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Zam-Zam Abdirahman, Gudule Kisempa Muyuala, Loïc Sauvée

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Names and affiliations of case study authors

Zam-Zam Abdirahman, Gudule Kisempa Muyuala, Loïc Sauvée

*Institut Polytechnique LaSalle Beauvais
Rue Pierre-Waguet, 60000 Beauvais
France*

Network profiles

In France three formal innovation networks have been investigated: Destination Développement Durable (hereafter 3D); BioBourgogne (hereafter BB) and Agence Régionale d'innovation Picardie (hereafter ARI). In total the data has been collected through semi-structured in-depth and one-to-one interviews with network coordinators, research organizations, public bodies, and business leaders (food SMES, cooperatives, farmers).

Two of these networks, 3D and BB, are devoted to organizational innovations, i. e. Corporate Social responsibility (CSR, through ISO 26000) for 3D and organic products for BB, and one, ARI, is a network focused on any type of innovations in line with the French national policy for innovation.

These networks have very contrasted effects on learning and innovation. 3D, as a specialized network for the promotion of CSR principles among food SMEs (mainly cooperatives) has a strong influence and is a real driving force for its members. Launched a few years ago, the network has seen a rapid increase in its actions and already 13 companies have received a compliance certificate. For BB, the situation is more complex. Settled a long time ago, the network is facing some tensions and difficulties due mainly to the competition of other forms of organizations also devoted to the development of organic products. Nevertheless, thanks to its long history and proximity with farmers, its role for learning is still widely recognized. For ARI, its role being clearly focused on a purely networking activity in putting in connections various members, the learning effects, although recognized by members, is much more difficult to measure. This network is usually oriented towards technological innovations without sectoral focus. This situation would add even more difficulties to clearly identify the effects on learning and innovation for food SMEs.

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Success factors and barriers to learning and innovation

The question of antecedents of these 3 networks is probably a first strong influence on the understanding of their respective situations. Two of these networks (3D and BB) were set up by members (i. e; farmers, food SMEs, cooperatives) so the approach is clearly bottom-up. Consequently to this fact, the governance of the networks is strongly related to its members. On the contrary, ARI has been set up in following previous structures for the implementation of the French policy for innovation and therefore the approach is top-down. Similarly, the governance of the network reflects the strong influence of the public body both at regional and national levels.

Considering the diversity, the composition of members and the size of the networks, three dimensions seem to have a specific relevance and affect the performance: (i) heterogeneity of its members; (ii) scope of action; (iii) functionality and objectives.

(i) *First of all, the heterogeneity of members.* There is a continuum from a high heterogeneity of members in their status (ARI) to medium (3D) and low (BB). ARI with its high diversity of members has an advantage considering its role of connection but also may limit the community spirit of the group. Confidentiality problem may arise but these problems are usually avoided by the bilateral agreements developed for the innovation projects. 3D gives an interesting mix with public and professional body (with the presence of AFNOR, the French branch of ISO), that could be seen as a way to create insurance and guarantee for its members. Finally, BB is, at least at the regional level, very farm-centered, but one must acknowledge the links at the national level with institutions for organic farming such as Agence Bio.

(ii) *Secondly the scope of the activity of these three networks is also of relevance.* Network such 3D is in a sense highly specialized, with a unique focus on CSR, which gives the network its legitimacy and recognition, an effect that is still reinforce by the fact that this initiative is quite in advance in comparison with other sectors (i.e. non-food business) and other region (outside Aquitaine, which was the first region in France to promote this concept). In an intermediate position BB also provides a clear focus on organic agriculture but the concept is far from being new and instead is clearly challenged by other types of organizations. Finally, ARI have an extremely wide scope of intervention (any type of products in any business sectors) but this network is tacitly oriented towards classical (technological) innovations.

(iii) *Thirdly the functionality and objectives, with the roles of leadership and interpersonal links.* 3D network probably gives an excellent example of a personified network with one person who gives at the same time a shared vision, common objectives and a clear-cut functionality of the network. BB has this clear-cut functionality through organic farming but without or a less clearly developed leadership. ARI will have in a sense an extremely specific and narrow function (bring people together) but without clear leadership promoting a common vision for its members.

Therefore these three formal networks bring a unique blend of these three families of characteristics (heterogeneity of members' status, scope of activity, objectives and leadership). Each of these networks has developed a specific combination with its own specific logic. When it comes to their real (positive) learning

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effects, the measurement problems (the definition of efficiency and effectiveness ratios for instance) is probably one of the most challenging issue to cope with.

Conclusion

One could consider that these three networks have a good level of performance in considering the opinion of their main members. In each case, and in considering the strong diversity of their respective situations, these networks have enhanced knowledge creation and/or knowledge transfer among members. These networks have also enhanced the innovative capacity of food SMEs and/or farmers. The idea is less clear when it comes to the collaboration effects and durability of actions.

Two categories of interesting insights can be provided from the cases to better understand their role for innovation and learning: firstly the nature of innovations (stage in life cycle, complexity, innovation phases...) and secondly the nature of the involvement of companies.

For ARI, there is no relevance of considering life cycles because its action is very short term oriented and the diversity of innovation is extremely high (from simple/incremental innovation to complex innovation projects). Instead, 3D and BB are on unique life cycles, but at totally different stages: early stage for 3D (ISO 26000 adoption and to some extent implementation), late stage for BB (organic farming standards). This fact may affect the uniqueness of their objectives as well as the performance of these networks (and the way of measuring it). We suggest that the type of life cycles considered and the stage with which the network deals with will have a strong influence on the learning performance of the network.

The nature of the involvement of the companies is also to be considered (question which is partially related to the governance forms of the network: bottom-up network vs. top-down network). For 3D and BB, the companies are involved in a long-term relationship with their respective networks, while in ARI the contact with SMEs is more sporadic and the links more tenuous. Consequently, the sense of collaboration and the will of developing common knowledge and resources will be totally different. The two latter networks (3D and BB) create an output for innovation and at the same time aim developing a kind of collective spirit (and organization) devoted to innovation and learning.

Acknowledgements

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CASE REPORT summary: 3D, FR

Overview on the network

The 3D network was created in Aquitaine in 2005 on the initiative of the Regional Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives Aquitaine (FRCAA) and the French Association for Normalization (AFNOR, French branch of ISO). This network is formalized by a contract of partnership between the two entities. Although established in 2005, the network's activities officially started in 2007 and partnership between FRCAA and AFNOR was renewed in 2009.

The need to establish a network was necessary to disseminate the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) principles in France, through a program called 3D (Destination Développement Durable: Sustainable Development Destination). The main objective of the 3D network consists in the federation of agribusiness firms committed to sustainable development, so that they can be recognized by influential players in the sector. Thinking of the people, one representative of FRCAA for CSR begun in 1992 in parallel with the "Agenda 21" and the appearance of the IFS standard. The concern of being constrained with new standards imposed by the buyers and the media pressure in terms of CSR faced by SME agribusiness have been a strong incentive in the creation of the 3D network. Currently, over 80 agribusiness companies and cooperatives adhere to the 3D community.

The 3D program principles are in tune with the guidelines on which is based the ISO 26000. The initiative is concretely done by the creation of common services articulated around three points: (1) a standard training program to prepare companies to the CSR approach, (2) the provision of a diagnostic tool, and the realization of diagnosis of the food SMEs by a team of experts, (3) a communication policy (website, brand name, communication towards stakeholders) of the initiative for member companies of the 3D program.

The support of SMEs is reflected by a structured networking of food companies and strategic actors, using the FRCAA as relay points. These actors have the resources and skills to improve and/or strengthen the adoption of the CSR principles by companies.

The Regional Council in Aquitaine region, the DIRECCTE (regional delegation of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce) and possibly the European Union contribute in part to the funding of these collective actions of the 3D network.

The 3D network involves four main categories of actors:

1. **the FRCAA and the AFNOR** are playing the role of network coordinators.
2. **the agricultural cooperatives and food companies (SMEs)**, who are the first recipients of the 3D actions (13 companies started the 3D program in Aquitaine).
3. **the Regional Council and the DIRECCTE**, who financially support companies.
4. **the pool of 3D experts** provides its expertise and skills to the SMEs (diagnosis achievement)

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Analysis and conclusion

The 3D Network is a response to various problems evoked by the actors of the 3D project. The agrifood SMEs need to differentiate in the market and the FRCAA needs to elaborate an effective strategy to promote their development. For the AFNOR, to get involved in the promotion of CSR seems to be a relevant way to test the ISO 26000 standard while supporting development of small structures. So, this innovative approach makes stress on the importance of collaborative work for a commitment to sustainable development. It also highlighted the central role of SMEs in the development and the implementation of these types of standards.

Key members of 3D network are bound by common values shared on sustainable development even if each of them appeals to different interests. The authorities perceive the network as a real strategic tool for the agrifood SMEs' development and regional orientation towards sustainable development. Indeed, the network membership provides access to significant resources (finance, skills and expertise, network relationships) to committed companies. Among more than eighty 3D-companies, currently a dozen have established their sustainable development report.

The standards ISO 14001, ISO 9001 are nowadays already quite widespread, and the adoption of the standard ISO 26000 would be an effective mean for agrifood SMEs to get differentiation. Even if this standard is not certifiable because of its too global character, the official AFAQ 26000 assessment grade helps companies to communicate the relevance and the level of maturity of their practices in terms of CSR. The 3D tool is a precursor of the AFAQ 26000 assessment through diagnoses and tracks progress offered to the SMEs.

3D experts provide significant importance to the skills available to them due to their membership in the network: training and qualification on ISO 26000 for example. The network in Aquitaine is particularly active and brings its expertise to other regional 3D networks (by exchanges between experts), where the dynamics is less significant than in the Aquitaine region. The main success factors of the approach are: the motivation and the belief of the initiator and the companies, the proximity of the members, relations based on trust and responsibility (informal aspect of relationships). On the other side, some brakes delay the release of the 3D approach such as the insufficient staff of experts and the management based on a limited number of people. In addition to this organizational aspect, effectiveness and sustainability of the network also depend on the funding of collective actions. The absence of a well-defined legal structure of the network (network only formalized by contracts of partnership between the FRCAA and AFNOR) obstructs some financial aids, particularly, European aids.

Although the network management is concentrated around a limited number of people, the involvement and the motivation of each member allow viability and autonomy of the 3D network. Moreover the strong expertise of the network in Aquitaine and the transposition of that expertise at the national level give to the 3D network an efficient functioning.

The results of the 3D network have strongly convinced the national and the regional public funds providers on the relevance of the tool and the strategy. The DIRECCTE is considering an eventual increase in its financial

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assistance to the activities of the network. Otherwise, national AFNOR plans to operate on the 3D tool and to integrate it into the practice of their activities related to the ISO 26000 standard.

CASE REPORT summary: ARI, FR

Overview of the network

Following the EU's Lisbon Strategy, each region in France had to adopt a Regional Plan for Innovation (SRI: "Schéma Régional d'Innovation"). The Picardie region has therefore to define the strategic lines to implement this regional scheme for innovation.

A study was undertaken to define these axis, and one major conclusion was to create a structure that would create links between the various themes identified and all stakeholders involved. Since 2007, the Regional Agency for Innovation Picardie, "ARI Picardie", was created from the will of the political body of the region and from this study on the regional scheme for innovation. ARI Picardie is an association under the French "1901 law on associations". Its funding is exclusively public, divided equally between Europe through the FEDER fund, the French state and the Picardie region.

There are Regional Agencies for Innovation in several regions of France but they are not designed and organized under the same model or on the same structure. In Picardie, ARI has been designed as a support of the RDT Picardie (Réseau de Développement Technologique; Network for Technological Development). Networks for Technological Development exist in all regions of France and have been created 20 years ago. RDT Picardie includes all regional actors in charge of technological development or currently involved in the development of innovations.

ARI Picardie coordinates the action of these actors and connects companies with the right people and the right organizations in the region. It is thus a network coordinator with the full meaning of the word 'coordinator'. Its role is to promote the skills of the Picardie region represented by the RTD and to link business firms with those skills. This allows us to distinguish three levels of analysis of the network:

- A first level is the association ARI Picardie itself composed of 13 employees
- An intermediate level consisting of all members of the RTD including ARI
- The final level consists of the complete perimeter: ARI association, RTD members and business firms of the Picardie region.

It is important to notice that the association ARI Picardie is itself the evolution of a preexisting structure called the "Association for the Development of Research and Technology in Picardie" (ADRTP). This organization, founded in 1982, consisted of various project leaders working on various themes concerning the region. This organizational structure remained the same during the evolution of ADRTP to ARI. Currently, ARI has 3 Administrative Officers and 10 topics that have an activity comparable to those in charge of missions within ADRTP. The themes of the ARI are: Agro-resources and sustainable materials, Person autonomy and health, Transportation and mechanical engineering, Information, communication and digital technology, Eco-technology, other themes. At the time of the creation of the ARI, three officer positions have been created: general manager, responsible for transportation and engineering industry, and responsible for eco-technology.

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The project themes and objectives of ARI are set by the SRI (Schéma Régional d'Innovation : Regional Plan for Innovation). Therefore the evolution of ARI's objectives is dependent upon the evolution of the SRI. Last year, the SRI has been reviewed and this review will enable ARI to integrate concepts related to knowledge management within the organization. Also the topic of the governance aspects of the SRI overarching the governance of the association ARI will be developed. Currently, there are two levels in the governance of the association ARI.

The first level is comprised of the COSS (Comité d'Orientation Stratégique et Suivi: Strategic and Follow up Strategic Orientation Committee) which is the highest level in the hierarchy. The COSS meets once a year. The COSS is composed of the regional prefect, the president of the Picardie Regional Council and representatives of institutional structures such as OSEO (National Agency for developing, promoting and financing innovation). This committee is in charge of setting the strategic orientations of the ARI association.

The second level, as in all associations, is the Board of Directors and the General Assembly:

- The Board of Directors of the Association ARI consists of 3 colleges: the College of Economic Actors, the College for Research-Transfer-Training and the Executive Bureau. The COSS defines and sets the general guidelines for ARI. These guidelines are then set by the board of directors of ARI. One feature of ARI is that the COSS has no representation in the Board of Directors.
- The General Assembly, meets once a year.

There is also, within ARI, a Technical Committee for Follow up (CTS: Comité Technique de Suivi) consisting of ARI operational staff closed to funding partners. These operational employees are the thematic managers of ARI. They work on the basis of regular contacts with the funding partners. The thematic managers of ARI came to support other members of the RTD which are generally non thematic players.

Members of the RTD are organized around two categories:

-Associate members (about 40 or 45 people) responsible of formal structures. (Example: the Director of Economic Development of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry -CCI). ARI informs these RTD members of everything they send to their staff. It is a win-win situation with these structures because they give their time to ARI and ARI in return allows them to make themselves known.

-Member prescribers or prospectors (about 60 persons) whose aim is to go into business (direct contacts with business firms). These people are called 'chargé de mission'. (Example: special assistants of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry). The idea is that everyone does not contact the same companies. Thus ARI is trying to keep the members of the RTD continuously informed of who does what in the region.

Companies in the Picardie region may apply directly to members of the RTD or may request assistance from the ARI to guide them. ARI Picardie is neither a project partner nor a funding partner. Once the linkage is completed and established, the parties in contact define the terms of their relationship, which could be formal or informal. The completion or non completion of a project is not directly attributable to ARI. This raises the question of performance of ARI. Created about 3 years ago, ARI has difficulty assessing its action

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in the absence of clear indicators. Currently, no one can precisely assess the performance of the ARI Picardy regarding innovation.

Opinion of the network coordinator

With the evolution of the SRI, the Picardie region is thinking about tools for measuring the implementation of the SRI and on indicators of activity of the ARI. Indeed, the indicators on the PTR (“Prestation Technologique Réseau”; i. e. subsidies provided by OSEO for innovation projects of small businesses, managed by ARI), are: the numbers of cases handled by the ARI, the number of contacts of the ARI. All of these figures are indicators of resources, but the region is thinking of new types of performance indicators.

The services of the French state and the Picardie region also want to integrate more closely, within the ARI, the axis of SRI and some aspects of knowledge management. They therefore believe in the creation of a “Steering Committee of the Innovation Strategy”. The axis of reflection on the new indicators relate to the types of requests to the ARI (that could be from individual projects, collective projects, requests for information) and the structure of types of connections and interactions, (in other words: how long time for what action did ARI act). Indeed the resources invested in the ARI for the support of innovation are mainly the time made available by the ARI employees to support businesses and managers in their innovation project.

In addition, there has been at the national level the General State of the Industry that led to the reflection on “Houses for Innovation and Entrepreneurship”. The Picardie region is looking at ways to integrate these houses within the ARI. The positioning of the ARI will thus have to evolve towards a coordination of all activities of the SRI. And, because of the progression of the national research policy, a change of name of the ARI will be probably finalized at the end of the year. ARI will probably change its name to “Picardy Innovation Network” (Réseau Picardie Innovation”).

There are also reflections on the structure of members of the RTD. In addition to the two categories of members already in the RTD (Associate Members and Prescribers), a third category of members, called informants, is being developed by ARI along with the structures of economic development (such as Chamber of Commerce and Industry). These members are responsible for disseminating information in their own corporate network. Thus ARI might have a higher penetration level of the knowledge of the business firms. This circle of informants will also enable the ARI to deal with the difficulty of sharing information from members of the RTD. In view of this information, it is clear that the ARI Picardy is rapidly evolving.

Opinion of other partners

For members of the ARI, the network has its importance in supporting innovation of SMEs in the Picardie. The main activity of the ARI is a support for SMEs in their innovation process. This activity allows SMEs to benefit from sharing knowledge, skills and resources.

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Its mission of promoting the skills of Picardy is one of the reasons for the participation of some members in this network. However, the gain of visibility resulting from the membership in the ARI network is difficult to estimate.

The lack of indicators seems to be the current problem of ARI Picardy according to interviewees. It would also be necessary to add a difficulty of positioning of the activity of the ARI Picardy. Indeed, with the presence of the pole of competitiveness IAR, it is difficult for some partners to understand the layout of the actions between these two organizations.

Analysis

The ARI network has its origin in a former structure called ADRTTP, thus its role is linked to this transformation: to have a real coordinator for this previous network. Nevertheless the main structural basis of ARI remains the RDT. The main advantage of the ARI network is that it brings coherence between the French national policy for innovation and the regional scheme for innovation (the SRI). The regional policy is thus not define in isolation but finds continuity and a complementarity between regions and their skills and competences. Another advantage is the proximity between any types of companies (small, medium or big, with no limitation in scopes) and ARI animators on the ground. The strong personal interaction allows the building of a trust relationship and a willingness to collaborate for companies. Moreover ARI has no limitations in the scope of the innovations: any types of creation and innovation may be integrated in the concerns of ARI.

From companies, the interest of the ARI network is a decreasing of their isolation and the ability to contact through only one partner with a great number of potential and heterogeneous partners (banks, research organization, consultancy firms etc.). ARI gives also important opportunities to very small structures (1 or 2 people, like farms). For research organization, ARI is a mean to be known by a great number of (small) companies and consequently creates opportunities for contracting.

Nevertheless ARI is facing some difficulties. Being publicly funded, the Public authority would like to better measure the benefit of such a structure. There are no real performance indicators, as the results of the action of permanent networking of ARI members are really difficult to assess. It is also difficult to evaluate the real benefit at the regional level, considering the fact that the money collected comes from that region. Another difficulty of ARI is the division of tasks with other structures for the development of innovation, such as competitiveness cluster Industry and Agro-resources. Another concern is that in spite of intensive networking at the local level, there is a lack of information of the real needs of companies. In the same line, connections with RDT members are sometimes not sufficient. Some research partners also have the feeling of a lack of connections between them and the companies.

Due to these limitations and to the evolution of the French innovation policy, ARI is going to evolve towards new structures and functions: creation of a specific structure for entrepreneurship, creation of a new category of people called informants, in order to improve information circulation and increase the capacity of dealing with any types of innovation needs more quickly. Another evolution is the will of the French State to bring closer the innovation policy and decisions of ARI at the local level with the creation of a strategic steering committee.

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CASE REPORT summary: BioBourgogne, FR

Overview

France has done an environmental engagement in 2007, in the context of "Grenelle de l'Environnement": to threefold the surface of organic agriculture in 2012. In this context, public and private organizations aim to develop conversions into organic farming. The case will focus on food SMEs and farms of the Burgundy Region (Bourgogne) and its organizational innovations. There are also some organizations that work at a Regional level. The "BioBourgogne association" (hereafter BB) manages the BioBourgogne brand and it gathers more than 130 organic food SMEs and farms.

SEDARB is a non-profit organization in charge of the conversion into organic farming in its technical aspects. It gives technical advice and backing to farmers. Burgundy Regional Council acts at a regional level financing the projects and the programs to develop organic farming. It is important to notice that the Burgundy region has four districts ("départements"): Côte d'Or, Yonne, Nièvre and Saône et Loire. Each of the districts is different: for example Côte d'Or has an important production of organic wine; as Yonne, of organic cereal. Each department has also its Agriculture Chamber (Chambre d'Agriculture). The development of organic farming will depend then not only in the regional initiatives, but also in the innovation structure of each "department" and its links with food SMEs and farms.

In the period 2008-2009 the number of organic farmers in Burgundy has rise 20%. In this region there are no formal organizations that lead or coordinate firms, public bodies, and research institutions. The development depends in a large part upon the food SMEs and the local initiatives. On the non-profit side, BioBourgogne association gathers different kind of organic farmers but as its aim is to communicate about the brand its field of action is reduced. A large part of its funding comes from the Burgundy Regional Council. The BioBourgogne association notes that fundraising takes an important part of the time of the board.

SEDARB is a key player in the development of organic farming in the region as the organization takes in charge the technical advice and support for organic conversion. SEDARB also receives an important part of the financing from the Regional Council. On the public side, at a regional level, the Burgundy Regional Council funds the initiatives for the development of organic farming. The region has four Chambers of Agriculture (one in each of the four districts that constitute the region). These districts have different approaches and ways of cooperate with other actors. For example, in some department the Chamber of Agriculture have a good synergy with SEDARB, while in others there is a limited cooperation.

Analysis / Conclusions

The motivations for converting to organic farming are mainly the sensitivity to organic approach and personal convictions (due to the consumption of organic products or for environmental protection) and

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also the aim of positioning in a market of high demand for organic products, not to mention the objective value of local products.

The BioBourgogne association helps promoting the products of the Burgundy region. BioBourgogne logo is pasted on the product, thus it provides added value that references a local product. Despite the promotion, marketing is also a difficult step for transforming the company because it needs to promote products by participating in exhibitions and other events. This requires time and money for such small companies that have a lot of diverse clients, as wholesalers in France and Belgium, cooperatives, private shops, internet.

Even if BioBourgogne association gathers more than 130 organic SMEs, it has a limited field of action: it mainly communicates about Bio-Bourgogne brand in the region. The association also faces an increasing number of competitors (organic labels) at a national and EU level. The brand is known in the region, but according to the coordinator it is not a competitive differentiation. In this context, SEDARB is the key player in the development of organic agriculture in the region. It has relationships with the other relevant actors which are members of its board, as a technical support organization. It has links with Universities and research institutes. SEDARB also creates and provides consolidated information about organic farming in the region by the means of a Regional Observatory. It also has a direct relationship with organic farmers. One characteristic in the BB innovation network is that SEDARB compete for funding with the Regional Chambers of Agriculture. It makes the cooperation more difficult in some departments where both organizations have the same role but not the same perspective and conceptions about organic farming.

Another issue is that on the public side: there is not a real common strategy for the Chambers of Agriculture, neither between them and the Regional Council. Organizations have different points of view about organic farming. Some of these differences can be explained because this innovation toward organic farming implies a questioning about conventional agriculture. Even with those issues, the Burgundy Region has increased the number of organic farmers mainly by the action of SEDARB. In each district ("département") the innovations have reached different levels depending on its agronomical and administrative characteristics. As well, different kinds of production have very different innovation rates. The context has changed and it has had consequences for the organizations: Some structures like BioBourgogne were created to have common specifications for organic products.

The main barriers are about financial information on certification costs, despite government aids including the Regional Council, the Chamber of Agriculture, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce for some companies. The costs of conversion to organic farming are important and the need for additional aid is a reality. The complexity and length of the administrative process is also a barrier to conversion for farmers.

The benefits for farmers come from the BioBourgogne formal networks but also from other networks including customers and suppliers, which are important sources of information for innovation. It is also important to emphasize the crucial roles of informal networks, including the advice of friends and family as well. At the end the certification label (AB logo) is seen as satisfactory and successful for all stakeholders, because of its good recognition by consumers at national and European level.

Zam-Zam Abdirahman, Gudule Kisempa Muyuala, Loïc Sauvée. France case studies: 3D Network, ARI Picardie and BioBourgogne.. Centma Press, ILB, Bonn, Germany. In: *Mapping Formal Networks and Identifying Their Role for Innovation in EU Food SMEs*, 2013.