

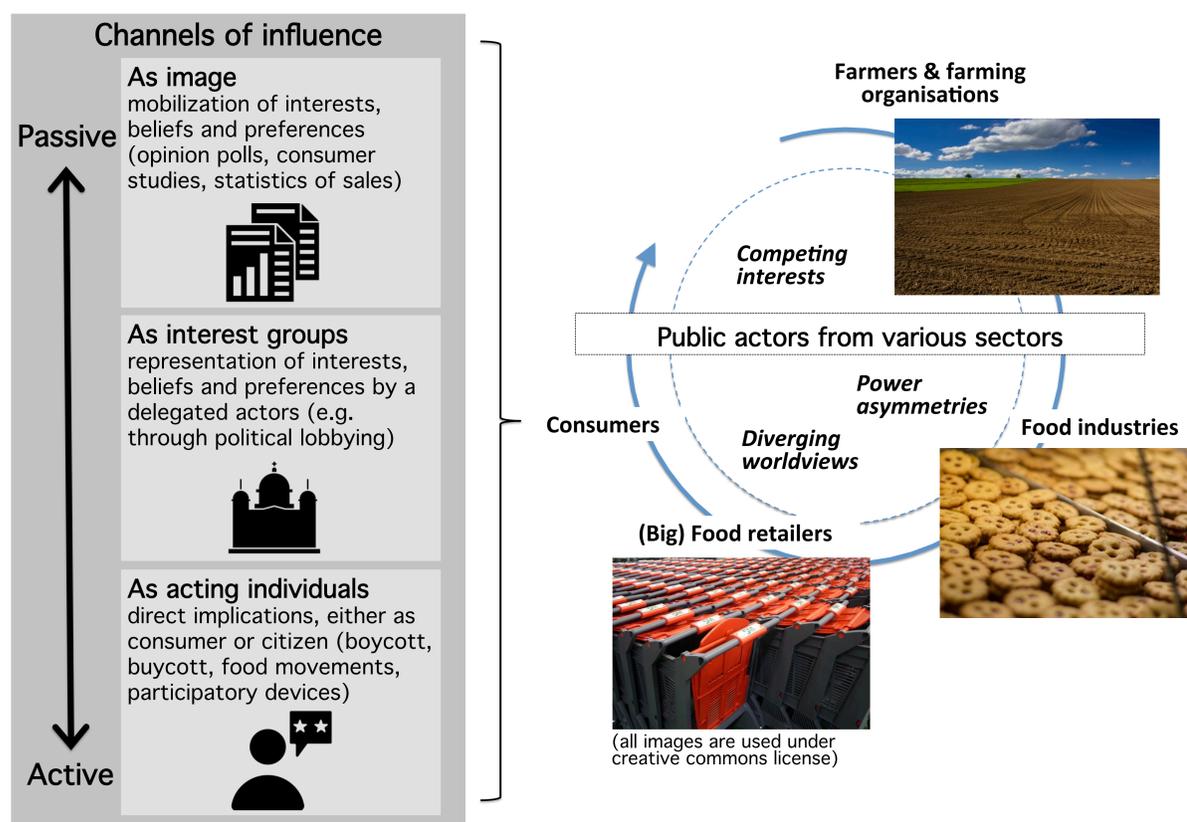
# The access of citizen-consumers' to Swiss agro-food decision processes: often called upon, rarely influential?

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## Problematic

Today more than ever, **citizen-consumers' influence is decisive** in explaining the direction undertaken by agro-food systems.

Statements such as this one have multiplied over the last years. By exploring who is involved in food governance, how and why, our research examines this **new politics of food** image in Switzerland. Considering citizen-consumers involvement as a key for economic success and political legitimacy, we analyse in **four case studies** how they, as individuals or organized groups, affect decisions. Based on previous literature, three **channels of influence** and **two scenarios** are identified. Their relative importance is assessed through the exploration of the political processes by which a wide range of actors along and around the food chain shape food systems.



(source of the icons: <https://thenounproject.com>)

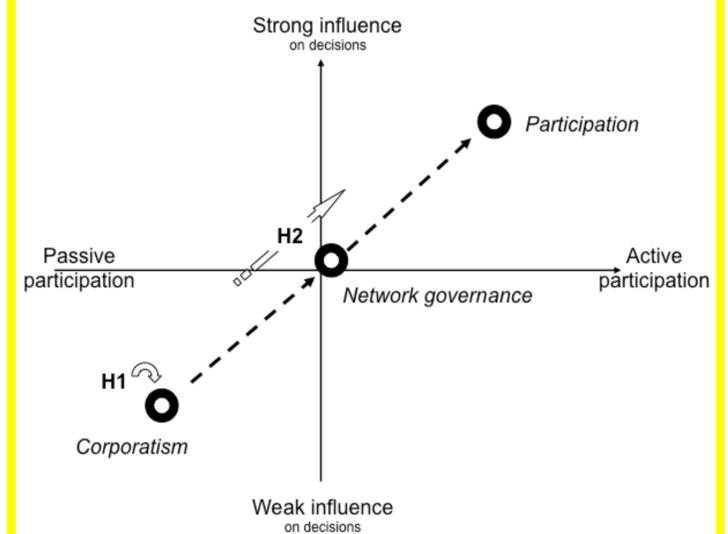
## Two competing scenarios

### H1 – Strong corporatism resistance

The level of access of citizen-consumers remains low (passive participation and weak influence)

### H2 – Evolution towards pluralisation

The level of access of citizen-consumers increases (towards a more active participation and a stronger influence)



## Case Studies

### Swissness



**focus:** revision of the conditions for Swiss and other indications of source on food products

**in a nutshell:** legislative process at the federal level, revealing the resistance of old corporatist logics between interest groups

**focus:** development of organic food labelling in Switzerland

### Organic Food

**in a nutshell:** institutionalisation and up-scaling of local consumer movements favoured by agricultural policy reforms and private actors' actions



### CO<sup>2</sup> labeling



**focus:** CO<sub>2</sub> mitigation strategies of food retailers (Coop & Migros)

**in a nutshell:** economic decisions mainly influenced by the CO<sub>2</sub> Act, market pressures and close partnerships (e.g., WWF, EnAW)

**focus:** development of a regional label in the canton of Geneva

**in a nutshell:** initially influenced by food movements close to consumer organisations, but progressively recaptured by corporatist actors

### GRTA



## Main results

The research unveils a **paradox** with regards to the two scenarios:

- ❖ **On the one hand**, their preferences are put forward and the organisations defending their interests increasingly consulted. Consumer willingness to pay for regional and ecological products and/or food movements represent strong impulses (**H1**).
- ❖ **On the other hand**, the diversity of actors and the asymmetry of power between them constitutes an indisputable reality. In the end, consumer preferences, food movements or the organisations defending consumers' interests still have a limited influence in a closed and unequal decision-making system (**H2**).

Image	Interest groups	Acting individuals
<p><b>Latent consent</b> emanating from consumption habits, pushing and legitimating private and public actors in their actions. However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- mediating effect of marketing, public policies, social norms;</li> <li>- risk of a manipulation of consumers' preferences;</li> <li>- dilution as soon as discussions become technical or economic stakes are taking over</li> </ul>	<p>Pluralisation of the decisional process only limited because of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- corporatist forces and "old" habits of collaborations;</li> <li>- asymmetries of power (in terms of political support, information, technical expertise, personal, money);</li> <li>- conflicting values (regarding the role of agriculture, the organisation of the food chain)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual consumption habits generating a form of <b>latent consent</b> (channel 1)</li> <li>- role of <b>food movements</b> in two cases (organic and GRTA)</li> </ul> <p><b>BUT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- participation mainly taking a <b>delegated form</b> (channel 2)</li> <li>- <b>weak mobilisation</b> of consumers by food movements</li> </ul>