

**HealthyGrowth**

From niche to volume with integrity and trust

**FULL CASE STUDY REPORT**

**Biovallée - France**



**Sibylle Bui, Claire Lamine**

**INRA Ecodéveloppement**

**April 2015**

The authors acknowledge the financial support for this project provided by transnational funding bodies, being partners of the FP7 ERA-net project, CORE Organic II.



# Content

- 1. Introduction ..... 3
- 2. Case-study approach: materials and methods ..... 3
- 3. France: the national context..... 5
- 4. Overview of the case..... 6
  - 4.1 Presentation and trajectory ..... 6
  - 4.2 Basic facts ..... 9
  - 4.3 Stakeholder network..... 10
- 5. Analytical perspectives..... 11
  - 5.1 Organisation and governance..... 11
  - 5.2 Business and management logics ..... 15
  - 5.3 Trade-offs between quality differentiation and volume and economic performance ..... 15
  - 5.4 Communication of values and qualities among the members of the food chain 16
  - 5.5 Quality mediation through the chain ..... 19
  - 5.6 Resilience..... 20
- 6. Future orientations of the initiative ..... 20
- 7. Concluding reflections ..... 20
- References ..... 21

*Most local organic market chains have inherent problems in moving from niche to volume, and mainstream large-scale market chains have inherent difficulties in securing and advancing organic values. The project “Healthy Growth: from niche to volume with integrity and trust” investigated a range of successful mid-scale organic value chains in order to learn how they are able to combine volume and values, and to use this knowledge to support the further development of organic businesses, networks and initiatives. Research teams from ten European countries contributed with 20 case studies. More information and documentation can be found at: [www.healthygrowth.eu](http://www.healthygrowth.eu)*

## 1. Introduction

---

The Drôme valley is the most developed area in France with respect to organic agriculture. In this small region (2200 km<sup>2</sup>, 54000 inhabitants), organic production represents 30% of agricultural land, high above the national average of 3%. A public project was launched in 2009 by the 102 municipalities of the valley: the Biovallée project ([www.biovallee.fr](http://www.biovallee.fr)). The Biovallée project aims at making the Drôme valley a pilot territory in terms of sustainable development. Therefore it includes operational objectives for 2020 in a diversity of sectors, among which energy (coverage of 100% of household consumption with renewable energies), waste (a 50% reduction), land use (no more destruction of arable land), housing (building 5 eco-neighbourhoods), education and training (developing high-level training programs on sustainable development).



Agriculture is one of the three main components of this program, along with energy and training. In this sector, the aim is to reach 50% of farmers and farming surfaces, 80% of public food procurement in organic, and 50% of pesticide use.

Despite the Biovallée project is not only focussed on organic food chains, it provides a large panel of production and marketing actors, who try to add value dimensions to the organic products, with financial support as well as with coordination.

Biovallée is one of the three territorial case studies of HealthyGrowth, along with the Biodistretto Cilento (It) and the Bioregion Mühlviertel (Au). Territorial case studies are not focused on a single chain but on a whole territorial agrifood system (Lamine *et al.*, 2012). This allows to analyse more deeply the modes of coordination between various actors and institutions (public and private), the management and governance models and the ways these contribute to maintain the 'added value'. As they differ from the value-chain focus of the other case studies of the HealthyGrowth project, some other dimensions are irrelevant in our case and will not be explored in detail.

## 2. Case-study approach: materials and methods

---

Table 1. The documents used as information sources

	Data type	Short description of content
Home page	Internal	Biovallée website
Student essays/research reports	Both	Analysis of the past and current dynamics of the development of organic farming in Biovallée in the vegetables sector Territorial diagnostic of Biovallée
Newspaper articles	External	National and local press review 2008-2012: 595 articles
Legal documents (e.g. founding)		7 local public policy documents
Internal strategy papers		13 working papers on local public policies programs
Minutes of internal communication/meetings		2 participations to public visits of Biovallée, 8 observations of public events and press conferences, 12 participations to the districts' commissions on agriculture, in 2012-13-14
Internal newsletters		2 Biovallée newsletters
List of suppliers/customers/members		List of beneficiaries of the Biovallée program

		(projects funded by Biovallée)
Financial accounting		Annual financial monitoring of the program 2012, 2013, 2014
Other (specify) annual reports, official registers, social media, training programs		14 videos posted on YouTube by Biovallée and 15 broadcasts of a radio program

We led 17 interviews. We chose to interview representatives of the main local actors of Biovallée's territorial agrifood system: local authorities, Chamber of agriculture, organic farmers group, farmers' cooperative, consumers cooperative, wholesaler, civil society association.

All his work was done within S. Bui's PhD. We also used interviews carried out previously (2011) by C. Lamine with one of the persons who set up the first agricultural programs in the 1980s and 1990s, an elected official for agriculture of the downstream district, the (former) director of the consumer cooperative, the founder and manager of the main regional organic fruits and vegetables wholesaler, and the president of the organic producers union.

Table 2. Interviews and interviewees

Role	Date, Duration
Officer on organic agriculture for Biovallée	21/03/13, 1.5h
Director of the association for the Brand Biovallée®	07/12/12, 1h
Ex officer on agriculture for the upstream district	07/12/12, 4h
Officer on agriculture for the upstream district	18/12/12, 1.5h
Elected official of the upstream district, responsible for agriculture	20/12/12, 1.5h
Ex-president of a local civil society association	20/12/12, 3h; 28/01/13, 1h
Elected member of a farmers' union	05/12/12, 2h
Director of a farmers' cooperative	24/01/13, 2h; 05/03/13, 3.5h
Ex-president of the Chamber of agriculture	23/05/12, 1.5h
Advisor of the Chamber of agriculture	31/01/13, 2h
Coordinator of the Biovallée program	31/05/13, 2h; 08/08/13, 2h
Ex-director of an associative distribution platform funded by Biovallée	16/05/13, 3h
Ex-president of the upstream district	05/06/13, 2h; 16/07/13, 4.5h
Founder of an organic consumers' cooperative	18/03/13, 3.5h; 14/05/13, 2h
Farmer and founder of an organic consumers' cooperative	05/06/13, 1.5h
Ex director of the social and cultural centre	06/06/13, 3h
Director of an organic consumers' cooperative	05/12/13, 2h

### 3. France: the national context

---

France has 65 Million inh., nearly 29 Million ha of arable land. The food productions vary a lot from one region to another: mainly arable crops in the plains of the north and north-west, extensive livestock in the mountains, fruit production in the southern valleys, wine in some specific regions. Despite a general trend of specialisation along the last 5 decades, in many regions and especially in the south of the country, agriculture remains quite diversified. France is also characterized by a high density of traditional products and a strong tradition of quality signs (about 250 PDO/PGI). However, since the 1990s farm specialisation (and farms' average size) has continued to increase despite some incentives for more ecological and/or diversified modes of production.

Today (end of 2014) the organic production represents 26 478 farms (5,4% of all farms), and covers more than 4% of the national agricultural area (about 5 times the area of 1998). France was the leader of organic production in 1985 but then it soon lost its first place and in 1995 organic production represented only 118000 ha and 3538 farms. There was a sharp increase again from 1998 to 2002 due to public incentives (in 2002 there were 518000ha and 11300 organic farms), then a stagnation and increase again after 2008, since when the number of farms has doubled (Agence Bio, 2015).

There are big differences between regions with some regions under 1% of organic (Ile de France or Picardie in the north), others above 6 % (15,2% in Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur ; 6,7% in Rhone Alpes).

The organic market is still growing: about 5 billion euros in 2014 and about 2% of the total food market, versus 1,5 billion euros in 2005. It has grown by +47% for example between 2008 and 2011. The organic agrifood sector involves 13000 "operators" (processors and retailers) in total in 2014 (Agence Bio, 2015). Marketing channels for organic products are more diversified than for conventional products with "only" 50% sold in supermarkets (versus around 75% for food in general) even though their part is increasing, and a larger part of direct sales and specialised retailers.

Since the 1990s, there have been successive national programs for organic farming: Plan Riquois in 1997, « Bio Horizon 2012 » in 2007, and lastly in 2013 "Ambition bio 2017". These programs have defined quantitative objectives for the surfaces and part of organic farming as well as the presence of organic products in the public schools canteens (20%). These national programs also aim to structure the organic food chains with for example the creation of a specific fund "Avenir bio" (with a budget of 3 Million euros a year, from 2008 to 2011 about 130 businesses or producers' groups have been financed by this fund) or, within the current program, incentives for cooperatives' investment and for the development of contractualisation in the offer/demand relation. Deep changes are also claimed in the agricultural extension organizations and in the agricultural schools and programs, towards a much larger place of organic farming.

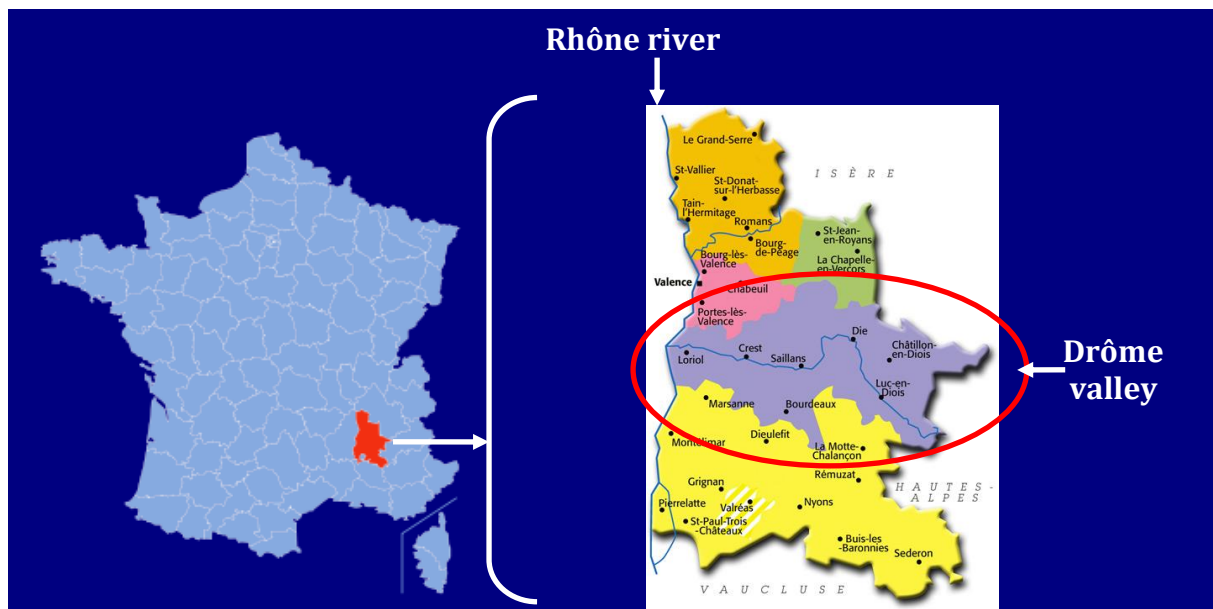
Besides these government programs, most regions and departments (and sometimes local authorities in small regions) support organic farming and food chains through diverse types of actions: some regions cover the cost of certification for producers, others facilitate the development of organic in public food procurement or the installation of young organic farmers on public land etc.

## 4. Overview of the case

### 4.1 Presentation and trajectory

The Drôme valley is the most developed area in France with respect to organic agriculture. In this small region (2200 km<sup>2</sup>, 54000 inhabitants), organic production represents in 2013, 30% of agricultural land (national average=3.5%). There has been a strong growth in the last years as in 2008, it represented 17% of it.

This area is considered as the/a cradle of French organic agriculture because some pioneers started there (some came from other regions or countries, some were local farmers) and quite early a coherent vision of the whole chain was built up, such as in the aromatic and medicinal plants industry as soon as in the 1970s and 1980s (Duffaud-Prevost, 2015), and more recently (from the 1990s) onward in the wine and the cereal industry (Bui *et al.* 2013).



The Drôme valley is quite diversified in terms of natural conditions and productions, with cereals, poultry, fruit and seed production in the valley, extensive livestock in the mountains, and wine, cereal and fruit production on the hillsides. However, apart from the area close to the Rhône river, most parts of the region are too remote and have a too rough production environment to be competitive in mainstream fruit or cereal production. In this context, the local stakeholders started to think about their future in participative manners, as soon as in the 1970s in the upstream part of the valley. In order to halt depopulation, local entrepreneurs and policy makers (i.e. from the two districts of the valley<sup>1</sup>) formed a development committee and launched a consultation to build an action plan. The joint assessment of the situation identified agriculture as the priority sector. Organic

<sup>1</sup> Initially, in the 1970s, there were two districts in the valley: one in the upstream part of the valley, one in the downstream part. In 1992, three municipalities get out of the downstream-part district to form their own inter-municipal structure. In 2001, eleven municipalities also get out of the upstream-part district to form their own inter-municipal structure. In 2013, the two smaller districts merged because of a regulatory obligation. So there are nowadays three districts involved in the Biovallée project, but only the two biggest have a major influence on the program, as they represent 88 municipalities.

agriculture started being considered as an important part of it from the late 1980s. From then on, different successive public programs were set up, which supported organic agriculture in the frame of broader rural development programs, and on one occasion one program supported organic agriculture specifically (in 1992-1997). In 1995, a key policy makers' slogan was « *The Diois* [the upstream part of the Drôme Valley], *an hinterland of the productivist period, a foreland of the quality period* ». The main idea was to turn shortcomings into strengths for a new momentum, and it still is the rationale for local policies.

In the 2000s, the districts built together the Biovallée project. In its first version, the Biovallée project aimed at developing the sectors of aromatic and medicinal plants and of eco-construction. Three years later, the Biovallée project evolved into a much more integrated program for rural development.

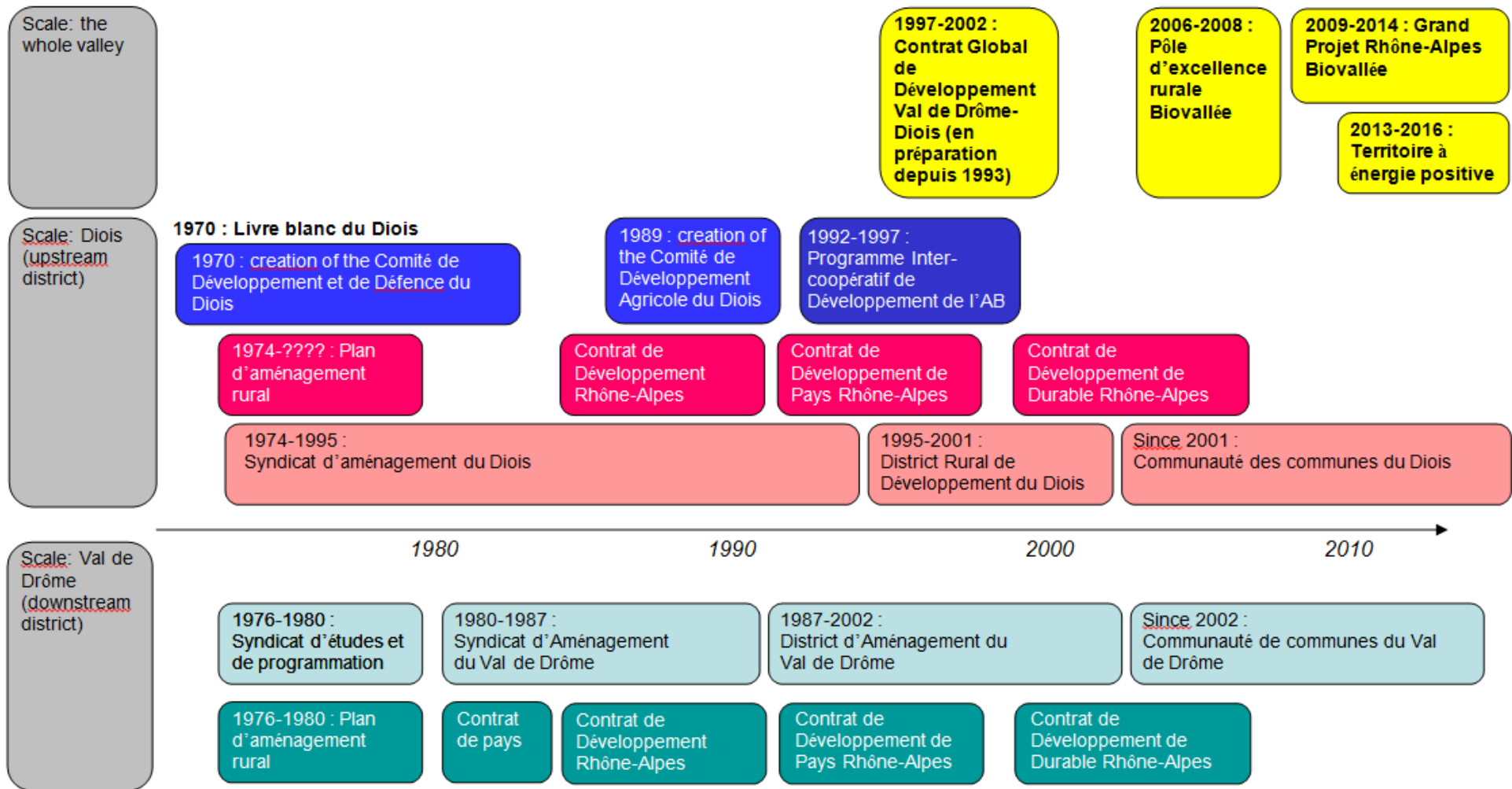
With a 10 M€ budget from the regional council for the 2009-2014 period, the Biovallée project aims at making the Drôme valley "*the territory school of sustainable development at the European scale*". It combines objectives in terms of land use, economic development (eco-construction, agriculture...), research and training, energy (saving, production...). In the farming sector, it targets 50% of organic farming (in terms of hectares and number of farmers) and 80% of organic and/or local products in school canteens before 2015, as well as a 50% reduction of pesticide use. The local authorities also created an official brand "Biovallée®" as a tool to rally the local actors (businesses, local communities, associations) around an approach of shared progress towards sustainability. The idea is to foster the exchange of experience, it is not a products' brand (for more information on the brand, see section 5.4).

Regarding the farming sector, the program focuses on stimulating local organic demand and local organic provisioning strategies of all the economic operators- farmers, processors, cooperatives, public canteens, restaurants... Actions support the setting-up of young organic farmers thanks to a "farm incubator" (for more information on the farm incubator, see section 5.4), the acquisition of alternative farming equipment for conventional farmers, the creation of local sourcing and procurement platforms (see section 5.3) for local and/or organic products, the training of canteen staff, experimentations on new practices or processes, among others.

Human factors (some would say social or cultural capital) were determinant in this trajectory: this region attracted many innovative new inhabitants (with a historically strong attraction for neo-rural inhabitants wanting to go 'back-to-the-land' in the 1970's) who, in the case of the plant sector for example, revealed the territorial resources before local actors and local politicians get involved in it (Lamine *et al.*, 2011).

Money also mattered of course and this region is characterized both by the innovative and lasting experience of collaboration between local authorities (the districts), but also by the concentration of public resources (mainly European funds), partly thanks to good skills in setting up projects within these local authorities' teams.

Another factor is linked to the momentum itself, characterized by a two-fold spillover effect: at the territorial scale, due to the presence of numerous organic farms, operators and institutions, and at the farm level, due to diversified farming systems (for example, farms which converted to organic their aromatic and medicinal plants production would often also convert the rest of their production).

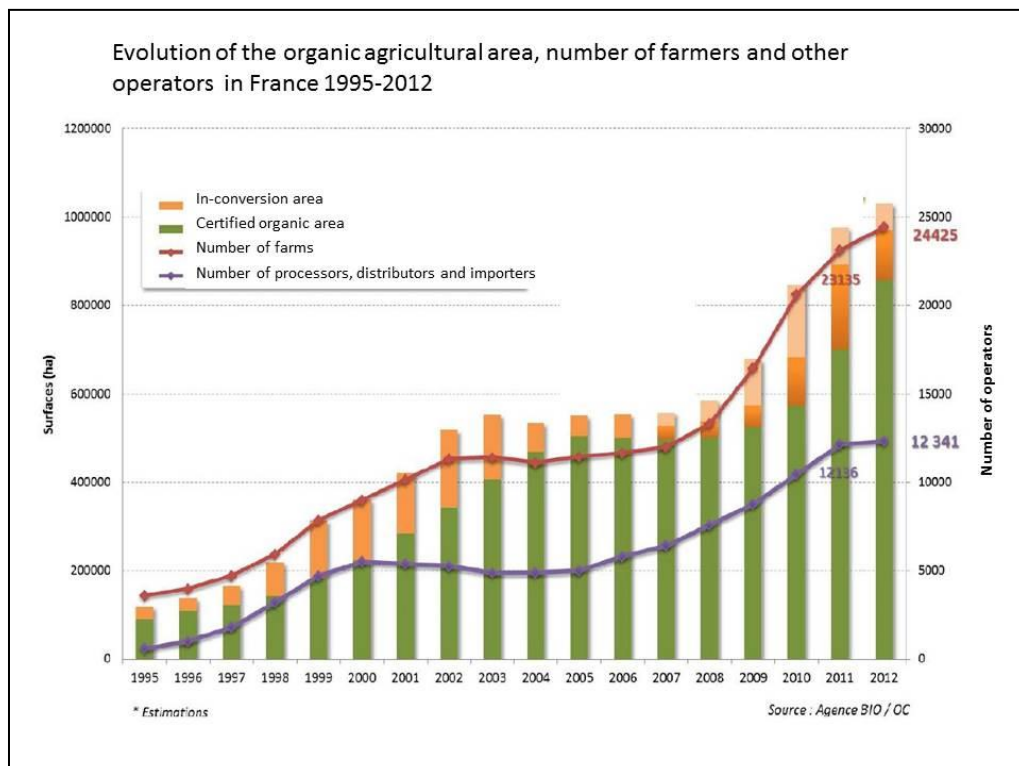
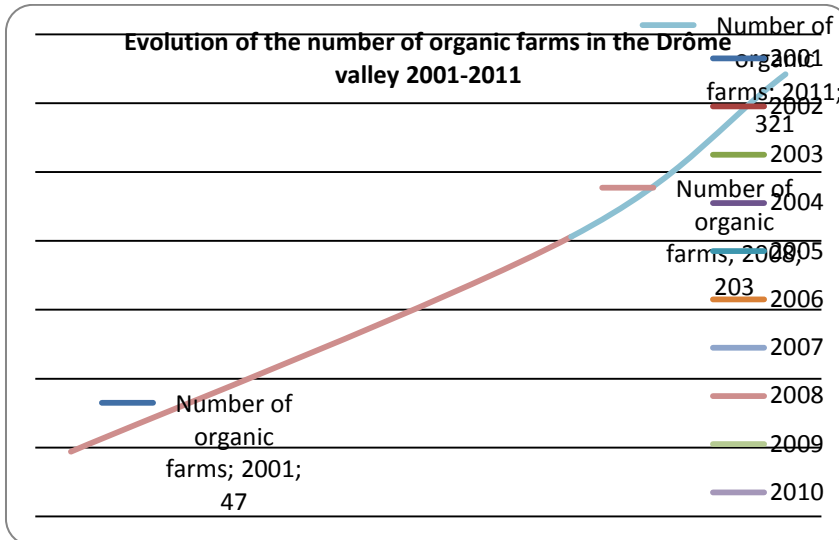


*Public policies in the Drôme valley 1970-2014*

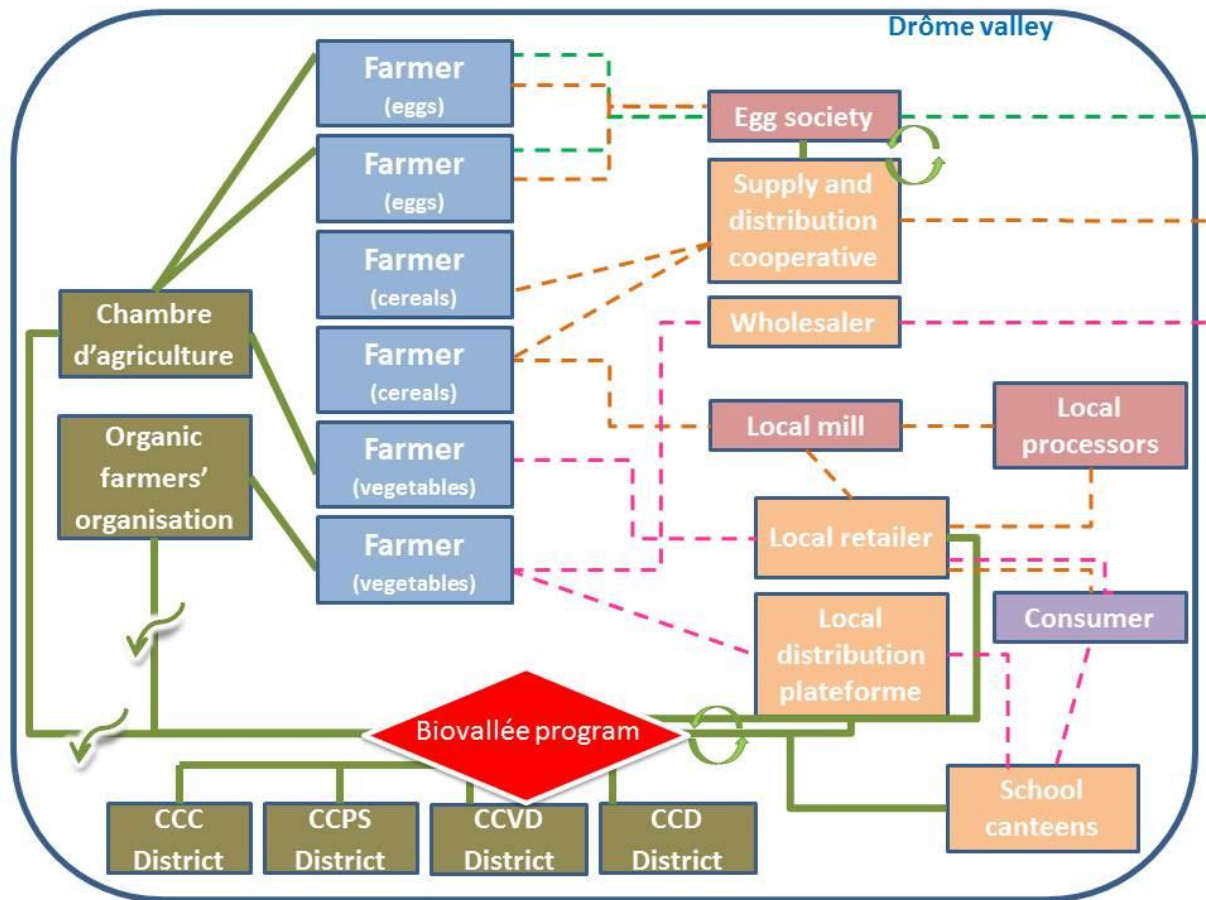


## 4.2 Basic facts

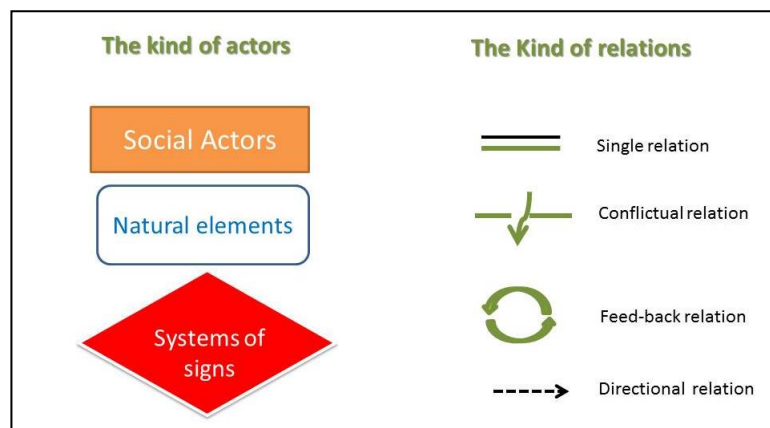
Organic farming made up for 17% of agricultural areas and 20% of farms at the beginning of the Biovallée program in 2009. It strongly evolved as it made up 28% of agricultural areas and 30% of farms in 2013. The data collection is still ongoing. For information purpose, we can for the moment provide the following data:



### 4.3 Stakeholder network



*Biovallée stakeholder analysis nowadays*



The figure represents Biovallée's stakeholder network nowadays, based on the common constellation analysis framework established within Healthygrowth project.

## 5. Analytical perspectives

---

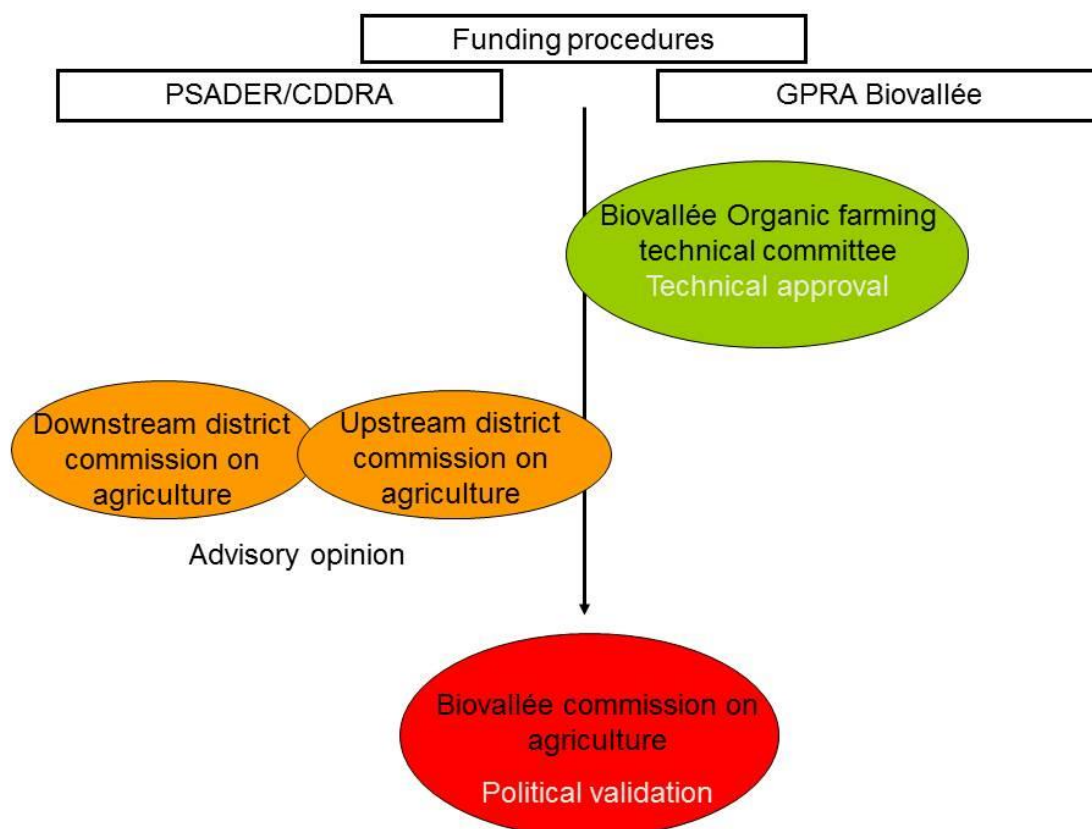
### 5.1 Organisation and governance

---

The agricultural part of the Biovallée program is funded via two procedures of the Rhône-Alpes Regional Council<sup>2</sup>. Grant applications are reviewed three times:

- first, they are assessed by a technical committee consisting of the technicians of both districts, of the Chamber of agriculture and Agribiodrôme (local farmers organisations) and of local agricultural training organizations;
- then, depending on where the project is located, they are assessed by either the downstream or the upstream district commissions on agriculture, which provide an advisory opinion. Each one of these commissions gathers the local district and all of his technical and institutional partners;
- finally, the decision is made by the Biovallée commission on agriculture, consisting of the districts' elected officials in charge of agriculture.

The agricultural part of the Biovallée program thus features three levels of validation:



---

<sup>2</sup> French territorial organization has 5 main levels: the state, the regions, the departments, the "districts", and the municipalities. Each level has its proper elected and technical teams and budgets, and upper level usually finance lower levels projects.

*Did the Biovallée program impulse an institutional dynamic at the scale of the whole valley (upstream and downstream)?*

In the Biovallée commission on agriculture, we can talk about a concerted management as the decision takes into account the opinions of the technical committee and of the two districts' commissions on agriculture. However in practice, as other local actors are not represented in the final decision process (but only in intermediary stages), the governance is *de facto* mainly shared between the elected officials from upstream and downstream districts. It must be noted that this has not helped moving forward a joint political project: indeed, the officials from the upstream district have recently expressed their willingness not to participate to another global program at the scale of the whole valley (see section 5).

This is partly due to divergent visions of the role of local authorities in agricultural development. According to the elected officials of the upstream district, local authorities should play a role of territorial coordination, while agricultural organizations are in charge of the definition and implementation of agricultural policy. By contrast the elected officials of the downstream district consider that agricultural development remains within the field of competences of local authorities and that they should play a leading role in this sector. These divergent viewpoints explain why, despite the same political affiliation (at the time of our study, the elected teams of the two districts are affiliated to the same political party) and a shared governance between elected officials of both districts it is still difficult to reach a joint agricultural policy and to build a joint project for agriculture at the scale of the whole valley.

Whereas in the Biovallée commission only the districts are represented, there is a strong participation of local actors within the two districts' commissions on agriculture (agricultural development and training organizations, farmers' unions, farmers' cooperatives, civil society). Governance is thus shared among all local actors at the scale of each district, but not at the scale of Biovallée.

The functioning of the funding procedures did not promote reaching a joint project either. Upstream and downstream commissions manage a distinct budget. Budgets are determined on a per capita basis. As there are three times more inhabitants in the downstream district than in the upstream district, both districts can't target the same ambitions, which creates a balance of power. This budget difference also impacts the human resources that the districts can dedicate to the Biovallée program. In the upstream district, 0.5 FTE are committed to the whole agriculture sector (not just to the Biovallée program), whereas in the downstream district, 1.1 FTE are committed to agriculture plus 0.7 FTE exclusively dedicated to the Biovallée program. Interviews with the technicians concerned revealed that the lack of available human resources dedicated to agriculture in the upstream district did not allow creating joint working habits at the scale of the valley.

Hence, it seems the Biovallée program did not foster the emergence of an institutional dynamic at the scale of the whole valley.

#### *Participation and ownership of local actors*

Initially, when the Biovallée project was under construction, the development of organic production, transformation and distribution was targeted in all agricultural sectors which were locally present: cereals, aromatic plants, eggs, fruits, vegetables, goat cheese... However, no consultation of economic operators has taken place prior to the start of the current program. Agricultural organisations such as the Chamber of agriculture and Agribiodrôme were not consulted either. These organisations are nowadays involved in the project in the frame of the Organic technical committee of Biovallée, but in practice this has not been embodied in a real partnership. Thus local actors have not been involved in the design of the Biovallée program, and neither are they involved today in the reflection on the political orientations which are debated in the Biovallée commission on agriculture. In practice, on its agricultural side, the Biovallée program is rather top-down and the local actors' ownership is relatively weak. However, the large participation of local actors which can be observed

in the districts' commissions is the result of a long historical process of partnership building (more than 20 years). Therefore, at the scale of the whole valley, it is probably a matter of timing of dynamics, the dynamics being young and still needing to be comforted.

Regarding the global Biovallée program (i.e. taking several sectors in consideration, not only the farming sector), several attempts of participatory approaches have been made at the stage of its elaboration. Biovallée was initially presented as a participatory process. All actors and inhabitants got invited to participate to the building of "the Biovallée" during a large forum in 2009. 200 to 300 people held workshops during 2 days to elaborate the development hypotheses for the valley. This high attendance shows that there were strong expectations on the part of local actors and inhabitants to get involved in the project. Yet the process was rather consultative than participatory (as is often the case). No feedback on the arbitration had been originally scheduled. The aim was effectively to have the Biovallée objectives approved, but this had not been clearly announced to the participants of the forum. This caused resentment among some of them - including actors from the agricultural sector -, and generated criticisms regarding the lack of transparency of the project, as well as regrets that some good ideas given by participants to this forum were not considered. Some participants kept in mind the idea that Biovallée is in reality a project of technicians and officials which never get local stakeholders around the table.

*"Biovallée started in a very, very concerted approach. We [facilitators of the Social and Cultural Centre] were associated to the first two forums that took place, to help preparing and to facilitate the workshops. [The forum gathered] more than 200-300 people who came from the whole valley to build up the hypotheses of development of the Biovallée. [...] Initially, the Biovallée process was announced as super participatory. [...] When you invite the people, it means you are in a consultative process. If you don't say so very clearly at the beginning, you generate loads of frustration, anger and even violence [...] Two years later, I hear a lot of people saying: they gathered us all, it was useless... [With] the impression they were manipulated, or that it had no results." (A former director of the Social and Cultural Centre)*

*"At the launching of Biovallée, they did things well – almost well. They invited [...] 200 of us, [...] saying: there, we have a Biovallée project, how do you see this Biovallée project? So we worked in working groups. [...]. It was very, very eclectic indeed, very interesting. And there we were, we spent these two days, it was two days we spent! Since then, well, I received no feedback about that thing [...]. There was a good thing to do. But no." (The director of a farmers' cooperative)*

### *Biovallée, a controversial project*

As it encompasses ambitious targets for the development of organic farming and few actions in favour of conventional farmers, the Biovallée program has a poor image among agricultural conventional actors. From the very start and even nowadays, some elected members of the Chamber of agriculture think the aim of Biovallée is to convert all farmers to organic farming and strongly criticize the program for that ("*organic farming can't feed the world!*"). Although the aim of Biovallée is in reality to encourage all farmers to move towards a more ecologically sound agriculture, it is true that the agricultural policy of Biovallée supports a farming model opposite to the one the Chamber of agriculture supports.

Beyond the development of organic food chains, Biovallée's action is oriented towards maintaining small farms via the development of short circuits and the relocation of distribution channels, and fosters the setting-up of new farms rather than the enlargement of existing farms. For instance, Biovallée funded the creation of a distribution platform of local and organic products to supply food canteens (see section 5.3), the creation of a cutting and processing plant for local livestock farmers, the creation of a farm incubator (see section 5.4), and set up an agricultural land intervention fund to prevent agricultural land from benefiting to farm enlargement.

Opposite to this policy, the elected members of the Chamber of agriculture and some agricultural cooperatives' leaders tend to diminish and criticize the actions implemented by Biovallée, because they believe the farming and economical model supported by Biovallée (i.e., mainly small farmers and short circuits) is not economically viable. Therefore, instead of bringing together local actors to cooperate, the Biovallée project reinforces the opposition between local authorities who intend to play a role in agricultural development and the Chamber of agriculture who considers that agricultural policy should be defined by farmers, i.e. by the Chamber of agriculture. Both groups of actors thus experience a highly conflicting relationship.

The image of Biovallée is not better perceived by organic stakeholders. These actors accuse local authorities of misusing and tarnishing the word "bio". "Bio" in French means organic (i.e. "Biovallée" sounds like "organic valley"<sup>3</sup>), yet they consider that Biovallée does support many structures which are not in an organic approach.

Paradoxically, the Biovallée project resonates with many local actors' visions of the future, including the historical organic actors, but is highly criticized by them. For instance it targets rethinking the links between agriculture and territory and the links along the food chain between consumers, economic operators and local producers; it aims at maintaining small farm structures. However it has not yet reached local actors' ownership - although it's beginning to reach it for some of them.

Most producers we interviewed don't know the Biovallée project. They have heard about the amount of subsidies provided by the Regional Council but they don't know which concrete actions have been implemented. They believe it aims at fostering the development of organic farming, but as they think organic farming has developed thanks to the actions of other local actors, they believe it's rather a communication plan and a form of political hijacking. Actually, they don't make the connection between Biovallée's external communication and the benefits which may be gained locally. One thing all actors seem to agree on is that Biovallée consists mainly in communication (see section 5.4).

The Biovallée project is not only controversial among local actors, it was also controversial within the district administrations themselves. It is the case mainly in the upstream district, because the current political team, which is not the team which participated in the elaboration of the Biovallée program, pursues a strategy of narrowing the district's competencies and of reducing resources. It is also the case in the downstream district, where some elected officials express some frustration of having such a huge program with high financial resources and ambitious targets and yet few financial incentives on the ground.

Thus, the Biovallée project is on the one hand a sound project as it relies on long term local dynamics of organic farming development which are growing in strength. On the other hand, it presents sources of fragility, as there is not yet a strong ownership of local actors and policy makers. This may be due to the timing of the project. In all territorial development projects, it does take time to bring all local actors together, to go beyond their oppositions and to cooperate. The current Biovallée program (financed by the regional council) comes to an end this year (2014) and its prospects are still unclear (see section 6).

---

<sup>3</sup> The name « Biovallée » was chosen in reference to the prefix bio- which means "the living".

## 5.2 Business and management logics

---

As Biovallée is a territorial case study, it is not focused on a single economic operator and therefore this study of the business and management logics could not be led the same way as in other Healthygrowth case studies.

Biovallée's general objective is to become a pilot territory for sustainable development. Communication, both internal and external, is thus of critical importance (see section 5.4). Before the Biovallée program was launched, communication was used "to rally local actors around a common project" (Biovallée's project document), i.e. as an instrument for a better acceptance of the policy scheme. Since the project was launched, communication is used "to showcase the assets and the actions undertaken by Biovallée®" (*ibid.*), i.e. as an instrument to gain visibility to the outside world, to reach the objective of being a pilot territory for sustainable development. Local authorities implemented a "promotion and communication system" (*ibid.*) based on: the creation of a territorial brand (see section 5.4); the organisation and/or funding of conferences and seminars (for example, among others in 2012: a Social Solidarity Economy forum, a seminar on water and organic farming, a meeting of the network of energy-positive territories) for which a conference room was built; the use of a diversity of media (radio, internet, press...).

Regarding the farming sector, the program focuses on stimulating local organic demand and local organic provisioning strategies of all the economic operators- farmers, processors, cooperatives, public canteens, restaurants... Actions support the setting-up of young organic farmers thanks to a "farm incubator" (for more information on the farm incubator, see section 5.4), the acquisition of alternative farming equipment for conventional farmers, the creation of local sourcing and procurement platforms for local and/or organic products, the training of canteen staff, experimentations on new practices or processes, among others.

## 5.3 Trade-offs between quality differentiation and volume and economic performance

---

Biovallée does foster quality differentiation rather than volume and economic performance. One example of that is their program on organic food procurement for school canteens which initially targeted an 80% organic procurement. Instead of relying on an existing local organic wholesaler who works with a pool of local producers and complements its offer with products from other organic platforms, Biovallée supported the creation of an associative distribution platform<sup>4</sup> which is open to all local producers (organic and non-organic) willing to take advantage of opportunities offered by school canteens and other local outlets. Although the development of organic farming is Biovallée's n°1 objective in the farming sector, the local origin of the products is strongly fostered and, in this example, it is the criteria which is eventually given priority: in 2013, Biovallée's public food procurement objective was reworded towards "an 80% organic and/or local food procurement" (instead of "80% organic"). Another reason why preference was given to this associative configuration is because it allows ensuring organic and/or local food procurement of very small canteens or canteens located in remote areas which would not have been interesting outlets for a private wholesaler. The associative platform thus provides a service of general interest and receives funding from Biovallée for that. It was created for that purpose and not in a business logic, which is why we can't talk in its case of a marketing strategy. We can note here a second type of trade-off: equal access to organic and/or local food is paramount over economic performance.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Agricourt association receives orders from school and kindergarten canteens, private restaurants and consumers' purchasing groups and handles them with products it purchases from local producers. This association was created by local consumers and producers.

This example of public food procurement is a good illustration of the trade-offs that are made in the operational implementation of the Biovallée political project. Whereas the initial strategy is to support transformation and distribution operators to favour organic production development, Biovallée actually supports the creation and development of short circuits rather than local economic private champions. This initiative does not compete with private businesses that market organic food in the area since these businesses are not interested in such small and poorly profitable commercial outlets anyway. The differentiation strategy ends up being on both products (local products) and services (a private platform which has its commercial activity and also provides services of general interest).

#### 5.4 Communication of values and qualities among the members of the food chain

---

The Biovallée project is recent as it was launched in 2009. However, it builds upon a long established experience of local public policies: policies on rural development since the 1970s and policies specific to sustainable development since the 1990s. The vision of the future it proposes in its slogan, “*an exemplary territory [or a territory school] for sustainable development*”, reflects the global approach of the Biovallée program.

The name Biovallée was chosen based on the Greek origin of the prefix bio- to signify “life valley”, but this name is quite confusing as “bio” means “organic” in French. Actually, the farming sector is only one part of the image the project wishes to give, even though as we saw (section 4.1) it is the most controversial. Its three pillars are: environmental quality (biodiversity, beautiful and diversified landscapes, water quality), social quality (community life and cultural life, recreational opportunities, creative solidarity actions, social and solidarity economy) and economy “of excellence” (organic farming and eco-construction) (Biovallée’s project document).

Biovallée is definitely an extension of a local political project aiming at being “a foreland of the quality period” which was implemented in the 1990s. Innovation and leadership are constantly sought and put forward in the communication media: the Biovallée project applies to numerous national and international prizes (the districts involved in Biovallée won the International Riverprize in 2005 for their joint program on water management, the farm incubator (see below) won two Prizes of the *Fondation de France* in 2013, another initiative funded by Biovallée won the regional Prize for the empowerment of building professionals in 2014) and innovative networks (the emerging French national network of “Positive Energy Territories”, the under-construction network of European bio-regions...). We analyse these actions are part of a strategy to obtain external recognition. The goal is two-fold: first, the project is expected to gain external legitimacy as a territory school – as well as visibility - through external recognition. And second, it also is expected to gain internal legitimacy, as external recognition acts as a validation of the project’s objectives relevance to a diversity of sustainability issues. However, whereas external legitimacy is constantly increasing -as shown by the growing number of invitations for Biovallée to participate to networks or seminars on rural development-, internal legitimacy is still fragile.

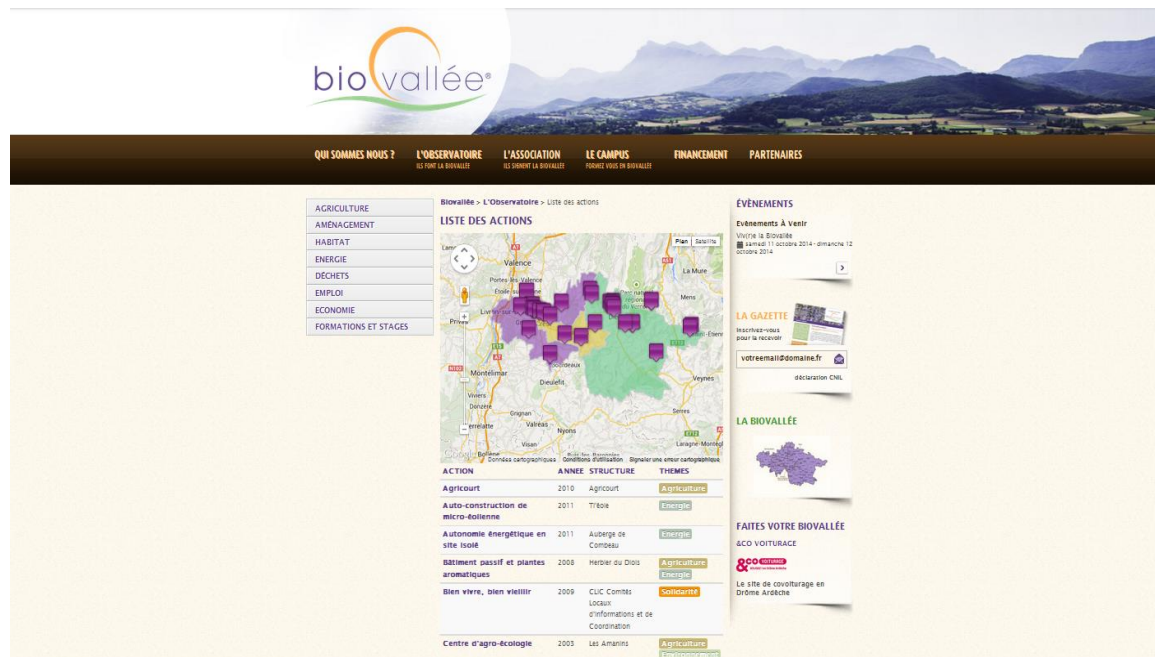
Indeed, the project does lack widespread local support, and the districts are still trying to build stakeholderhood among the local actors. In the narrative of the project, local private actors such as farmers, citizens and entrepreneurs play a leading role in the emergence of a new, creative momentum and in the development of social and technical innovations. Among the 14 videos posted on YouTube by the Biovallée team, only half of them show initiatives which did receive financial support from Biovallée. Biovallée is thus presented as a citizen-based approach, which largely relies on the practices and skills of the local actors and inhabitants: local actors have played a leading role in the past, and they are going to benefit from the skills each one developed and they all can share with each other.

To strengthen the adherence of local actors to the project, the political discourse is based on two rationales. On the one hand, the elected officials present the Biovallée project as building on the



know-how and on the momentum local actors have developed, to value the efforts of the pioneers (mostly organic farmers). And on the other hand, they say that the project is in phase with the flow of History<sup>5</sup>, which is a way to cut the legs out from under those who criticize the objectives of the project.

According to the official discourse, the project aims at supporting the current momentum by creating synergies. Cooperation tools are developed, such as the brand Biovallée® and the observatory of practices and know-how<sup>6</sup>, which aims at fostering networking, information exchange and collaborative work. These tools form a database of good practices: they gather information for external communication (e.g. for journalists) and to develop training material for the school territory. In other words, they shine the spotlights on some initiatives and by doing so they act as powerful tools for local communication, as they bear upon what the community values.



Screenshot from <http://www.biovallée.fr/observatoire-action-liste.html> (25/07/2014)

Communication on symbols plays a central role in the strategy of the Biovallée project. They choose to raise the profile of some very symbolic initiatives and although the project is very recent, this is not a default choice, it's a deliberate action to give credibility to some options.

For example, one flagship operation of the Biovallée project is the "farm incubator". In 2011, the districts bought a farm to create a farm incubator, a place where people willing to start an organic farming activity can stay 1 or 2 years and test themselves, assisted by a local association with experience in this field. The farm incubator is located in the middle of a grain-growing plain, mostly conventional. According to the elected officials, the aim here is both to let conventional farmers see that organic farmers do work hard and well, and to show their support for establishing new organic farmers rather than enlarging farms (some farmers did settle in the area after their stay in the incubator). They say that they know this initiative will have a small quantitative impact and that they work deliberately on symbols because they believe it is important. They hope to change mentalities this way, as they think it is one key barrier for the development of organic farming.

In order to be better identified and known by the local population and businesses, Biovallée established a partnership with the local radio which dedicates a program once a week since 2011 to the initiatives and issues in line with the project.

<sup>5</sup> One frequent statement is : "ça va dans le sens de l'Histoire"

<sup>6</sup> The observatory is subtitled: "they make the Biovallée"



It also organizes once a year an open-house day with visits of local initiatives. Once again the initiatives they put forward on this occasion are not necessarily formally linked to the political project, but they are in line with the vision of the future it promotes for the territory.

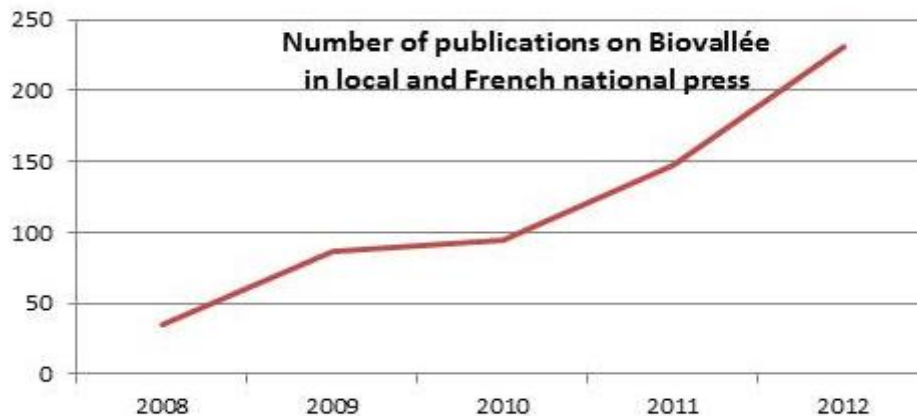
Complementary to this, communication programs in relation with specific actions are implemented (sensitization of parents' associations, school and canteen staff for the public organic food procurement program, for example). And of course, the elected officials take advantage of all occasions in public events to communicate about the project.

*Leaflet for the open-house days 2012*

The importance of communication in the Biovallée project generates controversies. Detractors and supporters can be found in all categories of actors. Critics come from some officials, farmers, advisors, entrepreneurs or citizens. The main argument they put forward is that Biovallée is a communication plan with very few actions: according to them, the project is an empty shell.

*“They do a lot of communication at all levels. So we’ve been hearing about it for a long time, but which concrete actions have been carried out? Pfff... And this is a bit what farmers think, too. [...] They know there are a lot of subsidies, and they’ve never seen any concrete action regarding their activity, things being set up for agriculture... Things seem to be changing now a bit, it seems it has been a bit more concrete on agriculture for a year or two. But it’s true that until now... I couldn’t tell you exactly what’s behind this Biovallée project, you see. Apart from a lot of window-dressing, a lot of communication... I don’t know which actions have been carried out in the frame of Biovallée. That’s it [he laughs]!” (An advisor from the Chamber of agriculture)*

Communication is indeed an important and increasingly visible strategy of the project:



Publications are professionally managed: a press officer was recruited in 2011. But although local press is one of the targets, publications are generally not written with the aim of informing the population about how it can benefit from and participate to the project (mostly because most actions do not directly benefit the population). Very few people know what the Biovallée project is precisely (ISARA, 2011), most people have heard about the project but have a blur or false idea of what it is, and there is a strong feeling that Biovallée is an attempt by officials at reclaiming the efforts of the pioneers and the already existing momentum:

*"[Some farmers received a letter from Biovallée] saying that for the image of the Biovallée, they encourage farmers to convert to organic farming. They talked about an image! We found it super shocking. [It seems they set up the project] without concerting the people, because when we talk about it, the Biovallée, nobody knows exactly what it is, but everybody grins his teeth and says: but what is this thing for tourists? As if we needed to make a Biovallée when organic farming has been developing here for 30 years! [...] It seems it's not something for the local people, but something to attract visitors."* (A farmer from the upper district)

Thanks to the creation of the association for the Biovallée brand management in 2012, nowadays the number of people and actors who support the project has risen. The association, which developed mostly thanks to the word-of-mouth, gathers about 70 members. One half is municipalities or municipality associations; the other half is composed of associations and local businesses. Its purpose is to bring together the actors who wish to "do their share" to create emulation and networking. An important element to notice is that the members of the association are indeed committed for this purpose rather than for the marketing advantage the brand could provide: out of 65 members, less than ten communicate about Biovallée on their website.

## 5.5 Quality mediation through the chain

---

As Biovallée is a territorial case study, this dimension of the Healthygrowth project does not directly apply. It is however interesting to note that the quality dimension of products is not made clear in the Biovallée program. Implicit in it is that small agriculture and organic farming provide quality products, but no substantiation is given. Please refer to sections 5.1 and 5.3 for information on the quality dimensions of the food system Biovallée aims at fostering.

## 5.6 Resilience

---

Once again here we cannot consider Biovallée as a value chain; however some aspects can be explored under a resilience approach, such as the notions of stresses and shocks as well as that of collective resilience (how the diverse stakeholders work together towards a global resilience of their activities and common territory).

We could consider that the Biovallée project has permanently been under the *stress* of internal criticism – especially after a first building phase where a participatory approach was set up but not really maintained (see sections 4 and 5.1.). It is currently undergoing a *crisis* in the context of the necessity to launch a second phase with a second financial program (see 5.1 and 6).

In Biovallée many stakeholders have a vision and a discourse which mention, though often in other words, the interdependency of stakeholders and dimensions and their role in the future (social, economic and ecological) resilience of farms, food system, and territory at large. The presence of these arguments as well as the way collective actions take – or do not take - into account this notion of *collective and territorial resilience* could be further explored within a comparative analysis of the different territorial case studies (FR, AU and IT) within the Healthygrowth project. Our first idea about it is that some specific local value chains strive and succeed in maintaining resilience at both farm, food chain and territorial scales (e.g., the cereal chain around the local cooperative, see Bui *et al.*, 2013), while it is more difficult to assess a coordinated multistakeholder strategy at the territorial scale, as suggests our analysis (see 5.1).

## 6. Future orientations of the initiative

---

The Biovallée program (as presented to and financed by the Regional Council) comes to an end in 2014 and won't be extended in its current form, of a global, rural development program, due to the defection of the upstream district (please refer to section 5.1). Regarding the agricultural development aspects, elected officials are willing to change the image of the project, for it to be better perceived by all farmers. Their strategy is also to seek a greater coherence with one sectorial extension of the Biovallée program: a project in the energy sector at the scale of the whole valley. They are currently building up a program on agriculture and energy, considering energy is a unifying theme.

The upstream district hesitated for a long time before to join the future program on agriculture, which shows the elected officials don't really consider energy is a key issue for the farming sector. The energy issue isn't considered as critical by the local actors of the agricultural sector either. Energy is thus a *consensus* issue rather than a *unifying* issue. In this context, one may wonder whether this program will allow bringing local actors together to cooperate.

## 7. Concluding reflections

---

This analysis was carried out in close cooperation with the two other territorial case studies from Italy and Austria, within the Healthygrowth project. We identified points of comparison to inform the following question: how far do/can territorial approaches contribute or give momentum to the development of organic farming? In June 2014 we met for a three-day seminar in the Drôme valley. During this seminar, we organised field visits for our colleagues from Italy and Austria to have a good overall vision of the Biovallée case and meet several local actors, and held an open workshop on territorial agrifood transition dynamics, where each team presented his case study. In this workshop, we invited both European researchers working on the issue and representatives of local stakeholders.

We also used this seminar for the verification of our results and validation of our interpretations in the Biovallée case study. A collective paper which compares these three case-studies will be presented in the ESRS congress in August 2015 in Aberdeen (Schermer et al., 2015).

## References

---

Agence Bio, 2015. La bio poursuit son développement et accroît son rayonnement auprès des Français, Dossier de Presse, <http://www.actu-environnement.com/media/pdf/news-23912-agence-bio-consommation-production-2014-france.pdf>, accessed 30th of April, 2015

Biovallée, 2013. Protocole Grand projet Rhône-Alpes Biovallée - Bilan au 15 mai 2013 et demande de modification de la maquette financière.

Bui S. (defence expected in 2015). Transitions vers l'agroécologie : pertinence de l'échelle territoriale pour impulser et analyser les transitions sociotechniques. PhD thesis, Ecole Doctorale ABIES, Paris.

Bui S., Lamine C., Cerf M., 2013. The solution is beyond the opposition. Breaking down the fence between conventional and organic values to secure trust and integrity. *ESRS Congress*, Florence, Italy, July 2013

Duffaud-Prevost, 2015. L'ancrage territorial par une géographie multi-locale : le cas des entreprises de la filière des plantes à parfum, aromatiques et médicinales dans la vallée de la Drôme. PhD thesis, Université Montpellier 3, Montpellier

ISARA, 2011. Diagnostic du territoire Biovallée. Rapport d'étude collective d'étudiants ingénieurs. ISARA.

Lamine C., Landel P.A., Prévost M.L., 2011. Dynamiques territoriales de transition vers l'AB, Colloque SFER Transversalités de l'agriculture biologique, Strasbourg, juin 2011

Lamine C., Renting H., Rossi A., Wiskerke J. H., & Brunori G., 2012. Agri-food systems and territorial development: innovations, new dynamics and changing governance mechanisms. In *Farming Systems Research into the 21st century: The new dynamic* (pp. 229-256). Springer Netherlands.

Région Rhône-Alpes, Département de la Drôme, Communauté de Communes du Val de Drôme, Communauté des Communes du Diois, Communauté de Communes du Pays de Saillans, et Communauté de Communes du Crestois, 2009. Protocole Grand Projet Rhône-Alpes Biovallée. Biovallée, l'écoterritoire vitrine de l'éco-région Rhône-Alpes, et de la Drôme, département du développement durable.

Schermer M., Lamine C., Pugliese P., Furtschegger C., Bui S. Organic farming as a factor for territorial de-velopment: a comparative perspective, ESRS congress, Aberdeen, August 2015

Tual J., 2011. Dynamiques territoriales de transition vers l'agriculture biologique dans la vallée de la Drôme Le développement de l'agriculture biologique dans un territoire pionnier : historique et dynamiques actuelles autour de la production de légumes. Mémoire de fin d'études M2, INRA Avignon: AgroParisTech