



## **Food4Sustainability – Phase II Scientific Report on the Case Studies**

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## 1. Introduction

Food retail corporations and fast food chains are powerful actors of the dominant food system. Over the last few years, several initiatives involving these corporations have emerged in Belgium, such as the introduction of local products in supermarkets, and the emergence of new types of fast food chains, the so-called 'healthy fast-casual' (HFF) chains proposing healthier dietary patterns for eating on the go. Exploratory field work done in 2016 has shown that these processes are dynamic and involve a variety of actors: retail corporations can work together with local private initiatives and/or local authorities, and HFF chains can have strong interactions with organisations from civil society. Van Amstel et al. (2012) argue that such networks that establish coalitions between niche and regime players are at the basis of real innovations and transitions towards more sustainable food systems.

In this second stage of the Food4Sustainability project, we examine to which extent these interactions can contribute towards a sustainability transition in the food sector. We thus address the following research question:

***Are interactions between food retail corporations, and local producers and local initiatives, and between healthy fast-casual food chains and organisation from civil society contributing to a deep transformation of the dominant food system in Belgium (i.e. leading to changes in practices and values within organisations), and if so, how?***

This question is investigated through the analysis of six case studies in Belgium, five related to local provision by food retailers and one to fast food chains:

- The local product strategies of two main food retail corporations operating in Belgium (referred here as Retailer1 and Retailer2), and their interactions with local producers and local initiatives.
- Three initiatives of local food provision in Wallonia (Promogest, Hainaut Développement, Made-in-BW), and their interactions with retailers, producers, local authorities and other local initiatives.
- The case of a healthy fast-casual chain, its suppliers and its interactions with NGOs.

More precisely, in the cases related to local food procurement, we analyse if the introduction of local products on food retail corporations' sourcing is an opportunity for profound change (i.e. for alternative farming practices and social and solidarity economy practices to scale up) or if it rather reinforce the lock-in of the dominant system. For the HFF case, we analyse if the interactions of the company with organisations from civil society results in institutional changes that could lead to more sustainable practices within the company.

It is worth mentioning that there has been a redefinition of the case studies related to local sourcing in supermarkets. In terms of the food retailers, three food retailers were considered initially. However, one of the retailers (referred to here as Retailer3) was reluctant to participate in the study. Many contact attempts were done, but only one interview with the Retailer3's Marketing Director was granted. Moreover, the content of the interview revealed irrelevant for getting insights on Retailer3's local procurement strategy. As for the local initiatives in Flanders, the initial goal was to study interactions between local platforms like Straffe Streek and Lekkers uit het Pajottenland, and the retailers. However, during the fieldwork, we found that the platforms do not have a strong importance for the retailers in Flanders. Indeed, the retailers seem to value working directly with producers more, or equally than working via platforms. We therefore chose to focus more strongly on the local product strategies of the retailers, rather than put the logistic platforms at the centre of attention. A detailed description of the case studies is presented in the scientific report.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The cases studies are based on the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews and complementary data.

### *Archival work*

Interviews were supplemented with information obtained from several documentary sources. Those sources include websites of the different actors interviewed, annual reports and sustainability report of retail corporations, local authorities and civil society organisations, student essays and research reports related to local procurement by large retailers; documents related to local sourcing and logistic platforms, such as internal strategy papers, minutes of internal communication and meetings, training programs, and national, local and electronic press articles.

### *Field observation*

Regarding the initiatives of local food provision in Wallonia, we realized six observations during workshops and discussion meetings where the project holders were presenting their initiative. These workshops and meetings were situations of interactions between various actors of the food system as they gathered project holders, local authorities, civil society organisations, farmers and/or citizens. Moreover, in the local procurement cases, we visited the retailers' stores to obtain a general feeling of the way in which the local products were marketed. Most of the time these visits took place before an interview, so that prior to the interview we could get a general feeling of the in-store marketing of local products in that particular store and, if needed, slightly adapt the questionnaire accordingly. Regarding the HFF case, we also did many field observations in different restaurants of the chain which provided us with direct observation of products sold, staff members, customers, marketing, and more generally, of the atmosphere in the restaurants.

### *Selection of interviewees*

In the cases of local procurement, we conducted interviews with actors from four different local initiatives (one in Flanders, three in Wallonia). These initiatives are mostly tied to the geographic boundaries on the provincial level and in most cases they are either initiated by or strongly supported by provincial government bodies. We first interviewed the person who initially developed the project, and then we interviewed other actors involved in these networks, making sure we would meet them all: producers, government officials and officers, managers and actors responsible for logistical issues and/or promotional and commercial actions.

Regarding the food retailers, the selection of interviewees followed a cascade procedure, in which we first identified and interviewed a person in charge of the local procurement concept in each retailer at the headquarter level. This person did then either put us in contact with regional coordinators or store directors, depending on the strategy of each of the retailers. Informants at regional level also suggested stores directors to be interviewed. For both retailers we aimed to interview a wide range of actors involved in the local strategy. Interviews were conducted with actors in different roles within the retailers: director and local product coordinator at the corporate level, local products regional managers, store directors and local products managers at stores. Moreover, we aimed to obtain a wide view by including stores that were both very implicated in the local strategy, as well as stores that were less involved, so that we could get a clear view of the importance of the local strategy for the overall company. We also aimed to spread the interviews over the different regions and provinces of Belgium. However, the interviews in the region of Flanders were conducted mainly in the parts to the East and North of Brussels. Also, no interviews were conducted in the region of Brussels itself. This gap was partly balanced out since one of the researchers took part in and helped organise a workshop for retailers on the sourcing and added value of local foods in supermarkets. This workshop took place in the Western part of the region of Flanders, and also mainly included retailers and government officials from that part of the country. However, although multiple retailers took part in this workshop, from our cases only Retailer1 was present. Yet, the discussions during the workshop and informal conversations afterwards expanded our vision and knowledge of the local food strategy of Retailer1 over the whole Flanders region. In the case of Retailer1, we started with a double interview at the headquarters of the retailer. Next to that, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a mix of eleven regional coordinators, store directors and local product managers in the store. Some of the interviewees fulfilled multiple of these roles, or had, in the past, fulfilled several of these roles and thus had a broad overview both over the strategy itself as well as over the way in which the local strategy was implemented in practice. In the case of Retailer2, we started our interviews with the manager and founder of the local product strategy. From there, further interviewees were identified. We proceeded interviewing one of the managers of the

sourcing of fruits and vegetables on the national level. Moreover, we interviewed five store managers, some of which also performed the role of Single Point Of Contact (SPOC) for local foods in their region.

Regarding the HFF case, our desk research had revealed that one of the founders was still directing the company. In the inductive perspective of our research, it was thus key to have the possibility to interview this person. Indeed, we wanted to have the longest timeframe possible to understand the evolution of the company, and especially how interactions with civil society had influenced the trajectory of the company. The interviews that followed were a mix of purposeful and snow ball sampling, as we were asking for specific managers to be interviewed, and were also suggested other people by the interviewees themselves. We also wanted to balance the account we would get from our interviews of managers with interviews from actors that were interacting with the company (civil society, franchisee, and supplier). However, we could only get limited access to them, especially suppliers, as they are part of the 'business secret' of the company.

#### *Number and duration of the interviews*

In total, we conducted 46 interviews, with lasted between 45 minutes and 4 hours. Regarding local procurement, we conducted 36 interviews. We interviewed 17 informants related to the local initiatives in Wallonia; some key respondents were interviewed twice. Interviews were done in French in Wallonia and Dutch in Flanders. Two interviews with producers related to the Promogest case were realized by Marlène Feyereisen from ULg-SEED in the frame of a collaborative research work. Moreover, we interviewed 19 informants occupying different positions within the food retailers; most of them working directly or indirectly with local procurement. The interviews duration varied according to the role of the interviewees and the number of informants per interview. For instance, while interviews at the headquarter level lasted more than 3 hours, interviews at the store level were shorter, lasting about 1 hour. In total, we had 26 hours of interviews with food retailers. Interviews were done in English, French or Dutch, according to the preferences of the interviewees. For further details see Table 1A. Regarding the HFF case: we interviewed nine informants, being five key managers in the company and four actors interacting with the company (civil society, franchisee, and supplier). For further details see Table 1B.

#### *Interview procedures*

With two exceptions, the interviews of retailers were conducted by at least two researchers. Hence, the researchers could discuss each interview and adjust the interview protocol. For the HFF case and for the cases of local initiatives, a single researcher conducted the interviews.

#### *Interview guides*

All the interviews were based on a common interview guide, which was elaborated after thorough discussions between all the partners of the project in order to cover the different analytical dimensions of the case studies (see Table 2, and for the interview guide see Annex III to the 2016 Annual Report). As such, the interview guide inquired about learning as well as changes in practices and values within the organisations and at the personal level of the interviewees. More specifically regarding changes, motivation and values, we inquired about initial goals and objectives at the level of individuals and structure, about the concrete practices into which these goals and objectives have (or have not) been translated) and about motivations and underlying values, in their temporal dimension. We also enquired about the impact of the interactions between retailers and organisation of the civil society and / or local producers on goals, motivations, practices and values, and more generally on the trajectory of the organisation and the personal trajectory of the interviewees. This was embedded in a more global concern for understanding how learning and changes towards sustainability took place within the different actors' organisations. In addition, this provided us with insights on the agency vs. structure aspect of these changes. Moreover, we also inquired about respondent's personal views on sustainability and the sets of values primed in the audience, here again, taken in their temporal dimension, whenever possible.

**Table 1A. Interviews related to the cases of logistic platforms and local procurement by food retailers**

Interviewee	Role	Date/ Length/Language
Government1	Officer in charge of short circuits in the Wallon Agence pour l'Entreprise et l'Innovation	15.04.2016/1h40m/French
ProjectHolder1	Head of the GAL Culturalités who carried the initial project	28.04.2016/1h/French
ProjectHolder2	Director of Promogest ASBL and Director of the Agriculture Services of the Liège Province	09.05.2016/1h/French 27.06.2016/3h45m/French
LocalProducer1	Producer working with Promogest	24.06.2016/-/French
ProjectHolder3	Responsible for logistics and customer relations at Promogest	27.06.2016/1h/French
ProjectHolder4	Promotion manager at Promogest	27.06.2016/1h/French
LocalProducer2	Producer working with Promogest	15.07.2016/-/French
Government2	Provincial officer responsible for the follow-up of the partnership between big retailers and local producers	01.09.2016/2h45m/ French
Government3	Ex-Director of Promogest ASBL	19.09.2016/2h50m/French
Government4	Elected official in Liège Province, in charge of Rural life and Short circuits	19.09.2016/1h40m/French
Government5	Officer in charge of social economy in the minister's office of JC Marcourt, Wallon minister of economy	30.09.2016/1h15m/French
Retailer1HQ1	General Director Quality and Sustainability at Retailer1, and the person responsible for conceiving Retailer1's local product charter	07.10.2016/4h/English
Retailer1HQ2	Responsible for Retailer1's local products (internal procedures) through an external company (consultant)	07.10.2016 (simultaneous with Retailer1HQ1)
Government6	Officer in charge of the GoodFood Strategy in Bruxelles Environnement	13.10.2016/2h30m/French
ProjectHolder5	Coordinator regional platform1	21.11.2016/1h30m/Dutch
LocalProducer3	Producer for Retailers 1 and 2, member and co-founder of regional platform	09.12.2016/2h/Dutch
Government7	Representative of a municipality working with regional platform	09.12.2016/1h/Dutch
Retailer2HQ1	Person in charge of the local products area at Retailer2's headquarters	20.12.2016/3h/English
*LocalProducer4	Producer Straffe Streek	20.01.2017/2h/Dutch
ProjectHolder7	Coordinator regional platform	23.01.2017/1h/Dutch
Retailer2Store1	Store director at a Retailer2's store in the province of Walloon Brabant	24.03.2017/1h/French
Retailer2Store2	Store director at a Retailer2's store in the province of province of Antwerp	11.04.2017/1h/Dutch
Retailer2Store3	Store director at a Retailer2's store in the province of province of Flemish Brabant	11.04.2017 (simultaneous with Retailer2Store2)
*Retailer3HQ1	Retailer3's marketing director	12.04.2017/1h/English
Retailer2Store4	Store director at a Retailer2's store in the province of Flemish Brabant	25.04.2017/1h/Dutch
Retailer1Reg1	Retailer1's Regional coordinator for local products covering three provinces in Flanders	20.04.2017/3h/English
Retailer2HQ2	Manager of Fruits and Vegetables procurement at Retailer2	21.04.2017/1h/English
Retailer2Store5	Store director at a Retailer2's store in the province of Liege	27.04.2017/45min/French
Retailer1Store1	Store director at a Retailer1's store in the province of Flemish Brabant	27.04.2017/2h/English (with some Dutch)
Retailer1Store2	Store director at a Retailer1's store in the province of Flemish Brabant	15.05.2017/1h/Dutch
Retailer1Store3	Store director at a Retailer1's store in the province of Antwerp	23.05.2017/1h/Dutch (with some English)
Retailer1Store4	Person in charge of the local products at a Retailer1's store in the province of Antwerp	23.05.2017/30m/Dutch
Retailer1Reg2	Retailer1's Regional coordinator for local products covering two provinces in Wallonia	02.06.2017/1h50m/English
Retailer1Reg3	Retailer1's Regional coordinator for local products covering one provinces in Wallonia	07.07.2017/1h30m/French
Retailer1Store5	Person in charge of the local products at a Retailer1's store in the province of Hainaut	07.07.2017 (simultaneous with Retailer1Reg3)
Retailer1Store6	Store director assistant at a Retailer1's store in the province of Hainaut	07.07.2017 (simultaneous with Retailer1Reg3)
Retailer1Store7	Store director at a Retailer1's store in the province of Hainaut, and previously Retailer1's Regional coordinator for local products covering one province in Wallonia	09.08.2017/2h20m/French

Note: Interviews marked with \* were not incorporated in the analysis: LocalProducer4 does not deliver to any of the retailers; Retailer3HQ1 because Retailer3 case has been dropped, as afore explained.

**Table 1B. Interviews related to the case of the healthy fast food chain**

Interviewee	Role	Date/ Length/Language
Fo1	Founder	14.06.2016/54m/French
Ma1	General Manager	09.09.2016/50m/French
Ma2	Product Manager	23.09.2016/1h5m/French
Ma3	Franchise Manager	04.10.2016/1h16m/French
Ma4	Marketing Manager	21.10.2016/1h12m/French
CSo1	Civil Society Organisation	11.10.2016/51m/French
CSo2	Civil Society Organisation	11.10.2016/51m/French
Fr1	Franchisee	20.10.2016/1h11m/French
Su1	Supplier	09.11.2016/48m/French

**Table 2 - Analytical grid for the case studies<sup>(1)</sup>**

Learning	<p>Aspects related to the learning processes within and between partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Autonomy and control (hierarchical issues.... )</li> <li>- Formalisation of processes/practices</li> <li>- Diffusion of knowledge related to the learning event</li> <li>- Knowledge exchanges (within organization and with external actors)</li> <li>- Interactions/communications (internal/external: frequency, exchange venues (meetings, events, visits....))</li> <li>- Motivations to engage with external partners (related to values)</li> </ul> <p>Output of the learning processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changes in practices and values (as described in the next two lines)</li> <li>- Innovativeness of new practices</li> </ul>
Practices <sup>(2)</sup>	<p>Production Processing Transportation Storing Buying (including price and margins) Selling (including price and margins) Marketing and communication</p> <p>Plus cross-cutting practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Standardization: formalisation of processes/practices; (re)organisation of HR i.e. people, skills, autonomy and control; diffusion</li> <li>- Coordination/negotiation activities: internal/external interactions (exchange venues, e.g. meetings, events, visits...), frequency, participants, content, outputs</li> <li>- Other knowledge exchanges between actors</li> <li>- Risk bearing</li> </ul>
Values*	<p>Initial goals and objectives at the level of individuals and structure Motivations and underlying values (in their temporal dimension) Definition of sustainability Definition of "local" Your organization's role The role of the other actors of the food system * Values are also identified by looking at the practices and the interactions</p>

Notes: (1) This analytical grid is based on the conceptual framework which was Annex I to the 2016 F4S Annual Report; (2) Practices: We consider physical practices (those that can be placed in time and space) of production, buying, selling, storing, transportation, processing, communication and marketing; as well as cross-cutting elements that are present in all physical practices: standardization, coordination/negotiation activities, other knowledge exchanges between actors and risk bearing.

### *Analysis of interviews*

In the local procurement cases, all interviews were first transcribed in the original language. For the Wallon initiatives, the results were analysed with the help of the analytical grid in Table 2, but instead of developing a table for each interview, we coded and analysed the material manually in order to identify the salient points in an inductive approach, producing intermediate analytical descriptions of each case. All interviews were re-transcribed, for a total of 258 pages. For the retailers, the results were also analysed with the help of the analytical grid presented in Table 2. First, each interview was coded and analysed based on the topics listed in Table 2. Based on this, a separate table was developed for each of the interviews. After this, a separate table was developed for each of the retailers based on the individual interviews.

The HFF case followed an inductive methodology. Following the full transcription of the interviews, in the early phase of coding, it is important to use an 'informant-centric' perspective on the data (Gioia et al., 2012). This implies to code the transcripts 'in vivo' (i.e. using the own words of the respondents), and we decided to use the qualitative software NVivo 11 as a support tool for coding. This first phase of coding focuses on identifying repeating ideas expressed by interviewees that are in line with our research concerns. Following attested grounded-theory techniques, we then move from these repeating ideas to our research concerns using incremental steps (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Gioia et al., 2012). This implies to find relationships between repeating ideas in a second phase of coding that form important 'themes' for our research concerns (second phase of coding). Finally, in the third phase of coding, we organise these 'themes' into 'theoretical constructs' that form our theoretical contribution.

## **3. Results**

The presentation of the results is organised as follow. Sections 3.1 present the six cases: three cases of local procurement initiatives in Wallonia, two cases of local sourcing by food retailers, and the case of the health fast food chain. Sections 3.2 present preliminarily findings on the impacts on the food system, which are organised according to the analytical perspectives adopted for the case studies as presented in Section 4.

### *3.1) Presentation of the case studies*

#### *3.1.1) The cases of local food procurement initiatives in Wallonia*

##### *Emergence and development of local food provision in supermarkets: the Liège and Hainaut initiatives*

Contrary to what we expected before starting the fieldwork, the introduction of local products in supermarkets in Belgium was not impelled by not-for-profit organisations or public authorities, but by Retailer1.

Indeed, in 2011, in response to increasing criticisms of the agro-industrial food sector, but also to decreasing economic performance, Retailer1 Belgium decided to develop local sourcing to improve its image. It contacted the officer in charge of diversification inside one of the main farmers' union in Belgium, to propose a collaboration. To make sure the producers' interests would be respected, this person decided to gather some farmers to identify the barriers for small producers to supply supermarkets and to work out solutions, which he did during several months, with around 20 producers and with the help of the advisory services of the union. The outcome of this process is the creation of a specific contract for local producers that ensures they benefit from specific marketing conditions: they can work directly with the supermarkets – i.e. they don't have to go through Retailer1's central purchasing group -, they are not submitted to price negotiation and determine their prices, they benefit from a reduced payment period (30 instead of 60 days), they are not submitted to the series of practices that keep up pressure on prices and usually exclude small producers (back margins, payments for supply disruption and unsold products).

After this contract was created, the farmers' union stopped the collaboration with Retailer1, considering that further developments were not its jurisdiction. So Retailer1, who needed support to make contact with farmers, turned to the Provinces, since the Provinces are the organisations in charge of agricultural extension services. At first, it turned



to two Provinces: the Province of Liège (Promogest) it had been in contact with for many years, and the Province of Hainaut (Hainaut Développement<sup>1</sup>) where the person in charge of process in the farmers' union – who had changed jobs in the meanwhile –, had been recruited. At that time, these two Provinces were looking for ways to support local agriculture, seeking new outlets for their local farmers in order to increase their incomes. Therefore, they immediately responded positively to the partnership proposal and both gave free rein to a dedicated officer. This shift from a partnership with a farmers' union towards a partnership with Provinces, whose jurisdiction is more broadly local economic development, caused the project to evolve: it no longer took only into account local farmers and on-farm processors, it also included local non-agricultural processors.

However, the producers were still very reluctant to work with big retailers, because of profound mistrust. To consult with and reassure the local producers, the officer from the Province of Hainaut organised several reunions together with Retailer1. He circulated the invitation broadly<sup>2</sup>, but only around 20 producers came along. During these reunions, Hainaut Développement helped to list the setbacks these producers had experienced with big retailers, and to identify and discuss possible solutions. Additional terms were agreed, such as specific reception conditions (special “side-door” access, priority over semitrailers for quality control), no additional costs associated to hygiene standards<sup>3</sup>. This agreement was formalised in a charter Retailer1 committed to respecting. In this charter, local producers are defined as producers located within 40 km from the supermarket, and hiring less than 10 full-time employees (excluded seasonal workers).

Retailer1 further adapted its practices and organisation. First, it created the position of Regional manager<sup>4</sup>, in charge of visiting the producers, tasting the products, helping to fill in reference files, to determine the selling price. Moreover, to encourage producers to join the program, it covers the costs of certifying the producer's self-monitoring system for compliance to hygiene standards. What is more, to build up and maintain trust, it organises annual meetings at the provincial scale where all producers are invited, to report on the collaboration and discuss possible issues. All these steps allowed producers who weren't able to work under food retailers' marketing conditions, to benefit from this new outlet.

The project was launched first in Liège in May 2012 and then in Hainaut in September, and it was such a success that Retailer1 rapidly decided to extend the operation to all its hypermarkets. The Province of Liège decided to create a logistic platform as a service for farmers, to help them with logistics but also with administrative and commercial aspects. The province of Hainaut also ensures the promotion of the local products, but it did not create a logistic platform because the elected officials considered it was not the role of the Province.

In regard to some aspects, the project started in a very informal way. For instance, working with retailers necessarily implies using barcodes, which represents a significant cost for the producers. In order to dispel the doubts the producers had expressed, Retailer1 lent them its own barcodes. Then, the two provinces, together with Retailer1, went to negotiate with the organisation in charge of managing the barcode system in Belgium (GS1) and obtained the creation of a new modality for local producers – fewer barcodes for a cheap price.

An interesting point to stress is that the issue of specifying the ‘local’ character was two-fold. First, it was raised by the producers involved in the consultation, asking about how suppliers would be selected in case several producers would propose the same products. Second, it was GS1 who asked for a specification that would allow to discriminate between local and regular producers, and thus restrain the access to the new modality. Indeed, the number of

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<sup>1</sup> Promogest and Hainaut Développement are two provincial structures which provide extension services to farmers. Promogest is an ASBL but is a direct emanation of the Province, Hainaut Développement is a parapublic agency. Retailer1 was in contact with Promogest because his director had had frequent professional contacts with Retailer1 in his previous position.

<sup>2</sup> All products were welcome, except from fresh meat, because Retailer1 already had a direct supply chain structured around a few Belgian producers.

<sup>3</sup> Farmers in direct sales have a self-monitoring system to check they comply with hygiene standards. When working with intermediaries, they need to get this system certified, which generates additional costs. Retailer1 assumes these costs.

<sup>4</sup> Retailer1's regional managers are responsible for two or three provinces. There are five regional managers in total in Belgium.



references was not discriminating, as some large-scale Belgian producers (e.g. Jupiler, the most important brewery in Belgium) sell a limited number of references.

### *Organization and governance features of the supply chains in Liège and Hainaut*

Hainaut Développement acts as a mediator, an advisory and a communication service. The officer in charge of the project deals with the problems that occur between producers and retailers. When there is a problem, producers call him and he plays the role of an intermediary, contacting the store to find a solution. Every 3 to 6 months, he gathers Retailer1 together with all the producers it works with, to make an assessment of the collaborations and to identify where improvements could be made. Sometimes he simply helps alleviating the tensions that can exist in case of disputes between stores managers or department managers and local producers.

He also helps calculating the production costs, in order to determine a selling price that is reasonable for both parties. In this regard, we can stress a shift in HD's activity, which thereby provides a service which also benefits to big retailers. Indeed, as he says: "This way we can give a trade margin, I would say, which becomes interesting for intermediaries" i.e. for retailers.

What is more, he provides the retailers with communication tools, for example with some posters with pictures and addresses of the producers that Retailer1 displays in the shelves where the local products are sold.

Except from the follow-up meetings organized every 3 to 6 months, Promogest proposes the same (free) services as Hainaut Développement. Additionally, it organizes promotional events in supermarkets (tasting sessions), and dedicates equipment and a full-time position to that. Most of all, it provides producers and retailers with logistical solutions: invoicing (5% margin), product delivery by the logistic platform (+5% margin), product collection on farm (+5% margin). To ease invoicing, Promogest also developed an IT tool which fits snugly to the requirements of the various supermarkets: in the province of Liège – and contrary to other provinces, see Section 3.1.2, the learning process for local producers to work with food retailers mostly takes place at the level of Promogest (and retailers, cf. Sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3). In total, seven people work to develop local sourcing for food retailers. Human resources from the Province also frequently – and informally – participate in this activity.

In terms of governance, what are the features of these two initiatives? In Hainaut, there is no specific governance arrangement. The development and follow-up of this program is carried by the officer who supported the process from the beginning. In Liège, the initiative is coordinated by a para-public organisation which already existed<sup>5</sup>, whose board is composed of large-scale, conventional farmers and elected officials from the province. As we will see in Section 3.2, this has strong implications in terms of values and objectives.

### *Replication and hybridization: the Brabant Wallon initiative*

The case of Brabant Wallon results from the conjunction of two projects. On the one hand, the one of the Province<sup>6</sup> which wished to answer Retailer1's proposition to develop local sourcing "in order to help local producers", but did not have the required skill in-house; and on the other hand, the one of a LEADER Local Action Group<sup>7</sup>, which had led for 5 years a box-scheme project together with around 30 producers and was seeking a viable way to continue contributing to rural development by supporting producers and promoting fair, short food chains, environment-friendly farming practices and healthy diets. Also, the LAG was reflecting on how to reach a larger customer base, so as to bring about significant outlet to support local producers, and at the same time raise the awareness of the people who are not involved in alternative food chains. Together the Province and the LAG decided to create a not-for-profit organisation combining their projects in the form of a logistic platform. In 2015, they created the ASBL Made in BW, after the project was implemented for one year by the LAG. They benefited from the support of Hainaut

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<sup>5</sup> Promogest takes charge of various activities: it has a laboratory of soil analysis, a milking farm and an insemination center for porks, as well as extension services providing technical, economic and administrative advice, and organizing promotion activities.

<sup>6</sup> More precisely, the Centre Provincial de l'Agriculture et de la Ruralité.

<sup>7</sup> The LAG Culturalités en Hesbaye Brabaçonne.

Développement which was present during the first meeting between the Province and Retailer1, and from the experience of Promogest which shared with the LAG its know-how and information. Made in BW works in a very similar way to Promogest (same services for the local food procurement activity, same fees).

In the case of Brabant Wallon, the governance of the initiative is shared among the Province, small farmers and the LAG who participate in Made in BW's board. These new interactions induced the development of new ethical values within Made in BW. As a result, contrary to the other two case studies, the purpose of working with supermarkets is not only to support local farmers, it is to reach a broader customer base, whose awareness is not yet raised, and to create a viable logistic tool to foster regional enhancement. That is why Made in BW has commercial relations with a greater diversity of stores and presents itself as a public service.

**Table 3: Activity indicators from 2016 for the local food provision initiatives of Hainaut, Liège and Brabant Wallon**

Indicators/Provinces	Hainaut	Liège	Brabant Wallon
Number of producers/processors	130	75	26
Number of stores	-	-	35
Sales revenue	4.2 million € with Retailer1	≥ 2 000 000 € In total	-

### *3.1.2) The case of Retailer1's local food strategy*

#### *Start and historical development of Retailer1's local strategy*

As mentioned above, Retailer1's strategy was developed for its hypermarkets. Initially, the main goal of this strategy was to surprise customers, build a good image, and differentiate from Retailer1s main competitors. Moreover, the project needed to be embedded in the retailers' sustainability program. The project started with a pilot with twenty producers, which was a success. After this, 1-3 meters of local products were installed in three hypermarkets. Gradually the area dedicated to local products was enlarged, and the project was extended to other districts, first in the South of Belgium, and later in the North. Over time, many stores have dedicated a separate place for local produce.

As mentioned above, first, meetings were organised to check whether producers would be interested to work together with Retailer1. Based on the meetings it became clear that the 'traditional circuit' – which was characterized by electronisation, efficiency, minimal human intervention and harmonization to make the system faster and more reliable - was not suitable for the local producers. Retailer1 recognised the differences that characterise local food systems. Instead of trying to fit this system in their own system of efficiency, specialisation, and electronisation, it therefore decided to develop a separate logistical and financial circuit for the local producers and to produce a charter in which the requirements of the farmers to work with Retailer1 were summarized.

At the start, however, producers were weary of working together with large retailers, and it was difficult to find producers that wanted to cooperate. Later, based on the good experiences and ever-increasing sales, other producers also started to participate. Over time, the project grew and became an integral part of the DNA of the company. In fact, the project grew beyond expectation (nowadays more than 700 producers in the whole of Belgium) and now generates an income the retailer had initially underestimated.

Retailer1 prefers relationships in which the products are delivered directly to the store by producers, and in which contacts take place directly between the store and the producer. However, in some cases the producer prefers to deliver through a local platform, which is also possible, provided that the relationship is still directly with the producer.

The contracts are generally signed between the store manager and the producer. This contract has been developed specifically for local producers. The contract for local producers is six pages long, while a standard contract contains 256 pages. In general, there are no conditions or obligations for the producer towards Retailer1, and producers are allowed to stop delivering their produce to Retailer1 at any moment.

### *What does Retailer1 see as local?*

Retailer1 has defined local products in its charter as a product that is:

- Produced in a maximum radius of 40 kilometres around the store
- Made by a production entity with less than 10 Full Time Employees (extra seasonal workers are allowed)
- Artisanal
- Made without additives

The criteria are followed strictly and, generally, no exceptions are made. However, there are no criteria on the inputs that are allowed in the processed products. Hence, the local charter may include processed, artisanal products like coffees, beers, olives and chocolates.

At the start of the strategy, Retailer1 mainly offered processed products. Over time, Retailer1 has also started to offer unprocessed products. These were difficult to introduce in some of the stores, as loose fruits could not easily be introduced into the scales of the store. Therefore, most local fruits and vegetables are now offered pre-packaged. Some stores also offer local non-food products, like music, books, clothing, and other crafts from the region.

### *Store and strategy organization by Retailer1*

For the strategy, Belgium was divided in five regions. As mentioned above, in each region, a coordinator for local products was appointed. The tasks of the five regional coordinators are to find producers, visit them, decide upon the added value of new products, taste, check the production methods and come to an agreement with the producers whether the product should be marketed or not. Once this has happened, an external agency that organises the contracting and manages the database of local products is contacted. From there, the contact mainly takes place between store employees and managers and the local producers. The buying of local products by Retailer1 happens through direct relationships between the stores and the local producers. Hence, the procurement department is not involved in the strategy at any moment. Consequently, the 'normal' and 'local' systems are generally seen as separate from and complementary to each other. Moreover, it was argued that the local products attract clients to the store that will also buy other products than just the local ones, as they are able to make complementary purchases

The producer sets the price for his/her products. The regional coordinator may give information and advice, but generally, the price set by the producer is accepted by the regional coordinator. The price that the consumer will pay for the product in the end, however, is set by both the regional coordinator and the producer as it needs to be competitive with other products, while still having a certain margin on the product.

Furthermore, there is no generic way of implementing the strategy. Therefore, it is dependent on the motivation and input of individual employees. Generally, the local products are managed by the managers of the respective departments (e.g. dairy by the dairy department, fruits and vegetables by the fruits and vegetables department, etcetera). This is even the case if the local products take up a separate space in the store. However, for now, the management of local products is not included in the contract of department managers. Therefore, the local products are a job on top of the normal tasks of a manager. Because of this, routines are generally lacking. If someone falls ill for example, this may impact the management of the department of local products. Also, when it is really busy, managers may forget to order local products, while with the 'traditional products' everything is ordered automatically. In other words, the strategy is prone to mistakes of individual managers. Moreover, the success and motivation is dependent on how strongly the manager in charge of the local products department believes in the offering of local products. In order to diminish this effect, many stores have started hiring one department manager responsible for the local products. This person places the orders, monitors deliveries, analyses what is sold well and what is not, etc. This has made the strategy more manageable.

From a legal point of view, all products need to comply with the food safety regulations, and packaging and bar codes need to be in order. Producers often need to adapt their practices to be able to comply with these requirements. As this can be very complicated for producers, Retailer1 provides trainings, so that producers can learn, for example, how to deal with the invoicing. As mentioned above, Retailer1 negotiated with the institution providing bar codes for

a new modality for small-scale producers, allowing them to buy small amounts of barcodes for low prices following a simplified procedure.

### *3.1.3) The case of Retailer2's local food strategy*

#### *Start and historical development of Retailer2's local strategy*

The local strategy of Retailer2 started as a part of its sustainability strategy. Also, given an increasing demand for local products, Retailer2 saw marketing local products as an opportunity to show to its customers that it did not only work together with large multinationals. Lastly, the strategy was a way of keeping up with other retailers. To initiate the project, a meeting between departments to define the scope of the strategy and to develop a first test was organized. This test took place in three stores that already offered products that could be defined as local. Based on its success, the project further developed afterwards. Over time, the strategy was implemented in all provinces.

From the start, Retailer2 has been working with platforms of local producers to quickly identify large numbers of producers and facilitate communication. In Belgium, these platforms are often organized on a provincial basis. The way in which they are organized differs. Some organize e.g. transportation and invoicing, while others are just there to promote local producers, or defend producers' interests. Recently, though, the store has also opened up towards direct interactions with individual suppliers. Moreover, the restriction of working on a provincial basis became clear. Therefore, stores can also order products that come from outside of the provincial boundaries.

Although the strategy started off quite small, it has grown quickly, and it has become an important part of the retailer's strategy since then. Consequently, instead of being a pure sustainability strategy, it has now also become important from a business point of view:

#### *What does Retailer2 see as local?*

Unlike Retailer1, Retailer2 does not have a strict definition of what a local product is. Generally, for Retailer2 a local product should be:

- Known within the province
- Authentic
- Small scale
- From Belgian origin
- Be produced by a local family
- Two thirds of the added value should be made in Belgium (in terms of processing, there are no criteria for input ingredients).
- Connected to the local identity

This definition is used quite flexibly. Also, we found that – because of the fact no strict definition exists – local tends to mean something else to each of the interviewees. In addition, the 2/3 added value is not a hard criterion. Furthermore, in time the guidelines have also become looser and less typical Belgian products are now admitted in the store as well. Actually, the most important criterion is whether the product will have an added value for the store.

Moreover, the local assortment team only has the mandate over processed products. Fresh fruits and vegetables are sourced on a national scale and promoted as from Belgian Origin and therefore are out of the scope of the local assortment team. This was both since sourcing fruits and vegetables locally is complicated in terms of e.g. efficient logistics, cooling and food safety, but also because of the setting of prices.

#### *Store and strategy organization by Retailer2*

Over time, the project has become more embedded in the strategy of the company. However, the strategy is still dependent on a small team of which one person is the driving force. Moreover, the department has been a part of different departments within the company. The local assortment team is based in the central facilities of Retailer2,

and approves all the local products for Belgium. Because of this, and the fact that the local assortment team is relatively small, the time span to admit a 'new' local product in the system can be quite long.

Products need to be admitted in the central system before stores are able to purchase them. Contracts are also made between the central and the producer. Once a producer is admitted to the system, the store managers receive a list with all the producers per province. Store managers can phone them, ask them about their minimum deliveries, and whether the producer is willing to supply the store. Also, prices are set centrally by the local procurement department and the producers together. Generally, the producer sets his own price, but this is done in concertation with the local assortment team. The prices are therefore differentiated per region. This effect is reinforced as the added costs for the transport and services by the platforms differ per region (e.g. moving through a platform can add 15-30% to the price).

Producers are expected to deliver their products in temporal evidence packaging, as this is one of the standard practices in Retailer2. Also, the producers are supposed to provide their products with barcodes. It is the responsibility of the producers to comply with these rules, and Retailer2 does not provide further support. It is thus also the producer who bares the costs of the barcodes and packaging. It was argued that it therefore only makes sense for producers to offer their products that sell very well, as buying a bar code for a product is a serious investment for producers. Consequently, this may be a barrier to enter into the system, as adapting the packing and buying barcodes requires expertise and investments. As a result, only larger suppliers, with quite profitable sales are able to enter the system.

An increasing amount of requests for new products from store managers has made it hard for the small team to deal with them. Therefore a SPOC (Single Point of Contact) for local products has now been appointed for each region. This person is a store manager that becomes the point of contact between the store managers and the local assortment team, so that all communication can be regrouped per region and put forward to the central and communication with the local assortment team is smoothened.

### *3.1.4) The healthy fast food case*

The Healthy Fast Food (HFF) case provides a contrasting picture compared to the retailer's cases in at least two aspects. Firstly, the object of study itself is not a specific event in the company's trajectory, as was the case with the introduction of local procurement for the retailers, but rather a long, slow and background process of institutional change that we could trace back with our interview material. Since we had the opportunity to interview people who were there from the start of the company and knew the whole story, this gave us a broad view and timeframe on our case study. Secondly, we aimed at understanding a process rather than a strategy, in addition to which we also put more emphasis on the role of values in bringing about these changes towards more sustainable practices. With this aim in mind, we started right from the words of our respondents, using an inductive approach in order to bring out the substantial elements that would contribute to a better understanding of the transformative role of the interactions of the HFF company with organisations from civil society.

#### *Starting off with the HFF company*

The HFF company was started on the premises that people who had only little time to eat in big cities could not find a healthy 'grab and go' lunch. The basic idea was thus to reconcile fast food with healthy food. We can thus posit that the HFF company started with internal values anchored into providing well being and good health to its customers.

At this stage, it is interesting to make a parallel with the concept of 'life goals' as it is conceived at the level of the individual. Indeed, life goals share much conceptual overlap with values as they also reflect what people's aims are. However, life goals contribute, in addition, to a better understanding of how people organise their lives in order to reach these goals. In the context of a company, this could thus be translated as 'shared views and goals', a concept that could be useful for the understanding of the transformative process that takes place within the company. Indeed, in the research we do, it is not only changes in 'values' that are of interest to us but, most importantly perhaps, changes in 'shared views and goals' that result in actual changes towards more sustainable practices.

Studies converge to show that there are only a limited number (i.e. around a dozen) of life-goals (Sheldon et al., 2011; Grouzet et al., 2005; Schwartz, 1992). An important dimension that structures these life goals is the physical self vs. self-transcendence axis. In this axis, we find, at one end of the spectrum, goals related to caring for one's physical self (e.g. safety and health, bodily pleasures and hedonism, financial success as a material means to achieve those ends) and, at the opposite end of the spectrum, dimensions that transcend the self (e.g. benefitting society, taking future generations into account, seeking universal meaning and understanding). If we translate these dimensions in the case of the HFF company, we could say that they started with 'shared views and goals' oriented towards caring for the physical self.

It is however clear from the data, that these goals were conceived not only from a short-term perspective (pleasure of eating a good healthy meal) but also from a longer-term perspective (positive effect on the health). This longer-term positive effect on health provided a first dimension to the word 'sustainability' within the company. Indeed, this positive effect would show if clients are loyal and come regularly and, in turn, loyal customers would ensure the sustainability of the company over time. More transcendent shared views and goals, such as these related to environmental concerns only emerged later from a process of institutional change within the HFF company.

It is also worth noting that business considerations rooted in rational thinking also regularly came up from our interview material. This brings us to the second axis that structures life-goals, namely the extrinsic vs. intrinsic axis. According to Grouzet et al. (2005), self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and physical health are common intrinsic goals. They are related to the psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence, as explained in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000). At the opposite side of the spectrum, financial success, image, and popularity form typical extrinsic goals aiming at obtaining some external reward or social praise.

In the case of the HFF, economic objectives and financial viability are clearly part of the picture. However, the company seeks to achieve these economic objectives through providing healthy meals to customers who only have limited time to eat. In addition, the interviewees repeatedly stressed the importance of coherence and sense making within the company, which relate more to intrinsic shared views and goals.

#### *Process of institutional change*

Our material suggests that the process of institutional changes towards more transcendent shared views and goals, such as these related to environmental concerns, is a slow and sort of background process. Interviewees repeatedly use terms like 'by chance' or 'along our way' regarding their interactions with organisations from civil society. This tends to indicate a form of serendipity rather than strategy, at least in the beginning of this process. In addition, the company's staff seems to play a non-negligible role as a driving force towards more sustainable practices (e.g. including more organic products or proposing more vegetarian and vegan meals). Even regarding the interactions of the company with organisations from civil societies, we can see that some of them resulted from an initial contact with a staff member. This importance of the staff in the institutional move towards sustainability came as an unexpected result and is reinforced, as we will see later, by the willingness to provide greater cohesion, sense making and adhering to shared views and goals within the company.

Shedding light on the interactions with organisations of civil society led the interviewees to verbalise the importance of these interactions in the transformation process of the company. Indeed, several changes took place within the HFF further to these interactions (e.g. introduction of organic products, fair trade products, lowering energy use, seeking solutions for packaging issues, favouring local productions, or greater emphasis on seasonal products). We can thus observe a progressive move towards integrating more self-transcending shared goals to the initial well-being goals of the society. Progressively, however, our interview material reveals a sense of the fact that because of their move in this direction, they attracted other actors with similar or, at least compatible views. This idea of 'virtuous circle' is reinforced by interviews material we collected by some of the organisations and suppliers the company was working with. They clearly felt the existence of compatible views, and, one of them expressed the thought that if you were predominantly driven by extrinsic goals like image, money or status, it would not work with the HFF company.



This was echoed on the side of the HFF company which explained how these changes made them more selective in the choice of further suppliers for instance.

### *3.2) Impacts on the food system*

#### *3.2.1) Impacts related to the local food procurement initiatives in Wallonia*

At first, the coordination between the farmers' union and Retailer1 helped combining the retailer's and the farmers' interest and resulted in some innovations allowing fairer marketing conditions for small producers. Indeed, this whole process resulted in several innovations: a specific contract for producers, a charter, a logistic platform, and a new possibility for small producers in the barcode system.

In Hainaut and Liège, the involvement of the Provinces allowed extending these conditions to all supermarkets. As a matter of fact, various supermarkets – including Retailer2 - had previously asked both Provinces for their support to develop local sourcing, but the marketing conditions they offered were very unfavourable for the producers (e.g. obligation of working with the central purchasing unit, no price negotiation, and request for exclusivity). The innovations built up in interaction with Retailer1 provided the Provinces and the producers with a basis for negotiation to work with other retailers. Also, the success of the project together with the general trend of “consuming local” forced other retailers to also propose local products and therefore to open up for negotiations. Some retailers even offer now more favourable conditions (e.g. regarding payment terms) than those co-constructed with Retailer1. In other words, the collaboration with Retailer1 paved the way and at the same time generated pressure on its competitors, which makes the Provinces and the producers now in a position to impose their conditions to retailers.

This interaction between Retailer1, producers and the 2 Provinces of Liège and Hainaut led to a significant development, given that it impacted significantly the practices of the various actors involved, as well as the practices of other retailers and created the conditions for many local producers who were previously excluded from the dominant system to integrate it and benefit from fairer marketing conditions. Also the availability of local products in supermarkets and their strong visibility thanks to promotion tools make consumers who usually shop only in supermarkets aware that there are farmers in their neighbourhood, and thereby « conventional » consumers gradually raise their awareness on agri-food issues (local, seasonal, small-scale farming) and some even change their consuming practices. Indeed, some farmers who have an on-farm shop noted an increase of visits and sales by new clients who said they had learnt about their farm or plant thanks to Retailer1 promotion tools.

However, even though new practices and new sourcing and consumption patterns have emerged, the underlying values and visions are unchanged. For food retailers, the market share of local products is negligible (e.g. for Retailer1 the target is to reach 2%). It represents a niche activity for them, not a new sourcing model to base their activity on (cf. Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3).

For the province of Liège and Hainaut, the project is in line with the projects they have supported or developed since the 2000's, where the development of short circuits is also a marginal program, focused on maintaining medium and small-scale farms and not related to the reconnection of producers and farmers or on the relocation of food systems. Indeed, both Provinces have been working on the issue of the valorization of local products since the 1990's - as all local authorities in the EU in the 1990's, as a consequence of the 'quality turn' and the 'endogenous turn' of UE rural development policies. In Liège, first actions were focused on the promotion of agricultural products locally produced and processed on farm. This question became more accurate with the milk crisis in 2008/2009. These actions, called “opérations Agricharme”, consisted of tours in rural areas, farm visits for people to know better how food products are produced and what a peasant's life is like. The idea was to give local agriculture a good image and to enhance local consumption of local products that had lost their international outlets. Nowadays, the “opérations Agricharme” still exist but are restricted to farms visits for school children. The activity was restricted because it implied provincial officers to work weekends and was therefore expensive for the Province – reflecting its marginal position in the Province's strategy for agriculture. Later, actions related to the meat sector, which was suffering from various sanitary scandals, were implemented. Actions involved export promotion, in agricultural shows such as the SIAL in Paris and



Anoga in Cologne, and various Belgian fairs. This also demonstrates that the development of local food chains was not considered as a strategic orientation. More recently, the agricultural service created a website Agricharme.be, presenting the farmers, with their name, address, products. As international outlets remain insufficient, local outlets are targeted once again. It is in this context that the local food procurement program of Promogest emerges, which its director presents as a way to propose new outlets to local producers, without ever mentioning other features usually associated to local food chains, such as reconnecting producers to consumers, enhancing local economy, environmental benefits, and support to small-scale farming.

The producers involved are actually mostly medium-scale producers. Indeed, during the initial concertation process, only middle-scale farmers who were able to supply supermarkets agreed to participate. Consequently, the definition of a local producers (located within 40 km from the store, hiring less than 11 employees exclusive of seasonal workers), de facto includes almost all producers in Belgium.

Eventually, there has been very little evolution in terms of values for each actor. The interactions between these actors led to a new framing, in the sense that e.g. for Retailer1 store managers, the point is not only to contribute to creating a positive image of the brand, but also to support local producers. For the provinces, there is no significant evolution, in the sense that they are still on a very sectorial approach, focusing only on the support to local producers and not yet connecting the development of short circuits with broader rural development issues. Regarding consumers, as shown by the posters displayed by Retailer1 in its supermarkets saying « support local farmers with us! », there seems to be a certain endogenizing of criticisms and the change in consumption patterns that has been observed will most likely to remain marginal. Although there are different governance arrangements between the two initiatives, the associated subsystems of actors – apart from the logistic platform in Liège that acts as an intermediary actor, practices and values are very similar. We assume that the fact that only mainstream actors are involved explains this similarity.

In the case of Brabant Wallon, the new interactions between the Province, small producers and the LAG induced the development of new ethical values within the local dominant food system. Indeed, the Province has now adapted its training program, which was exclusively oriented towards mainstream agricultural issues, and is now proposing many workshops related to short food chains with the logic of reconnecting consumers and producers.

What is more, it participates through Made in BW in the structuration of alternative food chains, which uphold values it previously did not relate to the agricultural sector, including social justice for instance. For example, Made in BW works with a citizens' cooperative supermarket which is trying to build a socially just and inclusive local food system and which couldn't develop without the logistic support of Made in BW. Although Made in BW's impact is still extremely limited in terms of volume and revenue, the new interactions it has fostered could be a first step in a transition process, as they enable higher diversity within the dominant system.

### *3.2.2) Impacts related to Retailer1's local procurement strategy*

The strategy to source and market local food by Retailer1 is seen as on top, and never intended to compete with its 'general system/practices'. Rather a complementary strategy, aimed at attracting extra consumers, and for a good image.

Retailer1's local strategy started in a context in which the retailer was moving towards increased electronisation, more efficient administration, minimal human intervention and harmonisation to make the system faster and more reliable. Retailer1 recognised the differences that characterise local food systems. Instead of trying to fit this system in their own system of efficiency, specialisation, and electronisation, a separate system was created, that was adapted to the needs of local producers. Hence, the local strategy was something that was completely separate from the general tendencies within the company, as it was characterised by an increase of human intervention, less electronisation, and less efficient administration. Generally, the local system was completely separate from the traditional practices of Retailer1, did not get into contact with it, or changed the traditional system or activities in the stores of Retailer1.

Although it was seen as complementary, the local strategy already had gained an important place within the company. This is illustrated by the fact that targets were attached to the strategy already, and that financial gains of the strategy

had grown significantly throughout the years. However, it was also found that in some moments the strategy did not fit with the routines and practices of the retailer. Indeed, in many cases the store employees also had to adapt their practices and routines to this new way of working, and at the start were sometimes opposed against it. However, in time, habits have started to grow and most employees became accepting towards it. For example, the local strategy was something that was not an integral part of the contracts of the employees from the store. As such, the sourcing and marketing of the local products was something that happened on top of the 'normal practices'. As such, if someone falls ill, this may have an impact on how well the department for local products is managed. Also, when it is really busy, managers may forget to order local products. While with the 'traditional products' this is much more embedded in strict routines and practices. In other words, for now there are some routines that are lacking. It is not something that is in the standard planning or contract of the manager, so it is something that needs to happen on top of the normal job of a manager. In this sense, the strategy is very dependent on mistakes, or successes of individual managers. This is less the case with the 'normal' products, as they are automated, and not dependent on individual motivation.

This already illustrates that, although the strategy is starting to find its place within the company, it is not strongly embedded yet within the structures of Retailer1. Another example illustrating this is the fact that generally, the local department is managed by different departments in the stores, according to the type of product. To smoothen this, some of the stores now have a local manager dedicated to the local products area. However, there are no targets yet attached to the local products as a category. As such, the local manager becomes responsible for the targets of other employees, which can create frictions within the store between the employees.

However, the local strategy already grew to such an extent that in some cases it did get into contact with and had an impact on the traditional practices. In some stores, the importance of local products grew so much that large spaces were dedicated to local products, which came at the expense of other products. Moreover, in some cases, sales of some products grew so big that they competed with the traditional products of Retailer1.

#### *How producers need to adapt to Retailer's practices*

Although the traditional and local circuit were generally separated from each other, both parties adapted and learned from each other. Indeed, for some producers, working with Retailer1 consisted of a steep learning curve in practices like invoicing and working with retail in general. For some of the producers working with the retailer, adapting these practices were hard, as some did not comply with the needed regulations, have the needed labels, packaging or barcodes. As this could be a hurdle both in terms of knowledge and financial input, Retailer1 tried to support the producers by giving them trainings, and offering barcodes at a lower price.

#### *How Retailer1 adapts to producers*

Many of the interviewees of Retailer1 also indicated that they had learned and changed a lot since the collaboration with local producers. Indeed, many of the retailer's practices were adapted in order to facilitate the interactions with the local producers. In other words, the learning and adaptation between the retailer and the local producers happened in both directions. And by giving trainings and support to smaller producers, Retailer1 made it more accessible for small producers to deliver their produce in the mainstream system.

#### *3.2.3) Impacts related to Retailer2's local procurement strategy*

As in the case of Retailer1, Retailer2's local food strategy is rather complementary to the traditional procurement system/practices. However, the impacts on the food system of Retailer2 differ from those observed for the case of Retailer1 (as presented above).

In the case of Retailer1, the local strategy was designed separately from the general system, and a conscious effort was made not to make the general system and the local system clash. Therefore, the sales of local products were seen as something on top and in no case were conflicting with the general products. Moreover, the two systems were seen as compatible and reinforcing each other, rather than competing. Indeed, the local products have an added value for the consumers, as they can make complementary purchases in the supermarket, instead of having to go to different

local producers, they can find them all together at their supermarket, together with other products they might possibly need.

However, the local strategy was seen as an on-top system, separated from the general practices of Retailer2. Generally, Retailer2 tried to 'push' the local strategy into its centralised frame, but more flexibility was granted for some of the sourcing and marketing practices. Indeed, most administration and contracting practices still take place through the central model of Retailer2, except for the placing of the orders and deliveries. Moreover, the local products were seen as something additional. It were thus the producers that had to adapt their practices and learn to comply with the rules and practices of Retailer2. However, there was some extent of increased flexibility from the side of Retailer2, in terms of placing orders (not always automated, but also by phone, e-mail or fax), and times of delivery. Also, some practices were more flexible and differentiated (like placing, promoting, buying and selling, transportation), and hence the way in which the strategy was given shape was highly dependent on the individual motivation of the store managers and employees, as well of the local producers. The strategy was thus more differentiated per region, and even per store than the general practices of the retailer.

#### *3.2.4) Learning impacts on the food system related to retailers' local procurement strategies*

Learning can be analysed at the different levels – individual, group, organisational and at a more system level. In or cases we are particularly interested at learning at the level of the food system. However, it is important to bear in mind that system level learning (learning by the system) influence and is influenced by the other levels of learning. Based on the findings, at this stage of the analysis we cannot claim that nor each of the retailers as an organisation as a whole has learnt, and neither that the food system as a whole has learnt. Considering the learning by the food retailers (organisational level learning), the local sourcing concept in Retailer1 appears to represent a more radical innovation than in Retailer2. However, even in Retailer1, the local concept is still a rather “parallel system” to its traditional network of suppliers. Evidences from the interviews suggest that new knowledge related to Retailer1's local procurement strategy has not yet diffused and embedded across the organisation as a whole – neither to other operating areas of the company, nor to its operations in other countries. Therefore, the findings suggest that the local product strategies in both retailers are not (yet) transformational. The two cases of local sourcing are rather very localised and in progress learning experiments. This also suggests that the learning impacts on the food system as a whole are rather limited, i.e. we cannot identify any changes of practices and views at the system level as a whole. However, it is worth nothing that the analysis of learning at any level needs to take into account the time window of the study. In a short time frame, as in the local procurement cases, it is difficult to capture learning, particularly at the system level, as learning outcomes take time to spread to and embedded within a whole system. In fact, given that transitions require powerful learning developments throughout long time periods, our findings need be carefully considered when analysing learning. This does not mean the cases have no transformational potential. This is an aspect we aim to consider in the analytical articles described in Section 4.3.

### *3.2.5) Impacts related to the healthy fast food case*

The institutional changes reported in Section 3.1.4 have an impact on the practices of the HFF company in several ways. Indeed, these changes impact the procurement process (e.g. with more organic, fair-trade, local and seasonal products). Moreover, they also impact other practices such as the processing of food and packaging issues, the sorting of wastes, as well as the reduction of use of resource and waste. From a value perspective, these changes also lead to a model that integrates not only intrinsic – physical-self concerns, but also, to a certain degree, more self-transcendent shared values and goals. However, the communication on these more profound changes in the company was mostly kept for the staff. Indeed, as expressed by some interviewees, these changes are complicated to explain and understand. Therefore, it is difficult to convey them to the public. Conversely, explaining the sustainability issues that underpin these changes to the staff is seen as a very valuable way of motivating them and developing shared understanding around the values and goals within the company.

This results in the fact that these changes have an impact on the HFF company itself. Moreover, these changes could also impact the actors that interact with it. Indeed, the congruence of values between these different actors seems a driving force for changes. In turn, the interview show that the HFF company can also exert a certain amount of influence on its suppliers in order for them to meet the higher requirements of the company in terms of sustainability. In addition to this the HFF company is well aware to be constantly watched by their competitors, including major retailers. The replication by other actors of some of the changes in their products, for instance, could thus lead to more important changes in the food system.

However, these changes, although clearly affecting the trajectory of the company, were not fully communicated to the public. Indeed, despite the changes that took place inside the company, external communication kept predominantly priming values and life goals related to well-being and physical self in their customers, while the more in-depth changes were mostly used for building internal coherence. Although researches in the field stress the importance of priming values related to the community or future generations, for instance, when communicating around sustainability (e.g. Sheldon et al., 2011); this does not seem to imply that actors such as the HFF company consider yet that priming these values in customers is legitimate. This clearly limits the transformational power of these institutional changes on the wider public.

## **4. Discussion**

The discussion of the case studies will consist of four analytical articles, co-authored by different members of the F4S team. The title, leading author and abstract of each article is presented below. The full articles will be submitted with the F4S final report, and submitted for publications to international journals.

### *4.1) Governance of sustainable agri-food systems: key values and features derived from Belgian initiatives aiming at introducing local products on supermarket shelves<sup>8</sup>*

Food retail corporations are powerful actors of the dominant food system, accounting for more than 95% of food market share in Belgium. Driven by motives of profit maximisation, they exert strong lock-in effects that hinder the transition towards a more sustainable food system. Through the criteria they impose on the upstream part of the food chain (e.g. homogeneity standards, volume and uninterrupted supply requirements) and through their marketing practices (e.g. back margins), they exclude a significant part of sustainable food products from their shelves which makes them lowly available for consumers.

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<sup>8</sup> The leading author of this analytical article is Sibylle Bui (UCL). This paper was presented at the XXVIIth European Society for Rural Sociology – ESRS congress held Krakow, Poland, in July 2017. It was published as a short paper in the congress proceedings which is annexed to the administrative report as Annex 4, and has been accepted as full paper for a special issue on *"The role of ethics in food system governance and sustainability transition"*, to be published in 2018.

Recently, several initiatives aiming at enabling the introduction of local, low-input, small farmers' products on supermarket shelves have emerged in Belgium. These initiatives mainly take the form of logistic platforms, that have been launched by local authorities and/or civil society organisations (CSOs). As supermarkets seek to improve their image, they are becoming a flourishing activity. This raises the following question: is the development of local sourcing in supermarkets an opportunity for a transition towards more sustainable food systems (i.e., for sustainable farming and food practices and for fair marketing practices to be broadly adopted), and if so, under which conditions?

In our research, we combine the multi-level perspective with a pragmatist approach to analyse three initiatives, which rely on different governance arrangements and produce different subsystems. In order to assess the impact of these initiatives on the broader food system, we take into account all the actors involved (producers, processors, retail corporations, alternative retailers, public authorities, CSOs, consumers), and for each one of them, we jointly analyse: the key ethical issues and professed values, and their evolution over time; the implementation (or absence) of related practices; and the coordination and governance features they participate in and their evolution over time.

Our results show that hybrid governance arrangements which bring together producers, large retailers, CSOs and/or local authorities produce hybrid ethical framings. Depending on the ethical framing, actors are stimulated to adopt or develop more or less sustainable farming, processing, marketing and food practices. At first, the coordination between the farmers' union and Retailer1 helped combining the retailer's and the farmers' interest and resulted in fairer prices and marketing conditions for small producers. Then, in the cases of Hainaut and Liège, the involvement of the Provinces allowed to extend them to all supermarkets. In the case of Brabant Wallon, the governance of the initiative is shared among the Province, small farmers and the LAG. This governance feature allows the LAG to uphold its values of regional enhancement and raising consumers' awareness, to enrol the Province's training services and thereby favour the development of ethical values within the local dominant food system. Moreover, alternative food chains, relying on radically different ethical framings (including social justice for instance) benefit from the local platform. Although the impact of this new governance arrangement is still extremely limited in terms of volume, it could be a first step in a transition process, as it enables higher diversity within the dominant system.

#### *4.2) Strategies of supermarkets to source and market local food<sup>9</sup>*

In recent decades most Western European countries have witnessed a move towards the rationalisation, centralisation and specialisation of food supply chains. This has gone accompanied by a substantial restructuring of the retail sector, which is characterised by among others a growth in store size and a high level of concentration in the food retailing industry. Consequently, most food in Western European countries is now bought in supermarkets (Chkanikova, 2016; Ljungberg et al., 2013). For example, in the Nordic countries and Western Europe, three to five major supermarkets represent the main food marketing channels (Chkanikova, 2016). In Belgium, three retailers represent more than 70% of the market share (Aevermaete et al., 2015) and almost 80% of all food is bought in supermarkets (Platteau et al., 2016). Retailers thus reach the largest segment of consumers in Western European countries. Moreover, large food retailers take a central place between the production and consumption of goods. And therefore can strongly influence farming, food processing, retailing and food consumption (Oosterveer, 2012; Clark and Inwood, 2015; Ljungberg et al., 2013; Chkanikova, 2016).

At the same time the need for 'sustainable', 'healthy', 'just' and 'climate smart' foods has become clear and consumer demand for such foods has grown rapidly (Brunori, et al., 2016; Lehner, 2015; Tjärnemo and Södahl, 2015). It has been argued that large retailers are able to take on the role of change agents by using their central position to steer both upstream and downstream practices towards sustainability (Chkanikova, 2016; Aertsens, 2011; Lehner, 2015; Kotzab et al., 2011) by buying more sustainable foodstuffs and promoting them in their stores and external communication (Tjärnemo and Södahl, 2015). Moreover, due to their size, retailers have the possibility and leverage to upscale markets of sustainable foods (Chkanikova, 2016; Dunne et al., 2011). As a reaction to this, retailers have increasingly started to offer 'sustainable foods' as a part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies and retailers are now the largest outlet for 'sustainable foods' (Dunne et al., 2010; Oosterveer et al., 2014; Brunori et al., 2016).

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<sup>9</sup> The leading author of this analytical article is Tjitske Anna Zwart (KUL).

In this article, we aim to empirically examine the way in which a part of the CSR strategy is implemented by two of the largest retailers in Belgium. In this, we will focus on the way in which local foods are sourced and marketed by these retailers as a part of their sustainability strategy. This choice has been made since the 'local' is often associated with sustainable, just and healthy production (Brunori, et al., 2016; Feldmann and Hamm, 2015; Trivette, 2015). Also, Richards et al. (2017) argue that an increased demand from consumers for foods that have been produced, sourced or grown locally is one of the most important developments in the food industry for the past twenty years (Richards et al., 2017). Both cases in this article have incorporated the marketing of local foods as a part of their CSR strategy.

We are especially interested in retailers' practices of sourcing and marketing local goods given that practices in local food systems are often different from practices of large food retailers. Indeed, local food systems and large retailers can be seen as two different 'worlds' operating with different organisational forms and strongly different rationales (Mount, et al., 2013). Following this, we are interested in the way in which the practices of the sourcing and marketing of local foods by retailers are shaped by and in their turn shape the standard practices of retailers.

We aim to address this question by taking a social practices perspective. Specifically, we focus on the practices of provisioning products and in-store marketing. We take interest in the sourcing of local foods because this is what determines what is available and where it is made available. We take interest in the in-store marketing since this is where the decisions of consumers can still significantly be influenced (Oosterveer et al., 2014; Tjærnemo and Södahl, 2015).

#### *4.3) Learning for sustainability transitions: a discussion on the role of mainstream business actors towards more sustainable food systems<sup>10</sup>*

Sustainability transitions involve the disruption of pre-existing commitments, roles and rules, and the development of new practices, values and identities, implying the transformation of the governance of the whole socio-technical system (Marques et al., 2012). It is widely emphasised by sustainability transitions scholars that such powerful changes are the outcome of multiple interactions, developments and learning processes within and between the three levels of a socio-technical system – niches, regime and landscape (Geels, 2004; Geels and Schot, 2007; Smith et al., 2010; Marques et al., 2012).

Regime encompasses the mainstream actors of a socio-technical system, and is characterised by relatively stable configurations and alignments of different cognitive and normative elements, activities and processes, including knowledge, techniques, artefacts, routines, practices, rules, worldviews, values, problem definition and interpretation (Geels, 2004; Schot and Geels, 2007). The stability of a regime's basic architecture locks it within path-dependent trajectories, implying that regime changes are rather incremental (Geels, 2004; Schot and Geels, 2007; Marques et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2010). However, sustainability transitions are characterised by deep and broad structural changes in technical and social components of the basic architecture guiding interpretations and actions of different regime actors (Geels, 2004; Schot and Geels, 2007; Smith et al., 2005; 2010). Thus, transition requires the transformation or shift of a dominant regime into a different regime (Geels, 2004; Schot and Geels, 2007; Smith et al., 2005; 2010).

Giving regime's stability, the driving force for such regime shift is argued to come from niches, which are conceived as protected learning spaces, where radical innovations with potential for triggering transitions can flourish (Geels and Schot, 2007; Marques et al., 2012). This may explain why the great bulk of scholarly work on the topic focuses largely on learning dynamics at the niche level, with little attention being given to the dynamics of learning at the regime level (Elzen and Barbier, 2012). However, in order to break a regime's stability, transitions require powerful systemic learning processes, implying that actors from the different socio-technical levels, particularly from niche and regime, engage to, and learn from each other (Elzen and Barbier, 2012; Loorbach et al., 2009; Marques et al., 2012). In other words, the multiple interactive learning processes required for socio-technical transitions clearly need to go

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<sup>10</sup> The leading author of this analytical article is Ionara Costa (UCL). This empirical paper departs from a conceptual one, which is presented in Annex 1 of the administrative report. Based on feedbacks received in two conferences and a workshop, and on internal discussions between the authors, this paper extends the conceptual discussion presented in the first paper, and applies it to the two cases.



beyond protected spaces, as those represented by niches. As claimed by Elzen and Barbier (2012:18), “the dynamics of system innovations also implies that niche developments should tie into regime developments in order to have a wider impact.”

Despite being at the heart of transition theory, such interactive learning is only vaguely defined and operationalised in most of the conceptual and empirical studies on sustainability transitions (Armitage et al., 2008). This paper aims to contribute to bridge this gap by discussing the rather neglected role played by mainstream business actors in collaborative learning for sustainability transitions, particularly in the context of niche-regime interaction. It does so by looking at two cases of local procurement by large food retailers in Belgium through their interactions with local producers and local initiatives supporting them.

Food retail corporations are powerful actors of the dominant food system. They exert strong lock-in effects that hinder transition towards more sustainable food systems. This occurs through the criteria they impose to the upstream part of the food chain, and through their products offering, which make sustainable food products lowly available for consumers. Over the last few years, large food retailers have been adopting novel business strategies, and increasingly engaging in collaborative initiatives with government and civil society actors to address sustainability issues (Loorbach et al., 2009). The cases discussed in this paper constitute an instance of such developments.

The aim is to identify aspects in the studied cases that can give some hints on the learning processes by the food retailers - mainstream business organisations, as they interact with local producers and local initiatives – non-mainstream actors that can be somehow considered as niche actors. The question driven this analysis is whether the introduction of local products on food retailers’ sourcing represents an opportunity for transformation of the dominant agri-food system by triggering profound changes in strategies, practices and values of incumbent regime actors (e.g. food retail corporations); or instead, whether the learning processes and changes engendered by such niche-regime interactions represent marginal adjustments in the socio-technical system. More specifically, can those interactions engender learning processes both at regime as well niche levels that are powerful enough to contribute to a transition of the agri-food system, by changing not only practices and strategies of the actors involved, but also the values and world views underlying their actions?

In order to define the analytical framework for the cases, the paper borrows insights from the scholarly work on organizational learning, inter-organisational learning and network learning. This analytical framework has two dimensions. The first dimension provides elements to look at the learning and changes in food retailers’ practices and shared views engendered by their local sourcing strategies. Hence, it focuses on learning by mainstream business actors, and how this can be related to transitions. More specifically, this dimension of the analytical framework looks at the social learning theory of action, as proposed by organisational behavioural studies, and discusses learning orders, and how they relate to different complexity levels of organisational change. The core idea is based on the concepts of learning loops – single, double and triple loop learning. While single loop learning can lead to ordinary incremental adjustments in action and behaviour, multiple loop learning can lead to changes of deeper elements of organisational culture and knowledge base, implying more radical or fundamental changes, or transformations.

The paper argues that sustainability transitions require regime organisations to engage in multiple loops learning (double and triple loop learning), which can lead to radical changes in their strategies, practices, perceptions and values; in other words, learning that can break the lock-in and change regime’s basic architecture. In the cases of local sourcing by food retailers the aim is to search for evidences of the impacts of such strategies in terms of their practices and values, and trying to identify if changes are localised or if they have the potential to spread to the retailers’ organisations as a whole.

The second dimension of the analytical framework addresses the transformative power of food retailers’ local sourcing strategies, particularly in the context of their interactions with non-mainstream actors such as local producers and local initiatives. The aim here is to get insights for the discussion of learning in the context of niche-regime interactions. It turns to the related concepts of inter-organisational learning and network learning, both departing from the concept of organisational learning, and focuses more specifically on the inter-organisational network learning as proposed by Knight (2002). Inter-organisational learning focuses on the appropriation of learning by an individual organisation in the context of collaboration or interaction between groups or pairs of organisations



(Janowicz-Panjaitan and Noorderhaven, 2008; Knight, 2002). Contrasting to this atomised view of learning, inter-organisational network learning focuses on the collective learning by a group of organisations as a group, implying that learning has to be embedded across the group of organisations as a whole (Knight, 2002). As described by Knight (2002:437), inter-organisational network learning “is more than the sum of the learning of individuals, groups and organizations that constitute the network; network learning processes would result in changes to the attributes of the network such as interactions processes and structures, and shared narratives”.

Following these lines, the paper argues that transitions requires learning at the level of the socio-technical system as a whole, and that such system learning is more than the sum of the learning of the individual actors from the different (analytical) levels of a socio-technical system (i.e. niche, regime and landscape); instead socio-technical system learning implies changes in the core attributes of the system, resulting its transformation into a new system. In the cases of local sourcing by food retailers the aim is to search for evidences of the impacts of the interaction between food retailers and the non-mainstream actors in terms of their practices, views and believes across the food system as a whole.

The paper is organised as follow. Section 2 presents the analytical framework, discussing the different concepts (i.e. organisational learning, inter-organisational and network learning). It put forward the main arguments guiding the analysis about multiple loop learning and system learning and how they related to learning for sustainability transitions. Section 3 presents the methodological aspects of the study. Based on the previous section, it identifies the variables to operationalise the learning constructs and conduct the analysis of the cases. Section 4 presents the two cases of local procurement by food retailers and their interactions with non-mainstream actors, and the main findings. Section 5 discusses those findings, and presents the concluding remarks.

#### *4.4) Greener on the inside? The role of values in institutional change towards more sustainable practices in the case of a healthy fast-casual food chain<sup>11</sup>*

Recent years have seen the emergence of new types of fast food chains, the so-called ‘healthy fast-casual’ chains proposing healthier dietary patterns for eating on the go. In the healthy fast-casual case we study for this paper, the interactions of the company with organisations from civil society result in institutional change that could lead to more sustainable practices within the company, and, in turn, could reinforce the emergence of socio-cultural values that give more importance to sustainability.

This paper aims at understanding this process of institutional change in the case of a healthy fast-casual food chain. More specifically, we focus on the role of values in bringing about changes towards more sustainability practices within the company. Indeed, according to Dolfsma and Verburg (2008) socio-cultural values play an important role in the legitimacy of institutions. However, translating abstract socio-cultural values in actual changes of practices within the company is a complicated process that requires further research to be better understood. Moreover the role of values in institutional change has not received the attention it deserves yet. Indeed, self-interest and rationality predominates in mainstream economics’ perspective while technological changes are key explanatory factors in more structural approaches.

Besides the fact that ‘tensions’ related to values can act as a trigger for change, as argued by Dolfsma and Verburg (2008), our first results show that congruence of values with other actors could also be an important trigger for a company in the process of translating abstract socio-cultural values into changes of practices. In this sense, interactions with organisations from civil society could act as a catalyst for institutional changes towards more sustainable practices in the company. However, in our case, these changes, although clearly affecting the trajectory

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<sup>11</sup> The leading author of this analytical article is Helene Joachain (ULB). This paper still deserves further work in the time remaining for the project, especially as the initial ambition was to also use material from retailers’ interviews in order to integrate a contrasting case in the paper. This would enable the paper to dwell more on the agency / structure issue than it does now. However, the integration of material from retailers’ cases has not proven an easy task, especially regarding the coherence and theoretical framework of the paper. Despite exchanges and discussions with partners to the project about that topic, it has so far remained an obstacle and we intend to pursue this common work in 2018.

of the company, were not fully communicated to the public. Indeed, despite the changes that took place inside the company, external communication kept predominantly priming values and life goals related to well being in their customers, while the more in-depth changes were mostly used for building internal coherence. In that sense, it seems that, although there could be a form of synergy between actors with congruent values in a move towards more sustainable practices and values, this does not imply that these actors consider yet that priming these values in customers is legitimate, which limits the transformational power of these changes.

As this paper focuses on understanding institutional changes within the company, we opted for a grounded theory approach which provides a good methodological fit for exploring how processes unfold (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). We carried out qualitative interviews of managers in the healthy fast-casual food chain, as well as interviews of actors involved in interactions with the company. Following attested techniques of qualitative analysis (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003; Gioia et al., 2012), our data analysis is based on a 3-step coding of the interviews transcripts using qualitative software NVivo 11 as a support tool for coding.

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