

For a transformative and critical perspective on the territorialisation and ecologisation of territorial agri-food systems

Collective statement by participants at the ATTER 2023 Open Conference in Rennes

The latest crises (Covid, the war in Ukraine, inflation, etc.) have highlighted the diversity of possible visions and approaches to transforming our food systems, the need for which is fairly unanimously recognised. Relocation has become a mantra, that often goes without any clear definition of the relevant scale of relocation or what needs to be relocated, nor any discussion of its environmental and social effects, both positive and negative, in the areas concerned and elsewhere. Yet relocation alone does not intrinsically promote the sustainability and ecologisation of food systems, their resilience in the face of climate change, social justice and equity between the links and players in these systems: certain conditions are necessary to move towards territorial transitions that are both ecological and fair.

This question is at the heart of the collective work of ATTER, an international research-action network on agro-ecological transitions at the level of territorial agri-food systems, which brings together 19 organisations from research, teaching, civil society, local authorities and facilitation, in a system of exchanges and cross-analysis between 16 territories located in France, Italy, the United Kingdom, the USA and Brazil.

The ATTER network conference, held in Rennes on 3 July 2023 and attended by French and foreign researchers, members of civil society networks, development agents, elected representatives, etc., provided an opportunity to discuss the conditions and points of caution in order to meet both ecological and social justice challenges:

- Visions of transition are diverse and even divergent, and this diversity as well as these divergences must be recognised because they can also enrich the paths of transition and strengthen the ambition for change;
- Ecologisation must remain at the forefront of transition objectives and be seen as a collective and active process, combining consideration of the material and social realities of a given territory and the sharing of different visions, both in analysis and in action;
- The commitment of civil society organisations and citizens' networks, which are often pioneers in regional dynamics, must be supported, as they help to consolidate and amplify the dynamics of transition on a regional scale, but also between regions or even countries;
- The notion of accessibility must be broadened to include that of human rights (to healthy, sustainable and culturally appropriate food, to decent living conditions for farmers, etc.);
- A systemic and critical perspective (e.g. on social inequalities and power relations) is needed to complement transformative, action-oriented perspectives.

In a more transversal perspective, and again in the light of the experience discussed within ATTER and with other networks present at this conference in Rennes, we believe that taking these issues into account can be based on strengthened cooperation between local and regional players, researchers and civil society networks at different levels (local, national, international). This cooperation enables knowledge, methods and experience to be shared, so as to support reflection and collective action. At a time when social insecurity in general, and food insecurity in particular, is increasing in all countries, when organic farming is experiencing unprecedented difficulties in some, and when the implementation of a genuine European policy in favour of sustainable food systems is coming up against multiple obstacles and pressures, these issues are becoming more pressing, making these exchanges and collective learning more necessary than ever.