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# WHAT TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IS ENGAGED BY THE FRENCH DAIRY STOCKBREEDERS? A CHARACTERIZATION THROUGH THEIR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

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**Abstract**·

The paper outlines the role played by several professional identities belonging to the dairy stockbreeders in Picardy region, France in redefying the social networks in these rural areas. The social capital, seen as a valuable resource for the French rural areas is developed by different local professional identities and organized itself in networks. In our case, the dairy stockbreeders are seen as one particular typology of professional identities which are redefined and transformed today. The transformation of regional and global context determines these networks to position themselves differently at local level.

**Keywords**: social capital, dairy stockbreeders, professional identities, agricultural identity, index or directory of action.
**JEL Classification**: Q12, Q19

## 1. Introduction

Since the early 1990 the agricultural professional identities in France become one of the occupational categories "disturbed" by recent crisis (such as food, health or environmental crisis). We see that despite a crisis of this profession, the standards set in the past for this professional membership continue to create some particular forms of social capital and still remains a resource for action. However, some "changes" (Lahire, 1998) are taking place at the micro level, and suggest other ways of recognizing the agricultural professional identity (that is the status of farmer) related to the past and present socialization of the individual, as well as on its spatial location. In this perspective, the daily interactions of the profession are important to understanding the changes of professional affiliations in the agricultural world and thus redefine the social networks attached to this professional identity.

This paper aims to emphasize a typology of agricultural professional identities engaged in daily routine interactions and their role for the development of collective action. A survey was made for the dairy stockbreeders in Picardy region, France in order to outline the degree of integration of their status within the social networks created by the agricultural professional identity itself.

Today the agricultural professional identity is characterized as a professional identity build around common standards which still remains a reference even if several different agricultural development models tend to replace it. Thus, its development is continuously enriched by the agricultural actors.

Local interactions, spatial localization and the agricultural activity attached to particular geographical spaces or areas will emphasize the development of collective professional identities and agricultural professional memberships. Local development in these rural areas is still consider a power tool and contributes despite a global pressure to redefine and maintain a visible social capital in these areas and therefore contributing to their development.

The starting point of this article is based on the observation that professional agricultural identities in France are redefined and being transformed today. Dairy farmers of Picardy region in France are no exception: increased competition at the international level has local impacts. Faced with this transformation of the global context, farmers do not position themselves in the same way. That is, what we show through our typologies constructed from the level of the farmer's routine. This leads to professional representations substantially different among dairy stockbreeders.

The paper is organized as follows. After the introduction which constitutes the section 1, in section 2 we present the theoretical framework of the social capital and its role in agricultural development. In section 3 we outline the methodology employed in order to collect the necessary data on dairy farmers. Section 4 emphasizes the role of dairy farmers and their relations within the

agricultural identity. Section 5 presents our case study on dairy stockbreeders in Picardy, France and their contribution to the development of different professional identities and implicitly to several types of collective action. Finally, in section 6 we conclude our paper.

## 2. Theoretical framework: social capital in rural areas

The recent revival of the literature on social capital considers this resource as highly valuable for rural development when considering the social networks which are expected to contribute to the competitiveness and innovation (Staber, 2007).

An increased interest from political institutions in developing specific tools in starting and maintaining the role of social capital as an important resource is unveiled in recent years in these rural areas. The development of this resource at the individual and community levels is the ultimate goal of sustainable rural development (Dwyer, Findeis, 2008).

The concept of social capital is according to Megyesi et al. (2010) largely used in rural research (Hofferth and Iceland, 1998, Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000, Castle, 2002) when defining the collective action as a form of social capital useful in developing "the social relations within a particular community" (Megyesi et al., 2010). According to Portes (1998), "during recent years, the concept of social capital has become one of the most popular exports from sociological theory into everyday language".

There is neither a precise definition for the concept of social capital nor an epistemological consensus for a single or general measure of social capital. Everything depends on the context and the way it is applied.

Several pioneer works of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993, 1995) emphasize the concept of social capital as the work of social networks, people, groups or organizations.

The social capital defined by Putnam as "those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993) or as "features of social life (networks, norms and trust) … enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1995).

The social capital can be also defined as "institutions, relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development" (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002). These authors distinguished between the forms and scope of social capital. We are interested particularly in the forms or mechanisms of social capital which enable these rural areas to develop. In this way we consider that agricultural professional identities in general and within the dairy stockbreeders in particular possess different types or forms of social

capital which guarantee themselves a privileged position concerning the cooperation, the information, the technological exchanges and the implementation of development projects (Gómez-Limón et al., 2012).

The research concerning the role of different types of social capital for the agricultural profession is scarce (Gómez-Limón et al., 2012, Adesina and Baidu-Forson, 1995, Uphoff and Wijayaratna, 2000, Monge et al., 2008) and need to be improved. For example, Monge et al. (2008) stated that some researchers (Narayan and Pritchett, 1999) consider that social capital, measured quantitatively and qualitatively as participation within farmers' organizations, can improve the diffusion of innovation.

Concerning the type of social capital linked to the agricultural profession, we adopt the approach of Gómez-Limón et al. (2012) who give three important interpretations as already used by authors like Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) and Uphoff and Wijayaratna (2000). These three models of social capital are described as structural, cognitive and relational. The structural model refers to the relations between members of the same network or profession which improves cooperation that is structural embeddedness (Moran, 2005). The second one, the cognitive model is referring to joint codes in order to achieve common goals within the agricultural profession; despite the fact that its members don't share common information or relations to the profession, these codes should improve the cooperation (Uphoff, 1999). The third model, the relational model is more related to the relationships that are resulting through cooperation that is relational embeddedness (Moran, 2005).

## 3. Methodological approach of the analysis: semi-structured interviews

In this context, the purpose of this article is the following question: dealing with less stable situations experienced by farmers, to what extent their professional identity was itself ready to transform? Can we really speak of change or crisis of the profession?

Our methodology, which adopts an interactionist perspective, starts from the farmers' daily life and assess the extent of the change in perception of professional affiliations from the "neighboring context".

The purpose of this methodology justifies an interactionist position in order to understand the daily agricultural occupations, which are inserted in an unstable environment. Then in a second step, we will present our fieldwork that is semi-structured interviews with dairy farmers in Picardy region. Forty-nine interviews with dairy farmers were performed in Picardy region following a detailed survey guide for every aspect of their professional, social and individual life. It is from this "empirical data" that a typology is formalized, the latter being built from everyday routine

professional life as it is experienced by these farmers. Finally, we establish the following observation or conclusion: although the dairy stockbreeders define their professional membership as "fragmented", the structuring of the professional field produces a collective capacity of action that remains strong, to the extent that the union membership contributes to the formation of a sustainable collective identity and implicitly of social capital.

## 4. Dairy farmers and their professional identities

Agricultural professional identities are re-interviewed in France since the 1990. Not only the professional events specific to the agriculture have contributed to this challenge, but also the economic and societal developments have played a role in this redefinition of the French farmer. Thus, the opening of markets and the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) have contributed to this transformation. This raises new challenges and emerging issues in agriculture. But this adds an individualization that characterizes the industrialized societies' process of evolution, which could be potentially problematic when it comes to building collective benchmarks. Indeed, the "post-modern" phase or radicalization of modernity as we know it today has led to consider the individual as an unique and special person, and therefore weakens the collective identity construction. That is this plural and complex professional affiliations of the French farmer need to be redefine nowadays.

The agricultural professional identities in France, have become recently more "challenged" than in the past (food, health or environmental crisis) ; thus we see that the standards set in the past for the farmer and belonging to a professional membership continues to play their role as collective cement and still remain a resource for action.

These events have plural consequences on the profession, including the establishment of a new framework law in 1999, which reflects changes of the profession, with an action level more "territorialized" than in the past. Indeed, nowadays the local scale is the preferred level of regulation of "business" in rural areas, in order to reduce tensions between two tendencies : the need to identify an agricultural product as "being territorially and locally produced" and an overall dynamic which reflects "the insertion of the food chains into global markets" (Joly, Paradeise, 2003). This dual application to the agricultural profession is not made to create tension and discomfort, as they often result in two distinct models of agricultural development.

In this context, agricultural professional identity tends to legitimize other ways, especially at the local level.Indeed, as pointed by Alphandéry Pierre and Jean-Paul Billaud (2009), highlighting the "territorialization" of farming will strongly influence the redefinition of collective identities and therefore agricultural professional affiliations. We witness the emergence of "local environments"

(Pinton et al., 2007) that reflect the appropriation of global issues at the local level, taking into account the constraints belonging to a single and specific territory. It is in this context that the identity may be less stable than in the past, and it is constructed in substantially different trajectories. We are also witnessing a diversification of social relations, which translates "a more open farming profession" (Dufour et al., 2003), thus contributing to the redefinition of the relationship between the profession and society.

Some breeders are subject to stable living conditions that result in a daily work that mobilizes weakly innovative actions regarding their work, while others reveal a more "evolutionary" career path. This corresponds to the following trend in contemporary societies: a growing pluralization of spheres of activity, cultural clashes, social norms, and insertion into a plurality of contexts of action.

In this perspective, identities, whether individual, social or professional, are the subject of ongoing negotiations. If this is not an unusual situation, as already pointed out several sociologists (Rémy, 1987), it is in the nature of this incessant confrontation between different professional segments that the specificity of contemporary context resides.

As pointed by George Herbert Mead (1963), we see identity as "relational", insofar as it is the result of social interaction at the heart of which the actor is inserted. These interactions are built every day, and therefore at the local level, which is the "closest" context within the meaning assigned by Anselm Strauss (Baszanger, 1992), and which represents the immediate context of the action. Indeed, the farmer can potentially come into contact daily with a variety of actors in the context of his professional activity but also outside of it.

Thus the "linking of the farmer" in a plurality of contexts can potentially lead to several redefinitions of the farming profession, especially because a farmer will fit into different contexts (even contradictory) which allows to enrich the directory of action in the sense outlined by Bernard Lahire (1998).

However, the "distant context" once again defined by A. Strauss, that is "the overall general conditions facing the action and interaction strategies such as time, space, culture, economic status, technology..." (Strauss, 1990), is considered as "the frame of the renewal" of daily action. In the "neighboring context", it is the degree of "routine" that occurs for structuring the actions. As we can see, it is through this concept of routine (Giddens, 1987) that one can grasp the dialectic between the "distantcontext" and the "neighboring context"; this allows understanding the mutation that occurs in agricultural professional affiliations, but also the degree of structuring that determines the changes.

## 5. Dairy farmers in Picardy, France: between specific and common membership

The theoretical positioning, including the presentation of the key concepts that will be developed throughout this text will include procedures for the construction of the typology, where the daily professional action appears decisive.

*An interactionist sensitivity to address the issue of agricultural professional identities*

As we mentioned before, the theoretical approach is based on interactionist approach, insofar as it focuses on everyday relationships, which could affect the social base configuration of the farmers and further the collective social capital.

Concerning the concept of professional identity, the contributions of sociologists Jacques Ion (1996) and Claude Dubar (2001) are interesting insofar as they focus on the basics of this identity correlated to the workplace identity.

The definition assumed by sociologist Jacques Ion seems particularly interesting in the light of the interactionist position that is ours: "The professional identity is allowing members of the same profession to recognize themselves as they are and to export such recognition outside. They therefore assume a double work, on the one hand an internal unification, and on the other hand an external recognition. Therefore other concepts besides professional models can participate in the construction of identities: similar access to business, training institutions, and a culture of profession legitimized and consolidated within defense and collective organizations".

Here we focused on the external recognition that can legitimize a professional model. Thus, the relationship with the environment is crucial for the construction of professional identities. The approach of C. Dubar fits into this similar understanding of professional affiliations, in a relational and dynamic perspective.

In this context, we consider these particular identity constructions as the result of close relationships with the "neighboring context". The identity, which is particularly expressed in relation to the local environment - is much less stable and more diverse than in the past, and this is what contributes to the redefinition of professional affiliations. Indeed, the relations with non-agricultural population, the fact that a presume collaborating spouse is working elsewhere, the biographical trajectory and the multi-organizational memberships are potentially factors that are questioning the agricultural professional identity as it was legitimized for many years. This leads to provide differentiated references or professional practices between individuals. While in some cases the farmer is immersed in different contexts of interaction which potentially create tensions with the

inherited professional model, in other cases the actors are able to establish relatively stable routine practices, which can be mobilized daily.

Our starting point therefore lies with the theoretical contributions of A. Strauss, and this for two reasons. Indeed, it is, on the one hand, a key author for the interactionist school as it has developed in the United States and on the other hand his contributions strongly related with the study of professions and identities which appear to us particularly illuminating for the study of rural area.

Its originality lies in its ability to bind, through the identification, structure and interaction concepts the understanding of changes at work, which will be particularly important for the latter part of this paper. These changes at work mean a higher competition between professionals segments but also the fact that actions are structured and influenced in advance – for example the ability of farmers to forge a collective identity reinforced by the action ("the structural dimension of the interaction process"). As pointed by A. Strauss, individuals also participate in continuous process of construction of social worlds in which they are incurred. Moreover Strauss has set up a conceptual apparatus with its notions of "negotiated order" and "professional segments": it illustrates the crisis of legitimacy of "traditional" professional model and highlights the struggles carried out by different segments that make up the agricultural profession to obtain the status of a "legitimate" farmer.

The routine will allow us to know the ability of farmers to stabilize their local professional environment, and to understand their ability to overcome the "historic" professional model. This concept develop by A. Giddens is strongly linked to the concept of "taken for granted", which is characterized by a "continuous and successful management of the actor's own activity". It assesses the extent to which agricultural professional affiliations are perceived differently than in the past, by the gap between the ancient and contemporary practices.

To make this concept of "routine" operational, we require the concept of "index or directory of action", focused on the individual. Indeed, it is with this concept that we will see to what extent there is a gap, a decrease or not compared to the "traditional" professional identity, which was defended by the dominant FNSEA[1] union.

This concept of "index or directory of action" was especially conceptualized by B. Lahire (1998). Thus, "when a player has been placed in a plurality of non-homogeneous social contexts, his stock of provisions, habits or abilities will not be unified. It wills therefore have heterogeneous and contradictory practices, varying according to the social context". These situations encourage the reflexive capacity of individuals, and thereby the emergence of a professional identity which is

[1] « Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles ».

"fluctuating" and is more volatile than in the past. Indeed, "the reflexivity of the modern social life is the constant review and revision of social practices, in the light of new information about these practices, which alters constitutively their character" (Lahire, 1988).

One of the assumptions of this paper is to consider that the degree of daily routine depends on the biographical trajectory of each person but also on social and family relationships that develop in the "neighboring context". This leads to an "index or directory of actions" more or less variable among individuals and linked to their ability to reflect. This "skill" appears as a dynamic trend of the modern societies, characterized by a progressive individualization and a "homo economicus" facing a plurality of different environments. In this perspective, professional identity "legitimately recognized" is more of a negotiated order (Strauss, 1990) than a model imposed by actors "from above" as was the case in the past. From this arises the capacity to challenge the existing business model, due to the reflective capacity of the individual, which is a potential source of innovation and renewal in relation to his/her professional affiliations.

It is in this changing and complex environment that the Picardy dairy farmers perform. Like all agricultural professions, they were influenced by the model of "business-farmer" defended by FNSEA union model. But they are now asked to find meaning to this model, in terms of their specific territorial resources. Four profiles have been identified.

*Daily activity as "routine": a professional universe represented in one dimension*

Of the forty-one interviews in Picardy, we believe that nine farmers are belonging to this category. Indeed, the "index or directory of action" mobilized in the professional world changed very little, and the mobilized professional identity refers to the "historic" standard of the profession. This translates into a less improved daily action characterized mostly by "routine habits". The changes which are made are minor and usually they become mandatory, such as setting the lately standards in a particular sector, that is the obligation to have good farming practices.

We give here two examples to illustrate our point. The first example concerns a specialized dairy farmer. Although the farm has two associates, father and son – the "index or directory of action" mobilized here is classic and innovations made are at the margin. Thus, the upgrading of the farm is carried out as it became mandatory and the adherence to a contract to produce Omega 3 milk is performed because of bonuses granted by the dairy to which the milk is delivered (Danone). We believe nevertheless that the farmer is characterized by its "unidimensionality" and low reflectivity, especially because the collusion between professional identity, social and personal characteristics is still very strong: for example, it is a family business and the workload involved in dairy farming (especially with the twice-daily milking) leads to an evolution of a farm local

environment, with little contacts to the surrounding environment, especially with non-agricultural public.

Thus, these farmers have never gone on vacation. Their environment remains the professional agricultural world, correlated with a strong commitment to work that is their professional membership is closely linked with social identity and personal identity.

The second example we have chosen is that of a young farmer who was taking over the family farm. It is an individual farm which was implemented in 2005. The "unidimensionality" of this farmer is again due to the high workload, since it is the only one working on the farm, with some occasional help from his father. His "index or directory of actions" is traditional, with a strong union involvement at the local level with the rural association "Young Farmers' Union".

This results particularly in a "technical know-how" highly controlled, because the productivity of the cows is above the average (about 10 000 liters per year). Similarly, he is a dairy stockbreeder rather "individualistic" type of, who is not too favorable to unions or grouping members of the dairy herd. The farm is primarily a family business: the parents settled in 1971 and he took over the farm recently while parents have always developed the farm in the past[2].

These two examples illustrate the report that surveyed farmers evolve with their daily professional lives. It shows a strong collusion between professional, social and personal identities, which also emphasize the specificity of agricultural professional affiliations. Here, the daily routine did not affect the "traditional" models of agricultural development, insofar as the reference groups are the parents themselves issued from the agricultural community and the organizational membership (classic membership or a dominant union). Similarly, the work is a core value which "encroaches" on the personal and social identities.

*The "constant" daily activity: "a routine" confronted sporadically with other references*

Twenty farmers can be included in this category. Here we meet the "traditional" model of agricultural development. However, this model is reexamined in relation to opportunities that may arise, and "the sensitivity" in relation to the changing expectations of the society.

Compared to the previous model, these farmers are aware that they must make changes for the conduct of their operations and more generally in relation to the traditional references mobilized by the agricultural profession. This can be explained in several ways: a presume spouse who works outside or some training that brought the farmer outside the farm, etc. However, these dairy

[2] However, it is important to note that in this situation, as in many other cases, professional identity is set to change. This is especially the case here where this young farmer is wishing to generate some free time by hiring an employee. Here we outline a particular professional aspect, namely the "call to work", potentially isolating the farmer from the outside world.

stockbreeders are living mainly as "entrepreneurs" or "businessmen": even though there may be a distinction between personal and professional identities, the social identity mobilizes primarily agricultural references, resulting in a strong identification with a model of the farmer that has been developed historically. In addition, the reference to the technique and performance is still high (for example the productivity of dairy cows, the genetics, etc.).

So for us it is a "constant" daily activity because it faces sporadically other references. If there is a minor "index or directory of action" where there is certain awareness about the changes of practices at work, the main cause should be the fact that the daily routine does not encourage the evolution of these practices. Thus, some initiatives have emerged "unfinished", as in the case of this farmer who has tried the direct sales to the farm but not perpetuated this activity because of the commercial difficulties.

The case of a young farmer illustrates our point of view. This one is heavily involved at the trade union and organizational level as he represents the Young Farmers' Union in Picardy, and is part of the milk group FDSEA. For him, this commitment to the dominant agricultural union is a family heirloom. So there is a strong identification with the traditional model, particularly a strong belief in collective action. However, there is some specificity related to the traditional model: there is a greater distinction between his personal life and the working environment, to the extent that his wife works outside, which brings some change to the daily routine as working patterns are distinct. Therefore, the farmer attaches great importance to the fact that he must have some spare time. However, this does not involve mobilizing action schemes that undermine professional membership as it is historically established: hence the references to technical and professional agricultural organizations are pervasively present.

Another young farmer is in a similar trend but it involves mixed farming. Compared to the traditional professional model, its farm is perceived as innovative in the sense that relations with the society seem to be for him a source of recognition. This is reflected daily by having done two years direct sales by selling bulk butter. He also contracted a CTE[3] in the past, and today he works with an association of producers who takes care of this retail, the "Panier de l'Abbey".

This is due to a commercial training (and a diploma) achieved far away from the family farm. He considers that it is important to see something else apart working on the farm. However, his work is guided by the importance given to technique and performance as a guarantee of excellence. There is also the importance for him to have a "business capacity" on its own. He

[3]« Contrat territorial d'exploitation» (CTE). The CTE was one of the first instruments of the Agricultural Orientation Act from the year 1999. Established in consultation with all partners, it offers to the farmer a new way to produce, in accordance with the economic, environmental and territorial balance. The CTE has now been replaced by the CAD ("Contratd'agriculture durable").

deplores the lack of free time to devote to his family, but he is satisfied to consider himself as a "businessman". Thus, although there is a beginning of integration of innovative standards related to new social demands (the environment or the proximity to the producer) and a boundary between the personal and the professional life (his wife is working outside the farm), the "index or directory of action" is activated as a priority. This result in a strong union involvement, emphasis on technical performance and the fact he identifies as a "business farmer". Likewise his actions are valued daily while being not isolated in his village where there are twelve more dairy farmers, thereby sustaining a dynamic professional environment.

Thus, we have just mentioned two dairy stockbreeders that have a critical eye over the traditional representation of the farming profession, reflecting the need for a more complex social recognition than in the past. But the family heritage linked to the agricultural world is also reflected in a commitment to practices arising from the representation of the farming profession as defined by the FNSEA, particularly related to the belief in the collective action.

*The "enriched" daily activity: multiple professional relationships*

This category concerns the dairy stockbreeders who have made "detours" before returning to the farm, either by extensive studies, different jobs or because their spouses work elsewhere. We face here with a different type of individual where the three constituent identities of a person are more differentiated than in the previous two cases. Here there is a need to be recognized by society. Similarly, several farmers express some critical view towards the farming profession. So there is a return on the exercise thereof. Ten farmers were incorporated into this category, farmers with a touch of reflexivity, in the sense that they are able to integrate a critical change related to their businesses following local situations encountered in practice. Here the "index or directory of action" is rich, but these farmers are not completed isolated from the past: their patterns of action remain mobilized unevenly, depending on the context of the insertion of every farmer.

Many of these farmers diverge from the two previous ones by their different professional paths: it is the case of a farmer whose farm is located on several sites. This is explained by the expansion of the farm and the fact that it is a GAEC[4] structure composed of four members. It is a diversified company with a large dairy production of nearly one million liters of milk. The recognition of the profession of farmer by the society in general represents for the founder of the farm an important factor that explains the innovations undertaken over the years. This is reflected by the recent creation of an educational farm handled by the farmer' daughter, coupled with direct

[4] « Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun » (Wikipedia).

sales from the farm. Similarly, this dairy stockbreeder is concerned about the environmental side, and he defined himself as a "natural, conventional and rational farmer".

It is thus concerned with the image of agriculture in the media and society, and considers that farmers are poor in communication. This is one of the objectives of the educational farm created by his daughter: give a better picture of the agriculture and gain a greater acceptance and understanding of the business by people who are not from the agricultural world.

We are therefore faced with a farmer who mobilizes other resources every day. However, there is no questioning of the prior model, but mostly enrichment. Thus, there is still a strong belief in the union commitment and collective action, as well as a focus on technology and genetics that act as a measure of economic performance.

The need for social recognition is also valued by other dairy stockbreeders in Picardy, like for example a couple that are associated in an individual farm specialized in milk production. It is through its dairy business, especially developed in relation with Danone, which emphasize the model of "sustainable development", that the daily changes occurred. These farmers have a privileged relationship with Danone, partly because they were the first dairy farm in France to have been certified as a Sustainable Agricultural Farm[5]. This leads to social recognition and a new way to define their dairy production which does not belong exclusively to the traditional norm.

However, this social recognition does not challenge the traditional model and is mainly a way to get social recognition: nowadays it is no longer satisfactory the precept "feed the planet", but also a reasonable use of technique in the meantime with the respect for the environment.

*The daily activity as a "professional disruption": an agricultural profession "against the identity"*

The organic dairy farmers fit into this profile, to the extent they are in discrepancy with the model proposed by the FNSEA. They are characterized by a different relation to the technique, but also by a strong consideration of societal demands. However, we encountered only two dairy stockbreeders characterized by the "professional disruption": two organic farms located in a grassland area in Picardy that promotes the emergence of this type of agricultural production. In fact the choice of organic farming is a decision that is not guided by economic strategies but only by belief.

In the first case, a farm run by a couple, husband and wife argue that they maintain little contact with the "conventional" professional environment. Their only "professional breach" refers to the Organic Farmers Union where they regularly participate in meetings and study tours. They

[5]The Sustainable Agriculture is a French agricultural approach concerning the agricultural production and taking into account environmental, health and animal welfare issues. This approach is regulated by the public authorities (Ministries of Agriculture and Ecology) and promoted by the network FARRE («Forum de l'AgricultureRaisonnéeRespectueuse de l'Environnement»).

are also part of the Lactalis' Organic Production Department – which they supply and which carries one meeting per year. Until 2007 the couple adhered to the Dairy Check[6] and since they interrupt because their controller could not advise them on organic agriculture. They have very little contact with the Departmental Chamber of Agriculture because there are no specialists on organic farming. However, they are in contact with the Regional Chamber of Agriculture where they participate in meetings on organic agriculture.

The professional identity described here is in opposition with the dominant model: an extensive approach which prevails and where the use of the technique is highly regulated. Here, the logic of performance is not related to the productivity of dairy cows, but linked to milk quality and social recognition obtained through milk consumption and consumers. This representation of the business has been gradually emerging insofar as organizational and professional environment has helped within the dairy industry (for example, Lactalis as a major dairy actor, processes and wholesales organic milk and the organizations will provide technical support). Thus, the daily activity differs radically from previous cases, insofar as these farmers do not maintain professional relationships with the same actors and agree to respect societal demands of major importance.

The second case is that of an organic farm located in same area with similar characteristics as in the previous case. This farm is run by a couple who wants an autonomous milk production and high quality milk. Again, the organic farming represents here an ethical choice. However, the reference to the conventional model is never far away: they practice an "organic intensive" agriculture which translates into an intensive grass production system and fifteen hectares of crops. Moreover, in both cases encountered, we are dealing with professional memberships that "encroach" on individual and social identities.

## 6. Conclusion: Professional memberships as resources for action

As we mentioned before, we consider today an increasingly uncertain global context where the agriculture promotes the activation of a larger "index or directory of actions" which contributes to the renewal of practices and professional affiliations. From our field surveys we were able to establish the following two observations:

- The agricultural professional identity nowadays has been built around several shared standards. But today, this model is strongly challenged by other models of agricultural development. However, none of them is consensual, leading to the legitimacy of the "traditional" model of agricultural professional identity. This model remains an important

[6] The Dairy Check refers to both the act of measuring both the quantity of milk produced by cows but also its quality (Wikipedia).

reference during crisis, but it is likely to be enriched by farmers, either in their actions or representations they made of the agricultural identity.

- In this context, the development of the agricultural professional identity is not established in the same way for the farmers. Several factors explain this differentiation: past and present socialization of actors, professional "detours", their spatial and social location, as well as daily interactions.

Agricultural profession appears more than ever as the result of an "arrangement" or "negociation" (Strauss, 1992) insofar as the representation of the agricultural professional identity is today increasingly rehabilitated and reinterpreted in relation to the "neighboring context"; this membership is therefore the result of daily interactions, which can be characterized by conflicts, tensions, agreements or compromises. Today, most dairy stockbreeders agree on a common definition of the agricultural identity: a multitude of actors having competing definitions of situations in which they are involved.

However, this critical distance regarding the agricultural identity is connected with the historical construction of it, and therefore oriented to the model advocated by the FNSEA, which corresponds schematically to that of a "business farmer".

Thus, if one considers that agricultural professional identities are mobilized in daily interactions compared to other professional identities, we confirm that the "index or directory of actions" is already structured. If today's agricultural professional identities are the result of an "arrangement" much stronger than in the past and much more geographically localized, there is always a high rate of agricultural unions in rural areas which constitute a legacy which leads to maintaining a strong capacity for collective action.

Indeed, a large proportion of interviewed farmers are unionized, mainly to FNPL[7], as part of the FNSEA. For many, it is a family heirloom, which results in a strong belief in collective action. This union membership is at all levels, since the union is strongly represented locally, departmentally and at national levels. There are therefore internalized patterns of collective action developed by these farmers, as illustrated by the several strikes related to the milk production that took place during 2009 (that led to aids proposed by the French State to the dairy farmers, who were facing lower prices offered by industrial manufacturers).

However, and this is one of the new features compared to the past, these collective movements are no longer the mere fact of the FNSEA union, which today is "overwhelmed" by another major union (APLI[8]), which has established branches at the European level. We register

[7] « Fédération Nationale des Producteurs de Lait ».
[8] « Association Nationale des Producteurs de Lait Indépendants », created in 2008.

some major changes of the profession since the unity of the agricultural profession longtime defended by the FNSEA union gives way to a greater heterogeneity. We are therefore facing a profession whose legitimate definition is progressively negotiated, whether we speak about local or national level, but also for every agricultural sector. It appears therefore a form of "structural homology" for the collective action (as the action is built between the FNSEA - as the historic union and the APLI - the emerging organization). Finally, the daily interactions, coupled with the temporal dynamics characterized by the "distant context", result in a redefinition of the professional memberships, while showing a certain resilience of the profession expressed by the primacy of the collective action.

We can add that these norms are not strictly commercial, but which nevertheless form a set of rules that makes sense for local actors, embedded in a localized system of action which constitutes their reference framework.

More specifically, the organizational dynamics that affect the agricultural profession seem particularly helpful for understanding the characteristics of social capital and its dynamics. Indeed, this is a profession that is firmly established in professional groups, whether through formal organizations, or more informally through farming communities linked by technical, political and social issues.

Therefore, these organizations have significant resources and are key inputs to form a viable social capital over time. Thus, from the identification of the range of collective actions, it is possible to provide elements to characterize the formation of social capital at the level of formal and informal organizations.

The contribution of sociology is crucial in order to identify the non-market logic that feed the social capital, from a directory of collective action which is mobilized through professional agricultural communities. Their collective dynamics and organizational innovation are also seen as a source of competitiveness where social capital is designed as a multi-scale concept.

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