4 and 2 million € between 2016 and 2020 (with crossed funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, and now the Ministry of Health and the national environmental agency ADEME). It then reached 7.5M€ in 2021, due to the recovery plan linked to the pandemic, under 2 modalities (strengthening existing projects or emergence of new ones), as well as 77M€ for investments.

The maximum amount that can be financed for their emergence has also raised from 50.000€ for 2 years to 100.000€ for 3 years (often used to hire a devoted project manager and fund focused actions), and the funding for investments can be up to 2M€/TFP in some regions. Because of this strong impulse (151 new TFPs were launched only in the year 2021), their number raised to 400 in 2022 (figure 1).

Observatoire national des Projets alimentaires territoriaux



Figures 1. Territorial Food Projects in France, 2022. Sources: RnPAT, 2022

Process of recognition

"Territorial Food Project" (or PAT, for *Projet Alimentaire Territorial*) is a brand, and a process of labellisation is mandatory to be able to use it as well as to apply to the public funding devoted to this policy.



This labellisation consists in two levels: one for "emerging PAT", that is valid for 3 years and gives access to facilitation funding (in order to establish a diagnostic and an action plan), and one for "PAT in action" (consolidated ones), that is valid for 5 years and renewable, and gives access to investment funding. The labelisation process is carried out by the regional services of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty (new name of the French Ministry of Agriculture since may 2022). It is unsure to what extent this recognition process will maintain its attractiveness for territories once the effects of the COVID recovery plan are over.

Territorial Food Projects in 2022: leaders, partners, key goals and actions

Most Territorial Food Projects are led by territorial authorities and public entities (large municipalities, rural or urban inter-municipalities, Départements, Parcs Naturels Régionaux etc.), only 4 of them being led by civil society organisations and 5 by chambers of agriculture in 2022. They have now a larger presence in rural regions than in the first years. The inter-municipalities, that are mainly involved in public services and in short term action are the most current leaders, with a size which is getting smaller over time (an average of 53 municipalities in May 2022), as an effect of the opportunity effects of the calls for tenders and related funding opportunities. In contrast, "territories of project" that have a longer term territorial strategy appear to be less present. Territorial Food Projects are present all over France with a higher density in regions where local contexts were already favourable to short circuits and/or there were strong partnerships between rural development

and peasant agriculture networks on the one hand, and local authorities on the other.

Emerging Territorial Food Projects have to include in their goals a series of key issues defined by the National Food Program (food justice, food education, food waste, territorial anchoring of food supply) and related concrete actions. Most Territorial Food Projects indeed include actions devoted to local agrifood chains (short circuits, processing units, logistics, distribution), social access to food, health and public procurement. Actions in favour of the ecological transition seem to be less present in the most recent projects than in the pioneer ones. Despite the 2014 law is oriented by agroecology, this paradigm has suffered strong locking effects, reluctances or weakening processes in the last years, due to the prevailing power relations in the agrifood governance arenas.

Territorial Food Projects are supported by regional networks that are also funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and by this Ministry's regional services, especially for the setting up of their applications.

A territorial food project in Communautés de Communes d'Aubenas Vals et Val de Ligne A rural area with a rather diversified agriculture around a small town About 47000 inh. – 32 municipalities

In this area, there have for decades been numerous initiatives linked to short food chains, school procurement, etc. and a first collective reflexion at the larger scale of Southern Ardèche aimed at launching a Territorial Food Project (2017-2019), although this failed due to a lack of shared visions and political will at this time. Meanwhile, an action research project was carried out (2019-2021) to collectively analyse the past trajectory of the territorial food system (see ATTER Southern Ardèche case study on ATTER-OBS), within a multi-actors group of around 25 persons (researchers and local actors). This work and others carried out by local institutions supported the reflexion towards the definition of a Territorial Food Project, an instrument which by 2021 had become more attractive to local politicians and actors than a few years ago. This was done at a smaller scale, that of 2 "communities of communes" which first decided to hire someone on agricultural and food issues, and then to apply to the governmental call for tenders. The process of definition of the objectives involved a diversity of local actors and was supported by a prospective study and approach carried out by the PNR des Monts d'Ardèche and Terralim (also partners of ATTER network).

The Territorial Food Project funding allowed to secure a coordinator's position, and to launch key focused actions on access to land, food procurement, health and education. Despite some actions would have been carried out even without this project, due to the pressure of new regulations (such as the presence of local and organic products in school food procurement) or thanks to the involvement of local networks (such as the support to new farmers), the Territorial Food Project had a real effect in terms of recognition of food related issues by local politicians and actors, of mutual acknowledgement of local actors involved in different sectors (agriculture, food, health, social, education etc.) and could act as a lever for future programs. However, it acts at a limited scale in relation to the larger scale that had been chosen – and experimented as relevant – in previous projects. Moreover, some nearby communities of communes that have less skills and means to set up an application, are also less likely to access to the same support and resources, which illustrates the risks of territorial inequity raised by the Territorial Food Projects policy.

Source: ATTER project, Southern Ardèche Case Study; [Lamine et al. 2022](#).

Montfort Communauté Rural area – specialized in conventional milk production 26 044 inh – 8 municipalities – 30km away from Rennes Métropole

In Montfort Communauté, actions in favor of food transition started in 2017 through an educational entry with a project entitled REPAS for «Re-enchanting our plates for the children's pleasure, the preservation of local agriculture and everyone health». Intended to address educational issues on children nutrition during canteen meals, the project mobilized a diversity of actors: chefs, canteen managers, elected officials, school directors, animators, parents, pupils, etc. Since school public catering is a municipal jurisdiction, Montfort Communauté endorsed the role of project leader and elaborated a roadmap for the 6 municipalities that provide a canteen service, which were then free to adapt it according to their own vision. The project quickly evolved towards the search for local products. In this purpose the Pays de Brocéliande, which gathers four inter-municipalities including this one, got involved to facilitate the access to its producers' networks.

The involvement of the inter-municipal level in steering a project dealing with issues that are under the municipalities' responsibilities brought out interests and limits. Chefs who work in neighboring municipalities found a space to talk with peers about their own practices and could evolve together through joint trainings. Each canteen was able to identify thematics on which they were already efficient and those in which they should invest efforts (waste reduction, meals' costs, use of organic products, etc.). However, intervention in the fields of competence of other public action levels can be misunderstood and has to be carefully negotiated.

Since 2017 the project has been evolving to become more transversal and was labelled as a Territorial Food Project in 2021. Sensitization actions are now extended to the whole population and financed by the Regional Health Agency. Progressively, access of all to healthy and quality food is considered as a central issue and the support of short supply chains is identified as one of the answers.

The main challenges for this territory are farms transmission (mostly large dairy farms) and the development of local outlets for products that are today sold on Rennes' markets (closest urban area). Steering the agroecological transition is difficult in this conventional farming context, which can explain why the Territorial Food Project mainly focuses on education and health. However, the inter-municipality also carries out a project devoted to energy and climate and both projects are integrated into a broader planification approach aimed at developing a global food and agricultural strategy.

Source : Doriane Guennoc, Terralim.

Strengths and key leverage effects of Territorial Food Projects

- Recognition of agriculture and food issues and of the need of a reconnexion of agriculture, food, health and environment in the political agenda
- Intersectoriality (agriculture, food, health, social justice, environment, education)
- Legitimation of social issues such as inclusion, equity, food poverty
- Inclusion and legitimization of diverse actors, formerly kept away from agricultural debates
- Development of concrete actions
- Development of inter-territorial exchanges and networks (regional networks, action-research projects etc.)

Weaknesses and limits

- Alternative food networks not always central (nor much supported) in Territorial Food Projects, despite they were often pioneer in territorial transitions
- A weak contribution to ecological transition (RnPAT, 2022), despite they adopt a systemic vision
- Territorial Food Projects are defined at administrative scales rather than at scales that would be relevant to tackle agroecological transitions
- An homogenisation of Territorial Food Projects' contents, due to the framing of the calls for tender and the development of a consultancy market for their definition and facilitation
- Difficulties in assessing deeply the territory's and populations' needs because of the short duration of their elaboration process and of their funding (3 years)
- A gap between long-term political objectives and action plans that often appear disappointing
- Weak effective results due to the lack of dedicated funding, of know-how in local governments to address transversal issues and of lack of political will (in many cases)
- Their articulation with the key planning documents is yet not tackled by the law (especially with those that monitor land use), which limits their potential effects, and is an issue raised by a recent report that introduces the notion of "territorial food contract" (Rapport Lemarchand, 2022)
- As urban territories have much more means (teams, skills etc.) than rural ones to set up such projects, the Territorial Food Projects policy tends to increase rather than reduce territorial inequalities or even submit neighbour rural territories to an urban domination

These limits are of course partially linked to the effects of the ongoing larger « projectification » of public action.

Lessons learned and inspiration for other contexts

The French Territorial Food Projects experience suggests a few lessons and insights that may be adapted in other contexts.

- **What's in and who's in a territorial food project?** French Territorial Food Projects' ambitions and achievements differ a lot depending on the actors who are involved in the debates over the definition of the project and its implementation, and on the arenas of debates and forms of governance set up in each case. The strong interdependency between the geographic scale, the network of involved actors, and the thematic scope covered by such projects has to be a key point of attention.
- **Enhancing and experimenting food democracy** Territorial Food Projects are an opportunity to create spaces/arenas of debates over local agriculture and food issues, where new actors can enrich the debate on agroecological transitions. In these arenas, rather than a mere economic perspective focused on food supply, a more political and critical perspective can be developed, in order to analyse and discuss power relations within territorial food systems and their actual or potential reconfigurations.
- **Intersectorality** Making territorial food systems more sustainable requires a strong intersectorality which has to be organised and reinforced through the involvement of the public services and entities in charge of agriculture, food, health, social inclusion, and environment (Brazilian policies may be inspiring in this regard)
- **Relevant scales** The territorial scale is now widely acknowledged as relevant to tackle agroecological transitions because it allows to take into account together social and ecological processes that would favor or impede these transitions. However, the French experience shows that administrative/governing scales prevail for Territorial Food Projects, which favors the operational dimension but may weaken the ecological and social ambitions. The overlap of different territorial levels for public action, as is often the case in France, can be either considered a strength (every level brings its own competences) or a weakness (there might be contradictions between the different levels in the case of shared competences). In any case, the relevant scale has to be an object of democratic discussion as such.
- **Translocalism** Exchanges across territories and between projects coordinators as well as comparative analyses are key to the success (and qualitative progress) of Territorial Food Projects and take various forms at national, regional or lower scales. In this aim, the national network RnPAT has been recognised by the recent Climate and Resilience Law (2022).

Resources

Réseau national des Projets Alimentaires Territoriaux : <https://rnpat.fr/>

Rapport RNPAT 2022: F. Marchand et G. Chabanet, 2022. *Projets Alimentaires Territoriaux « Plus vite, plus haut, plus fort »*, [Rapport](#), 50p

Authors/Contact ATTER

Claire Lamine (INRAE), Doriane Guennoc (Terralim), Gilles Maréchal (Terralim)

Layout: Elodie Babu (INRAE)

Copyright: INRAE



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101007755