

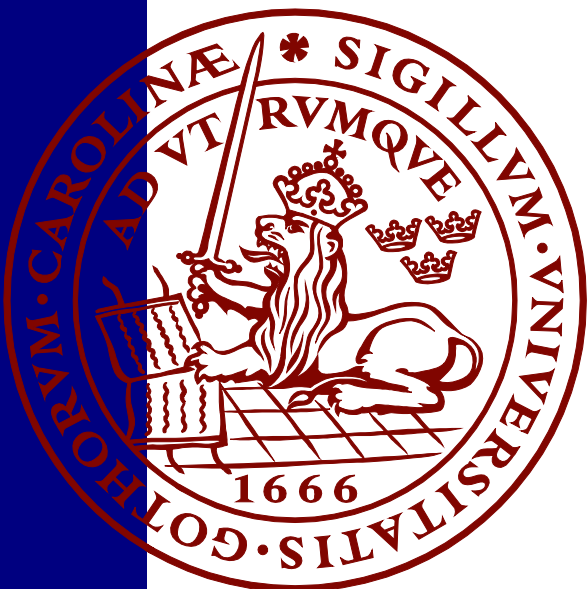
Limits to redistribution

Evidence from France's Anti-Food Waste Law

Mila Danklefsen

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Lund University Centre for
Sustainability Studies



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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Lund University International Master's
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Abstract

Food loss and waste (FLW) is an urgent global challenge. France pioneered in implementing a binding legal framework that incentivises supermarkets to donate their surplus to charities. In this thesis, I combine responsabilisation theory and a feminist political ecology lens to investigate previously overshadowed aspects of this law. I demonstrate that the responsibility for food waste (FW) management has shifted from retailers to charitable organisations. Associations face significant logistical costs, strict hygiene norms and low-quality surplus, often acting as “garbage bins” for the retail sector. This system creates an unequal power dynamic where supermarkets profit through tax breaks while relying on the unpaid care work of volunteers to sustain their systems of overproduction. Ultimately, this thesis questions the sustainability of redistribution as a primary solution for FLW, arguing for a transition toward FLW prevention at the source combined with greater structural support for associations.

Keywords: Food Loss and Waste, Lyon, food redistribution associations, Loi Garot, Responsibilisation, Power

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List of abbreviations

BA: Banque Alimentaire

EU: European Union

FLW: Food Loss and Waste

FPE: Feminist Political Ecology

FW: Food Waste

GHG: Greenhouse Gas

PE: Political Ecology

RDC: Restaurants du Coeur

RQ: Research Question

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

1. Introduction

On an autumn day in 2025, I decided to join a friend on their mission to look through accessible supermarket bins to see if we could save some food while finding products for our dinner the next day. What we found were kilos of perfectly wholesome and edible food, thrown away by the supermarket. Cucumbers, salad, bananas, oranges and apples were just a few of the items that were lying in the bin ready to be destroyed. This was just a drop in the ocean of what can be considered the systemic issue of food loss and waste (FLW). Food is a basic human need and shapes everyone's daily life. Yet, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) calculates that in 2022, around 1.05 billion tonnes of food were wasted globally, taking up the equivalent of 30% of agricultural land and amounting to 8-10% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Forbes et al., 2024). If we stopped wasting this food, we would save enough to feed twice the number of undernourished people worldwide (World Food Program, 2026), eliminating world hunger.

These estimates do not even include the food lost during primary production, such as cultivation and harvest (Teigiserova et al., 2020). As no shared definition is yet commonly acknowledged on what exactly FLW represents (Damiani et al., 2021), this leads to a wide range of estimates. Despite these variations, FLW remains a pressing and global problem. Wasting food results in wasting land, water, energy, labour and capital that flows into its production (Kalogiannidis et al., 2025). This represents not only an environmental but also an economic and social problem as it causes significant economic losses and persists while many still suffer from hunger (Kalogiannidis et al., 2025). In the European Union (EU) alone, 58 million tonnes of food are wasted per year, post-primary production, while 42 million people cannot afford a quality meal every second day (European Commission, n.d.a).

Reducing FLW has become an important public policy and governmental issue in recent years (Szulecka et al., 2024). Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as ending world hunger (SDG 2) and combating climate change (SDG 13) have been identified to depend on reducing FLW (Manzoor et al., 2024). Especially the target to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level by 2030 (SDG 12.3) (United Nations, n.d.) has brought forward the commitment of the EU to meet this goal and implement new binding targets. The 2025 EU waste framework directives aim to cut 10% of food waste from processing and manufacturing and 30% jointly from retail and consumption by 2030 (Directive 2025/1892).

France can be considered a pioneer in this domain as it is one of the few countries that has introduced a binding legal framework tackling FLW (Vaqué, 2017). The Loi Garot, or anti-food waste law (*Loi anti-gaspillage alimentaire*), implemented in 2016, has been advocated by several media outlets to have “banned food waste from supermarkets” (Chrisafis, 2016; Markert, 2023). It has earned close international attention and contributed to ranking France first in the food sustainability index¹ (Mourad, 2022). The law requires distributors with sales areas over 400 m², caterers serving more than 3,000 meals per day, and food processing companies and wholesalers with a turnover above €50 million to donate surplus food to food aid organisations (Ministère de l’agriculture, 2024). However, while many believe that the law completely bans supermarkets from discarding their surplus, it only implies that supermarkets sign a contract with organisations that redistribute the food (Eubanks, 2019). The law, therefore, does not determine how much food should be donated. One box of chocolate per year would theoretically be compliant with the law (Mourad, 2022).

Food distribution in France is implemented through charity organisations fighting food precarity. The French government has issued a list of all associations authorised at the national level to receive donations from the retail sector (Ministère de l’agriculture, 2025). Typically, these associations pick up consumable products that hold no more monetary value to the store, sort them and redistribute them to people in need. While these associations have been commissioned to redistribute surplus from the retail sector, little attention has been given to this important step. While authors have debated to what extent the law is effective in reducing FLW from the sides of the supermarkets (Eubanks, 2019; Schraeder, 2023; Szulecka et al., 2024), research has fallen short of showing what happens to the food after it is donated. Therefore, my research objective is to understand the impacts and shortcomings of food redistribution policies under a pioneering legislative framework, with particular attention to the perspective of actors whose voices have not yet been amplified.

Food waste is a complex interdisciplinary sustainability issue that not only exceeds planetary boundaries but also exacerbates social inequalities. Sustainability science aims to find solutions to these complex challenges (Jerneck et al., 2011). Through this research, I contribute to the corpus of sustainability science not by proposing a solution to the challenge but rather by critically addressing a

¹ The Food Sustainability Index ranks countries on food system sustainability based on 3 pillars: FLW, sustainable agriculture and nutritional challenges. It analyzes the G20 countries as well as 5 nations from regions otherwise unrepresented. (FAO, n.d.)

law that has been framed as such. As redistribution frameworks are now encouraged through the 2025 EU waste framework directives (directive 2025/1892, §1), I intend to inform governments and relevant actors aiming to implement food redistribution as a strategy to reduce FLW. By performing qualitative research in Lyon, I will answer the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: Which challenges and constraints emerge within organisations receiving donations under the Loi Garot?

RQ2: How does the Loi Garot reconfigure responsibilities for food surplus/waste management between retail and associations receiving donations?

To address these questions, I draw on the field of feminist political ecology (FPE) and responsabilisation theory. The following parts present a review of previous scholarly engagement with FLW, food redistribution and the Loi Garot. Subsequently, I will present my theoretical framework, research methodology, the research findings, and end with a concluding discussion summarizing the shortcomings of food redistribution under the Loi Garot.

2. Setting the Scene on Food Loss and Waste

While there is no agreed-upon definition of FLW, Damiani et al. (2021) argue that different terminologies are related to the phase of the value chain in which the loss/waste is generated. Food loss (FL) occurs at production, processing, storage and distribution stages, while food waste (FW) occurs at retail and consumption stages (Salan & Hossain, 2024). In my analysis, I will mostly focus on the retail sector, hence use Albizzati et al. (2019)'s definition of FW, stipulating that it is the share of surplus food sent to disposal, where surplus food is "food and beverages that have not been sold or are not marketable but are still suitable for human consumption" (p.142).

2.1. Causes for food loss and waste

FLW causes depend on climate, culture, diet, economic development and popular food products (Szulecka et al., 2024). Canali et al. (2017) argue that there are no clear determinants responsible for FLW, as it is the result of a complex pattern of diversified and interconnected causes. However, Mourad (2022) identifies the intensive and capitalistic food production as a significant driver of FLW. As supermarket shelves must always be full and reflect a norm of abundance, too many products are

available and hence thrown away. FLW is thereby built into the agri-food system in a systemic sense to guarantee a constant availability (Welch et al., 2018).

Gascón (2018) also argues that the root cause of FLW lies in the hegemonic agri-food system and unequal power relations between agri-food chain actors. He argues that supermarkets encourage a tendency to plan for surplus as suppliers need to meet contracted volumes with supermarkets. In this case, suppliers would rather end up with excess production than not meet the required amounts and risk losing contracts with supermarkets. Additionally, products must meet a certain appearance, i.e. their size, colour or shape. While farming generates a variety of product appearances, these end up wasted because they do not reach supermarket shelves or are not bought by customers (Gascón, 2018). Arcuri (2019) also argues that FLW often represents a food system inefficiency and results from the loss of monetary value attached to food, which happens when, e.g. one mandarin is mouldy in a bag of 2kg, where consequently the whole bag is discarded.

Certain food laws have also been identified to driving FW levels (Bradshaw, 2018). As food is a perishable product, laws have been implemented to ensure its safe management. The EU prohibits the donation or sale of 'unsafe food' and requires most pre-packaged food to have either a 'best-before' date, concerned with food quality or a 'use-by' date which is concerned with food safety (Bradshaw, 2018). The use-by dates are for highly perishable products that can, shortly after their expiration, constitute a direct danger to human health. Bradshaw (2018) argues that, while certain products do not require labels, e.g., fruits and vegetables, retailers routinely do so, in addition to adopting large error margins to safeguard against liability. This undermines FW reduction imperatives as actors are legally obliged to throw away food perfectly fit for human consumption (Bradshaw, 2018; Gumbert, 2022).

2.2. Food waste hierarchy

To guide stakeholders in reducing their FLW, the EU promotes the Food Waste (FW) Hierarchy as a guiding framework (Figure 1). It ranks FW management options from the least to the most environmentally friendly (De Laurentiis et al., 2024). In this research, I am informed by the FW hierarchy as it is incorporated in the Loi Garot (see section 2.4.). I specifically focus on its second level, namely donation or redistribution of surplus food.

Food waste prevention, when potential surplus food is not produced, is considered the highest priority,

as it contributes to the biggest reduction of resource use (Sundin et al., 2023). However, Mourad (2016) argues that this first level of the hierarchy is often last in practice. The second level represents the reuse of surplus for human consumption (Teigiserova et al., 2020). This entails that companies donate unsold products that are still fit for human consumption to, for example, charity organisations (Sundin et al., 2023). Yet, Teigiserova et al. (2020) state that surplus food is tied to strict hygiene and safety norms that can limit the quantity of food that can be reused. The next steps in the hierarchy are recovering food waste by converting it into animal or industrial products, followed by using food as a fertiliser or biogas or recovering it as energy through anaerobic digestion. The last option is disposal (De Laurentiis et al., 2024; Schraeder, 2023).

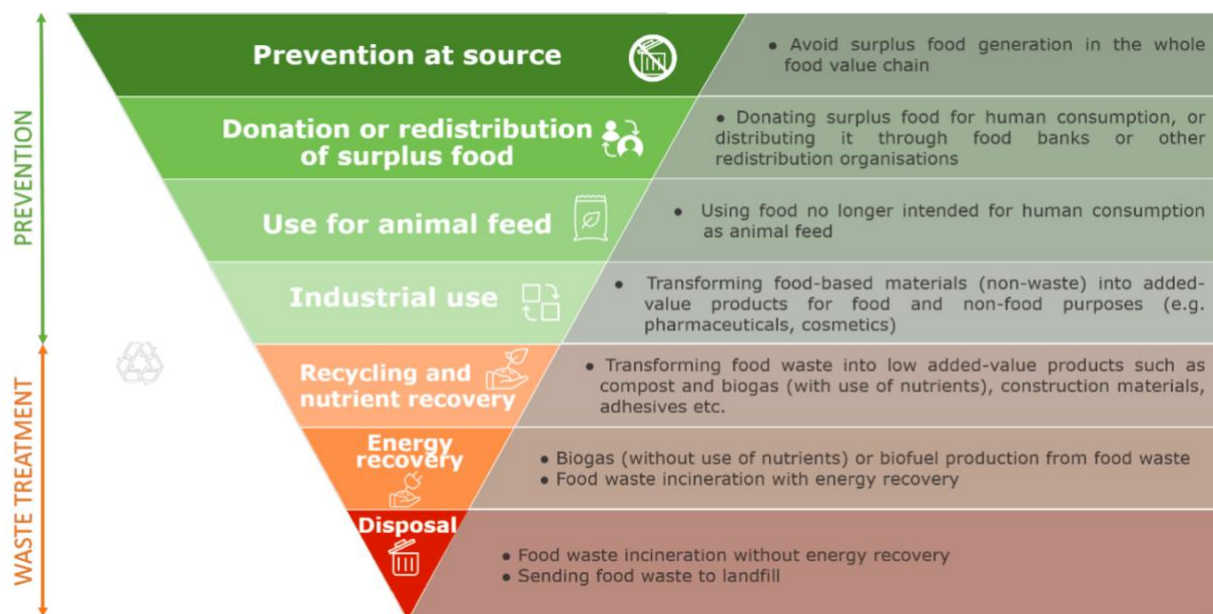


Figure 1. Hierarchy for the prioritisation of options to manage food surplus, by-products from food processing and food waste, as applied by the European Union (Source: De Laurentiis et al., 2024).

While the FW hierarchy is commonly used as a framework to define preferred FW governance strategies, it does not give concrete actors responsibilities and governance tools (Szulecka et al., 2024). Albizzati et al. (2019) argue that when managing surplus food, following the food waste hierarchy provides the largest environmental benefits, as redistributing edible products offers less environmental costs than, e.g. scenarios involving energy production. This is also supported by Redlingshöfer et al. (2020), saying that applying the waste hierarchy to food helps decrease GHG emissions. Nevertheless, according to Van Ewijk and Stegemann (2016) it is insufficient to achieve an

absolute reduction in material throughput, especially because food waste prevention at the source is rarely being prioritised (Mourad, 2016).

2.3. Food redistribution

Increasingly pursued as a strategy to fight food waste (Gumbert, 2022; Szulecka et al., 2024), food redistribution can be defined as “the process by which surplus food is recovered, collected and provided to people, in particular those in need” (Damiani et al., 2021, p.3). Portrayed as a “win-win solution” to decrease poverty, food insecurity and food waste, it is argued that food surplus redistribution can lead to significant environmental, economic and social benefits (Arcuri, 2019; Salan & Hossain, 2024; Sundin et al., 2023; Vittuari et al., 2017). Although it is estimated that the retail sector produces around 5% of FLW that is created throughout the food system, for Albizzati et al. (2019) it represents an important aspect of FLW minimisation, being the collection point for large amounts of food, connecting the consumer and producer sectors.

Achieving a sustainable food waste management system can be facilitated through the redistribution of retail surplus (Makanjuola et al., 2020; Salan & Hossain, 2024). Sundin et al. (2023) have found that, despite some wastage, food donations in Sweden were effective, as 78% of redistributed surplus was eaten. Albizzati et al. (2019) suggest that redistributing surplus food instead of discarding it has a significant global warming saving potential. A case study in the city of Ferrara, in Italy, has also found that through food redistribution, 90 tonnes of food collected generated 10.000€ of savings in waste treatment (Féret, 2019).

Additionally, redistribution has a rather positive influence on individuals (Vittuari et al., 2017; Wolfson & Greeno, 2018). It can help overcome social exclusion and moderately increase their chances for future employment, acquiring new skills and being integrated into society (Vittuari et al., 2017). It showed positive outcomes for one’s diet, health, and food budget (Wolfson & Greeno, 2018). It also helped reduce stress about food budgeting, providing recipients more opportunities to choose how they spend their limited financial resources (Wolfson & Greeno, 2018).

While food redistribution brings considerable advantages, my investigation in Lyon is guided by its shortcomings. Sundin et al. (2023) argue that it only presents short-term potential to address sustainability concerns as it fails to address the root cause of food waste and food insecurity. Tecchio et al. (2023) argue that active inflation exacerbated food precarity and the need for food aid in France

in recent years. While they argue that food redistribution helps in some parts, it is far from being the solution to food precarity (Tecchio et al., 2023). Donating surplus food to food-insecure people may serve to enable business-as-usual rather than contest it (Spring & Biddulph, 2020). Arcuri (2019) states that while food waste should be reduced, it is at the same time a resource in high demand to be redistributed. She asserts that if food waste remains the main channel for food aid, few incentives are taken to tackle overproduction (Arcuri, 2019). Bergström et al. (2020) claim that food waste reduction cannot be dependent upon food precarity, as to achieve a sustainable society, we need to both reduce poverty and the production of surplus food.

Lastly, redistributing surplus food also requires efficient mechanisms of recovery and redistribution, in terms of sizing, logistics and consumption (Damiani et al., 2021), which are often based on voluntary work and donations (Arcuri, 2019). It is a costly and complex endeavour (Gumbert, 2022) and can enhance greenwashing from companies when the costs of redistribution are not covered (Davies & McGeever, 2022). Finally, food distribution can also enhance problems with stigmatisation associated with receiving food aid, as it is sometimes believed to be a demeaning solution (Arcuri, 2019).

2.4. Loi Garot (Loi n2016-138 du 11 février)

The Loi Garot, as wrongly assumed, is not a complete ban on food waste from supermarkets (Mourad, 2022). The only thing that the law has banned is the process of purposefully destroying edible food, e.g. using bleach or chemicals (Mourad, 2022). The law implies that supermarkets sign a contract with associations redistributing surplus (Eubanks, 2019; Vaqué, 2017) and adhere to the waste hierarchy (Leipold et al., 2021). This promotes social expectations of donating food, rather than requiring it, relying on voluntary engagement, making the law suasive (Mourad, 2022; Szulecka et al., 2024). The law also requires food waste prevention curricula in professional training programmes and in classrooms, though gaining less attention than the supposedly 'ban on food waste' (Mourad, 2022). The Loi Garot is the first punitive food waste law, as it implies sanctions for non-compliance, which have not yet been issued (Mourad, 2022). However, this legislative threat is argued to have helped mobilise into more ambitious food waste prevention (Szulecka et al., 2024).

France has had an active tax policy encouraging food donations since the 1980s (Szulecka et al., 2024). In the wake of the Loi Garot, the percentage of supermarkets donating surplus rose from 66% in 2016 to 96% in 2019, and more than half donated every day (Mourad, 2022). Eubanks (2019) argues that the Loi Garot has positively impacted French society "by fighting against hunger and the environmental

impact of food waste at no cost to the state or to businesses” (p.679). Additionally, it made businesses sell discounted soon-to-be-wasted products before donating them, creating a new ‘sustainable consumption’ market niche (Mourad, 2022). Lastly, the law integrated the fight against food waste into aid schemes, where Leipold et al. (2021) have argued that it facilitated the emergence of new forms of solidarity, multiplying self-organised collectives and activist initiatives.

While the law has had a significant impact on increased donations, authors have also raised criticism of its effectiveness and environmental impact (Eubanks, 2019; Leipold et al., 2021; Mourad, 2022; Schraeder, 2023; Szulecka et al., 2024), these are tightly related to the shortcomings of redistribution. First, the retail sector only produces 5% of FLW in France, leaving most sectors unimpacted by the legislation (Eubanks, 2019; Schraeder, 2023). Second, as previously mentioned, it does not establish the amount of food that should be donated (Schraeder, 2023). And third, it has been criticised for failing to address the problem of capitalistic overproduction, leading to most of the food waste (Eubanks, 2019; Leipold et al., 2021; Mourad, 2022; Szulecka et al., 2024).

The Loi Garot can give a false idea of a “magic solution to food waste” (Eubanks, 2019, p.681). Mourad (2022) argues that focusing on food redistribution goes at the expense of prevention measures that would address overproduction, access to quality food, and how we value food. She asserts that to minimise the impact of food waste, a form of prevention is needed that targets the generation of surplus food at the root. The Loi Garot, according to her, neither solves food waste nor food insecurity problems. Szulecka et al. (2024) additionally argue that the Loi Garot is deeply rooted in the neoliberal paradigm, emphasising business innovation and redistribution as solutions to the food waste crisis, rather than tackling its root causes. It might also encourage the discourse around “the more surplus the better” (Szulecka et al., 2024).

Lastly, Mourad (2022) also argued that food banks received limited financial support to expand their capacities and still had to throw away some of the food they received (11% thrown away in 2018 compared to 8% in 2016). This suggests a decrease in the quality of donations after the implementation of the law, whereas food banks clearly stated that they did not want to become the garbage bins of supermarkets by receiving damaged, blemished, near/past the expiration date or nutritionally inappropriate products (Mourad, 2022). However, under the law, the charity organisations have the right to determine what donated food they accept (Eubanks, 2019), only allowing products that are 48 hours before their expiration date (Mourad, 2022).

3. Theoretical Framework

To understand how redistribution of food under the Loi Garot impacts receiving associations, I take inspiration from political ecology (PE) as an overall approach. I specifically draw from feminist political ecology (FPE) as it highlights frequently overlooked labour, care work, and gendered dynamics that sustain societal systems and environmental governance (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018; Sultana, 2021). To highlight how responsibility for FW management is shifted, I will use the theory of responsabilisation stemming from Foucauldian notions on the new mode of governmentality (Rose et al., 2009), which is “understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour” (Foucault, 1997, p.82). As both sets of theories draw on notions of power, I argue that combining responsabilisation theory and FPE provides a strong theoretical and analytical lens as they can complement each other to showcase previously overshadowed dynamics and potentially unintended consequences of the Loi Garot.

3.1. Feminist political ecology

FPE brings together a feminist perspective on the analysis of ecological, economic, and political power relations in a single framework (Thomas-Slayter et al., 1996). It has emerged as a subfield of PE (Elmhirst, 2015; Mollet, 2017), which aims to understand the complex relations between society and nature through analysing who has access and control over resources and the related implications for sustainability (Elmhirst, 2011). PE discloses how social inequalities are structural, highlighting how power relations are integral to the central organisation of societies (Mollet, 2017). Within FW governance, Gumbert (2022) argues that little attention has been given to power dynamics, complex structural drivers and the possibility that FW generation is a conscious act that benefits some actors over others.

While FPE traditionally tends to see gender as the most significant factor in resource struggles (Mollet, 2017), it has increasingly been used to research broader inequalities within environmental governance (Harcourt, 2023; Sultana, 2021). Drawing on different feminist critiques, FPE highlights what is often overlooked and obscured (Sultana, 2021). It interrogates structural forms of power and differentiated responsibilities in the access and control of resources through a range of social differences such as gender, race, age, ability, class and sexuality (Clement et al., 2019).

Feminist scholars have interrogated the invisibility of certain societal and environmental work

(Harcourt, 2023; Mies & Shiva, 1993). Though the act of care is fundamental to our survival and wellbeing, it is often invisibilised, not counted as profitable or productive, and performed mostly by marginalised groups (Harcourt, 2023). These insights have been taken up in FPE to analyse how environmental governance relies on often feminised and undervalued labour to implement sustainability initiatives (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018). For example, a case study in Laos has highlighted that ecological care work, fundamental to sustaining local forests and their value chains, was mostly carried out by local civic organisations, but this work remains largely unrecognised and uncompensated (Gutiérrez-Zamora & Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2026). Overall, FPE takes critical stances on capitalism, patriarchy, extractivism and various forms of inter-connected oppressions and injustices (Sultana, 2021).

3.2. Responsibilisation

Responsibilisation refers to a process strongly associated with neoliberal politics, where subjects are rendered responsible for something that would have previously been the duty of another, usually a state agency (Juhila & Raitakari, 2016). It has been applied to a range of fields to reveal how governments, agencies, and organisations transfer responsibilities to individual agents, communities and lower-level decision-making bodies (Mustalahti & Agrawal, 2020). These, in turn, adopt the governance goals and carry the given responsibilities as their own (Mustalahti & Agrawal, 2020). This has been argued to be “a way out of obligations” for powerful actors by shifting their responsibility onto third parties and continuing to do business as usual (Mustalahti et al., 2020).

Responsibilisation theory has developed following Foucault’s influential writings on governmentality (Mustalahti & Agrawal, 2020; Rose et al., 2009). The latter entails employing different tactics or laws to arrange things so that the end goal is achieved (Foucault, 2007). It has been employed to illuminate how power shapes institutions, governments, knowledge, and technologies at various scales (Jackson et al., 2023). Governmentality offers an analytical toolbox to critically develop understandings of, among others, the governance of sustainability challenges (Stripple & Bulkeley, 2013). Within the governance of natural resources, interventions increasingly rely on citizens, communities, and local authorities to be responsible for their own well-being and resource sustainability (Mustalahti et al., 2020). For example, the REDD+ forestry conservation program has been labelled as successful but has been unable to enhance the livelihoods of those dependent on the forest, who carry the responsibility to enhance its conservation (Mustalahti et al., 2020).

As mentioned above, responsabilisation theory is strongly related to neoliberalism. This is a form of governmental rule where states govern less through society but rather through the 'entrepreneurship of autonomous actors', entailing that responsibilities from governmental agencies are shifted towards organisations without electoral responsibility and accountability (Ilcan & Basok, 2004). Foucault (1997) argues that under neoliberalism, the state maintains the infrastructure of order, while society promotes individual and national well-being through their responsibility and enterprise, where society is considered external to the state. This highlights that the government is less engaged in traditional planning but is rather involved in enabling and assisting citizens to take responsibility for problems in their communities (Juhila & Raitakari, 2016). Neoliberal modes of responsabilisation are increasingly powerful and pervasive technologies of governance (Trnka & Trundle, 2014) and often entail fiscal policies (Ilcan & Basok, 2004). Within neoliberal climate governance, corporations and governments frame climate interventions as opportunities to make profit, expand markets and thus reproduce capitalism itself (Jackson et al., 2023).

One of the core consequences of responsabilisation processes is the recognition of local responsibilities in ways described as governing at a distance (Juhila & Raitakari, 2016). In this instance, responsibilities are increasingly allocated to the civil society level and NGOs, usually monitored and commissioned by the state for the content and outcomes of the services. This leads to voluntary agencies becoming largely responsible for assisting disadvantaged people (Ilcan & Basok, 2004). Rose et al. (2009) argue that the state increasingly divests itself of many of its obligations and rather governs quasi-autonomous entities through benchmarks, budgets, standards and other technologies that are responsabilising and autonomising. This results in volunteers being "transformed into responsabilised service providers rather than social justice-oriented advocates" (Ilcan & Basok, 2004, p.141), which risks turning NGOs from voluntary activism towards professional working arrangements (Mustalahti & Agrawal, 2020). Consequently, NGOs become responsible for well-being outcomes demanded by governmental institutions or donors, leading to less freedom to innovate voluntary actions (Mustalahti & Agrawal, 2020).

Responsibilisation theory has been applied to natural resource governance, where Mustalahti et al. (2020) have shown that "sustainable" interventions have transferred tasks and duties to communities without adequately fitting their capacities, capabilities, and resources. On the other side, powerful actors such as governments, industries, or businesses having the leverage for transformative change, maintained their positions of domination, reproducing business as usual, and failed to effectively

address the challenges at hand (Döbbe, 2023). Responsibilisation outcomes will thus vary depending on the extent to which local decision-makers or NGOs possess the power, resources, and authority to implement enforced decisions to govern resources in a responsive and accountable way (Mustalahti & Agrawal, 2020).

Top-down responsabilisation does not ensure the empowerment of duty bearers nor the adequate change at the structural level (Mustalahti et al., 2020). Approaching responsabilisation from a grassroots level and a bottom-up perspective highlights conflicting meanings and consequences for everyday life (Juhila & Raitakari, 2016). Hence, by analysing the impact of rearrangements in the governance of food waste management, I will be able to approach the impact of the Loi Garot from a grassroots perspective and contribute to the theoretical corpus of responsabilisation within natural resource governance.

4. Methodological Approach

4.1. Research design

In this research, I employ a short-term ethnographic approach, allowing for “immersion” into people’s lived realities to understand everyday and embodied practices and politics. It is based on the same epistemological commitments as traditional ethnographic research (Dumont, 2022). Ethnography seeks to understand human groups by having the researcher in the same social space as the participants of the study (Madden, 2017). I specifically draw from organisational ethnography, enabling me to produce a more practice-based and grounded understanding of organisational life (Watson, 2012). As organisational ethnography relies on participant observation and intensive fieldwork (Gaggiottia et al., 2017), I drew from informal conversations, participant observation and semi-structured interviews during a 6-week fieldwork in Lyon, France (2 February to 17 March 2026). Additionally, I also draw from autoethnography, offering a way to give voice to my personal experiences (Wall, 2008). This entails reflecting on my own embodied experiences through a research diary and photographs, while volunteering at the researched organisations. I volunteered at different organisations with the intention of understanding the impact of the donations but let the informal conversations and field observation in the first three weeks guide my theoretical approach. This means that the latter and the related formulation of interview questions were based on informal conversations and observations I made within the different organisations (Figure 2).

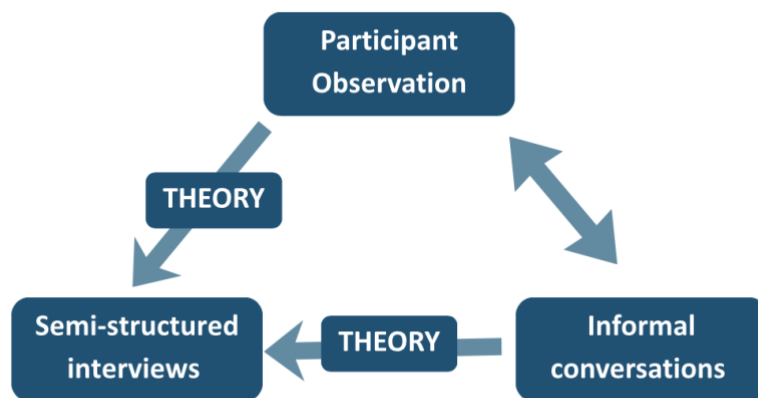


Figure 2. Triangulated research design. The arrow symbolises “informs” (own conceptualisation)

4.2. Case selection

I performed this study in Lyon, France. As I am focusing on the organisations receiving food donations, I aimed to gather data in a city where all prominent organisations receiving donations from the retail sector are located (Restaurants du Coeur, La Banque Alimentaire, and Linkee). These are present in the cities of Paris, Lille, Lyon, Nantes, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Montpellier, and Marseille. I decided to select Lyon as it is known for its strong gastronomic culture (OnlyLyon, n.d.) and presented a reasonable scale for the research.

I have identified the main organisations receiving food donations through the website of the French government (Ministère de l’agriculture, 2025). I reached out to all organisations listed, while some have answered that they do not collaborate with supermarkets, some have explained that they get their donations through the Banque Alimentaire (BA). The latter is a logistical centre collecting high quantities of supermarket surplus, sorting it and redistributing it to 106 smaller associations in Lyon. In total, I researched seven organisations: five receiving direct donations from supermarkets (three formal and two informal) and two receiving their food supply from the BA. All are located in the city of Lyon or its outskirts. As I was not able to participate in all associations receiving food from the BA, I chose two organisations from the 106 based on contacts that the BA sent me. Additionally, I found two informal organisations through additional research on social media.

4.3. Data Collection

4.3.1. *Informal conversations and participant observations*

Participant observation can be considered the core of ethnographic research (Madden, 2017). I spent a total of 66 hours volunteering at different organisations. The hours I invested in the different organisations depended on their operating mode, their different tasks and the significance of food donations that they would receive. I spent less time in associations that were not receiving direct donations from the retail sector. The tasks I was generally involved in were picking up food from the supermarkets, sorting the food, and distributing the food to either individuals or other associations. Informal conversations I had with volunteers and employees were neither audio recorded, nor taken note of during the conversation, as I did not want to pose a distraction to the conversations. At the end of every field day, I gathered my observations, discussions and reflections in a digital document. At all times, I was transparent about my position as a researcher.

4.3.2. *Semi-structured interviews*

To complement the observations, I performed 11 semi-structured interviews with a total of 14 participants (Appendix A). This method allowed me to be flexible in my structure and questions, which differed depending on the interviewees and the organisations. Hence, I had both an interview guide for volunteers and people who were overseeing the logistics of food collections and distribution (Appendix B & C). All interviews were conducted in French. Semi-structured interviews enabled me to draw on both open-ended and theory-informed questions (Galletta, 2013). I interviewed different participants from 27 February to 17 March 2026, which lasted between 17 minutes to 1hour19. All interviews took place in person, in Lyon, except one, which was held online. While most interviews were only with one person, I also conducted two group interviews with two and three participants respectively. One participant was volunteering in two informal associations. All interviewees were informed about the treatment and anonymisation of their data and consented to the interview being recorded (Appendix D). All interviews were transcribed with the help of the application GoodTape.

4.4. Data Analysis

To analyse the data I gathered, I used a thematic analysis, which enabled me to interpret patterns and meanings across my data (Fugard et al., 2020). For this, I used the qualitative coding application NVivo. I coded abductively, meaning that I both coded deductively, using preconfigured themes stemming

from my theoretical framework, and inductively, based on emerging codes in my interviews. I divided my analysis into my two research questions.

My first research question, which explores constraints and challenges, was primarily addressed through inductive coding. In contrast, for the second research question, which addresses how responsibilities are shifted, I utilised preconceived themes derived from responsabilisation theory and FPE. This theoretical framework was iterative; it stemmed from and was refined by field observations, evolving dynamically throughout the research process.

I followed Braun and Clarke (2022)'s approach to thematic analysis. I did one round of initial codings and further identified, reviewed and defined themes through a second round. A coding diagram structuring my findings can be found in Appendix E. I did not thoroughly code my field notes, as I only used them to inform the findings from the interviews. I translated the quotes presented in the findings from French into English.

4.5. Ethical considerations

I carefully examined ethical considerations prior to my fieldwork. To respect participants and avoid harm, they needed to sign a consent form before the interviews to ensure confidentiality. Several organisations insisted on not being related to specific findings. Hence, to mitigate the risk of deductive disclosure, organizational data essential to addressing the RQs are decoupled from individual interview sources². I decided not to display the name of the informal associations as the findings present sensitive and personal information, relevant for the research but breaching confidentiality if exposed by name. Hence, when mentioning these informal associations, I will use the pseudonym (Elsa) I gave to one of their members. The anonymised transcripts, consent forms, and recordings were stored on a password-protected personal cloud. All recordings were deleted from the recording device once uploaded and transcribed.

Lastly, my research was not guided by neutrality. FPE requires reflexivity, reciprocity and interactive learning (Harcourt, 2026). I chose to research food waste as I am concerned by the careless waste of resources in times of climate breakdown and unequal access to resources (IPCC, 2023). I position myself as a feminist researcher aiming to bring forward possibilities for a more sustainable and caring

² When using a quote to illustrate challenges specific to an organization, I do not relate it to an interview.

society, which is shown in the findings of this research. Showing my opinions on the topic of food waste in informal conversations also enabled me to have more relevant discussions and findings. However, not being neutral does not equal being uncritical. Throughout the research, I gave great care to be reflexive about my granted assumptions and positionality, additional to bringing forward the complexity and paradoxical nature of the topic.

5. Unpacking Food Redistribution in Lyon

The following paragraphs will answer research question one by unpacking the challenges and constraints that associations experience when handling donations from the retail sector. I will explain the aim of these associations and why the supermarket surplus is essential to them, followed by an explanation on the challenges related to logistics and the quality of the donations. Lastly, I will show the constraints that associations experience in meeting the demand for surplus redistribution.

5.1. Aim of food redistribution associations

Surplus food generated by supermarkets or wholesalers is distributed to various charitable organisations in Lyon, whether official or informal (Figure 2). All official organisations place social help at the core of their operations, as they aim to fight food insecurity. One employee explained that using consumable surplus that would otherwise be thrown away is the right lever to pull, as it reduces costs and contributes to a better society (interview 1). A volunteer explained: “If we had to buy everything we receive in supermarkets, we would have had to close down, quite clearly, because financially, we wouldn’t be able to make ends meet” (interview 11). They also explained that we are in an urgent situation where people increasingly rely on food aid, and that without the charitable sector, beneficiaries would be left with nothing (interview 11). The informal organisations I have researched distribute food with the aim of reducing food waste and making it available to anyone who wants it.

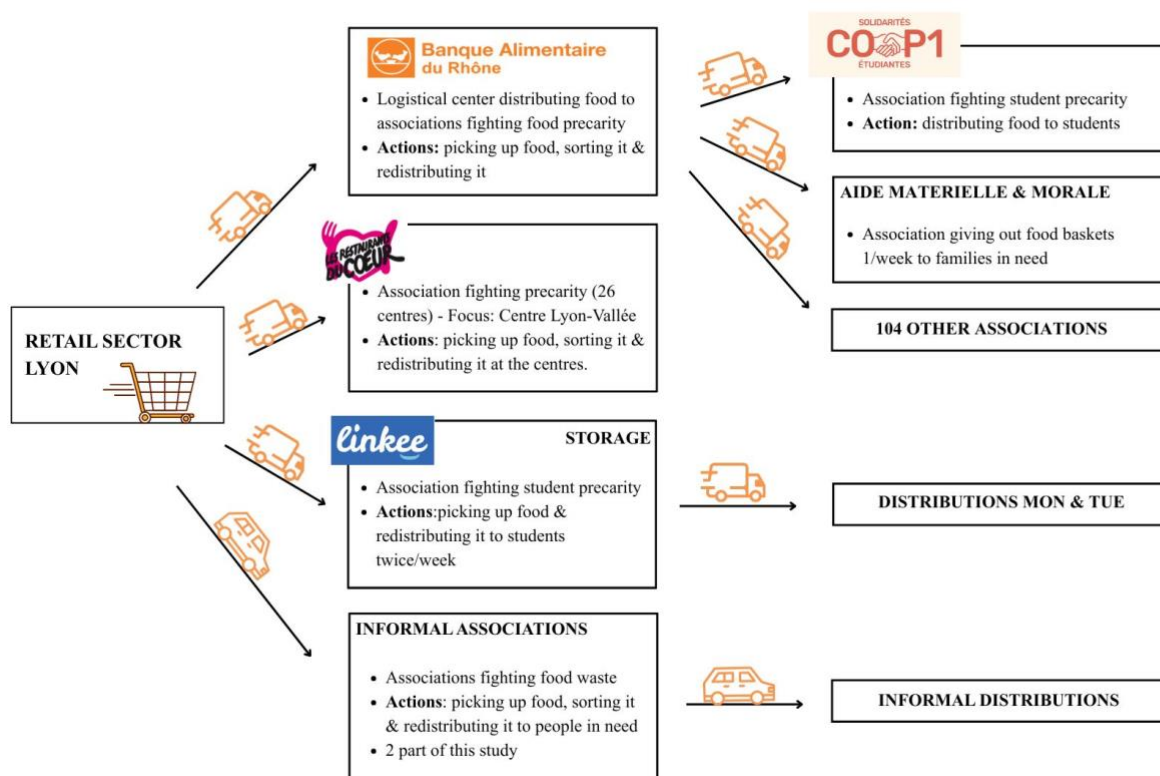


Figure 2. Infographic of food distribution from the retail sector in Lyon (own conceptualisation)

5.2. The challenges of food redistribution

5.2.1. Logistics

A variety of supermarkets donate their unsold goods to charities in Lyon. However, recipient organisations must travel to each store, collect products, return to their base, sort items, and redistribute them to beneficiaries. These operations require complex logistics, flexibility and availability. Some associations have dedicated remunerated positions for this task, while others lack the funds to do so.

Collecting donations demands substantial logistics and resources. Sometimes the distance between the organisation's storage and supermarkets is considerable. To collect donations from three stores for the BA, another volunteer and I drove 45 minutes both forth and back and were busy for three hours. Some actors reported refusing donations because the distance made collection unfeasible. One informal association relies entirely on Elsa, who uses her own car to collect the food and her own house to sort and store it. At times, she must make multiple trips because her car cannot accommodate large

volumes (Picture 1).

Perishable food is officially prohibited to be redistributed past its use-by date (Bradshaw, 2018). However, most donations received by the organisations are very close to their expiration date. Interviewees overseeing logistics mentioned that this brings an additional logistical constraint as these donations need to be redistributed under time-pressure. The same challenge arises with fruits and vegetables that are already slightly damaged, as they need to be redistributed fast before they mould. While this is a general challenge for all organisations, some are more affected than others. The BA, which handles the highest amounts of surplus from the retail sector, does not always have the time and capacities to handle short dates and sometimes must refuse certain donations for these reasons. Since the BA redistributes food to other associations, the products must have a sufficient expiration margin to ensure that the receiving association can still redistribute them. Some associations take products from the BA that expire on the same day, but when no association has the capacity to do so, there is no other option than throwing the food away. On the other hand, the Restaurants du Coeur (RDC), for example, struggle less with short date products as they are able to redistribute them during the days of the pick-up, being their distribution days.

Additionally, associations need to follow the concept of a cold chain. This is a supply chain using refrigeration to maintain perishable goods such as fish, yoghurts, meat or cheese at a temperature that ensures their quality from pick up until distribution. Some associations are not able to do this as they do not have enough refrigerated storage space or a refrigerated truck. Interviewee 10 mentioned: “I’m talking about perishable goods [...] They need to be kept in fridges, which we don’t have. We’re in third place. There are regular power cuts. That could lead to the loss of this stock. And then, apart from the fact that we would lose the stock, well, we’d have to throw it out if we had fridges”.

Elsa mentioned that she lacks the capacities to maintain the cold chain. Even though she has eight fridges, she cannot store all the products she gets. Hence, she has to deal with products that are perishing more quickly than expected. She explained: “When it’s winter, I use my garden shed as a gigantic fridge. On the other hand, when it’s summer, it’s horrible” (Interview 8) (Picture 2). This entails significant logistical work to sort and distribute the products as fast as possible.

Interviewee 1 has highlighted that “there's a slightly perverse effect. That is, companies are asked to approach charities to collect these food items, but then, we're not asking the companies to support the associations with the logistics.” This shows processes of responsabilisation, further developed in

section 6, where charities have been commissioned with performing a service that was previously the duty of another, i.e. the retail sector, but have not sufficiently been supported for performing this service (Juhila & Raitakari, 2016; Mustalahti et al., 2020).



Picture 1 & 2. From left to right: (1) picture of Elsa's garden house used as a fridge, when the picture was taken it was already around 15 degrees in Lyon. (2) Products from one small supermarket collected by Elsa in her car. Source: Own photos 21 February 2026.

5.2.2. Quality of donations

Findings show that all associations face similar challenges when handling donations from supermarkets. They get many good products, but some that need to be thrown away directly. The state of the donations often depends on the store and the association receiving them. One volunteer mentioned, "Some stores I would be ashamed if I were them" (Interview 4).

When I was volunteering at the BA, the quantities they were forced to throw away due to hygienic standards were considerable. Every day, they need to throw away several full trash boxes (see pictures 4-6). One day, when sorting through the fresh products, I had to throw away 26 full boxes of six kilos of salad (amounting to 156kg) as it had reached its use-by date the day before (see picture 3). Volunteers from the BA have mentioned that they realised the amount of food wasted in society

through their work at the BA.



Pictures 3-6. Products thrown away by the BA due to hygienic standards. From left to right: (3) Boxes of salad over the “best before date”. (4) Trash box of vegetables in damaged conditions meant for compost. (5) Trash box filled with mouldy aubergines and other vegetables meant for compost. (6) Trash box filled with fresh products that are over the use-by date meant for compost. Source: own pictures 3 & 18 February 2026.

Findings show that several associations are struggling with expired and mouldy products. A volunteer at the RDC, for example, mentioned that they recently got a donation of 50kg of carrots, but they could only keep 1-2 kg. At the BA, they got an offer of 800kg of tomatoes, but they would have had to throw half of them away, which they then refused. The reasons for this were as follows:

There are more items to throw away than to distribute, so ultimately it's a waste of time and fuel for the driver who makes the trip back and forth, a waste of time for the people managing the logistics, the volunteers who leave their homes to come and sort through things for close to nothing, because they are sorting items that they will end up having to throw away themselves, which makes it even more heartbreaking. (Interview undisclosed)³

Moreover, associations struggle to redistribute food that is not part of the beneficiaries' eating habits, such as winter vegetables (e.g., Brussels sprouts or endives). Sometimes the nutritive qualities of the products are very low, and when beneficiaries get the same products every week, they tend to refuse them. Interviewees mentioned that this leads to associations not being able to redistribute certain products and needing to throw them away. Products in large packaging are also challenging to manage as for recipients they are difficult to use up and transport. When I volunteered with Linkee, they often got products in large packages such as 1kg of Pâté, a package of 10 boiled eggs, or 1 litre of egg yolk. While I was questioning if students would be able to consume the products in a short time (sometimes 1-2 days) before their expiry date, volunteers told me that the best option they have is to freeze the products.

These findings indicate that much of the food donated by the retail sector presents a significant challenge for the associations due to its perishability. Many of the received products are expired, close to their expiration, or are difficult to redistribute, leading to considerable amounts of food being thrown away. This highlights that the issue of food waste has been reallocated to associations dealing with donated products from the retail sector.

5.2.3. Waste management

All associations receiving direct donations from supermarkets mentioned that they sometimes feel like the trash can of supermarkets, as they receive expired products, mouldy vegetables and fruits, and sometimes even a box of peels without vegetables. In her research, Mourad (2022) has reiterated that food banks did not want to become the garbage bins of supermarkets following the implementation of the Loi Garot. However, associations in Lyon feel like they have become an easy way for supermarkets to dispose of their 'trash'. Several interviewees have said that some supermarkets do

³ See ethical considerations section 4.5.

not “play by the rules” in giving the associations products that they know they will not be able to redistribute. Indeed, supermarkets under the Loi Garot have to donate products a minimum of 48 hours before their expiration date, not to disadvantage associations (Mourad, 2022). When this is not followed, associations regularly bear the costs for trash management that should have been taken over by the supermarkets.

Elsa explained that her association’s strength and reputation is that she collects all trash from the supermarkets, even if only 10% is edible, and picks up the surplus at any time of the day when called (Interview 8). While she spares supermarkets the time in sorting and the costs for waste management, much of this work is on her shoulders, as she needs to sort through the products and deal with the accumulating trash. This can be challenging as she needs to use the city’s trash system, which is not adequate for around two trash cans full of products discarded every day (Interview 9).

5.3. Constraints of associations

The Loi Garot has indirectly commissioned associations to redistribute surplus. However, these are constrained by workload, opening times, workforce and space paired with the challenges mentioned above. All official organisations have specific workdays. The BA, for example, operates from Monday to Friday. The RDC from Monday to Thursday. Smaller organisations, such as Linkee, operate on fewer days during the week, having distributions on Mondays and Tuesdays. Official organisations do not have the capacity to handle surplus over the weekend. When a supermarket wants to donate things on a Saturday, there will be only informal associations able to take these donations. When the BA is getting donations on a Friday, but the products expire over the weekend, they will have to throw them away on Monday. A volunteer shared their frustration by explaining:

How many times did X tell me: Did you see the strawberries? They are pretty, right? On a Thursday, she told me. Well, it won’t go away because it’s the weekend and all the orders are done. So, on Monday, they won’t be good to be given out anymore. (Interview undisclosed)

Seasons also impact food donations and their management. Food degrades much faster in summer, and many organisations are closed over this period, leading to fewer food redistributions. Hence, when associations have no capacity to redistribute the surplus, it ends up wasted. When the BA was still operating in the summer, a volunteer explained that “some years we saw full pallets of salmon filets

being thrown away because there were not enough volunteers, because it was summer, because, well, associations are also closed in summer.” (Interview undisclosed)

Elsa explained that she is taking over partnerships with stores over the weekend or in the summer when official organisations are closed. The issue here is that she does not have the capacity to store the food in a cold place (See section 5.2.1.). In summer, there are higher quantities, but they also degrade faster. She also mentioned that in July and August, many people taking her donations, such as students, are not there. This leads to more logistics and higher amounts of food thrown away due to a lack of capacity to manage and distribute the food donations. While expiration dates do not stop her from distributing certain products, many products still must be thrown away due to their degraded quality.

Additionally, official organisations depend on state support, as running them entails high costs. When state funding is cut, as has been done for the BA, it has a significant impact on their ability to handle donations from the retail sector, having fewer funds for employees overseeing logistics, transport, storage, waste management etc. Organisations receiving food from the BA were consequently indirectly impacted by getting fewer donations. Paradoxically, for one association, getting too much money from the state entailed needing to spend more money, having to buy more, and hence needing fewer donations from supermarkets (Interview 1).

All organisations are only able to get in as many products as they can redistribute. Sometimes this leads to associations having to refuse big donations, such as a demand from an actor to donate 15 tonnes of salad (Interview 1). Overall, my findings show that associations cannot meet the demand for surplus redistribution because they lack sufficient capacity, storage, workforce, and opening hours. Partly also because some have not been sufficiently supported by the state to handle the surplus. This is in line with Mustalahti et al. (2020)’s argumentation that, within sustainable governance, tasks are often transferred to communities without adequately matching their capacities. The Loi Garot has transferred the task of handling surplus from the retail sector to associations fighting food insecurity, thereby expanding their operational role, without adequately increasing their operational capacities.

It is important to mention that volunteers who worked at food redistribution organisations for several years have also said that donations from supermarkets decreased. At the BA, this led to less food being thrown away than before, but sometimes also a shortage in products, impacting the receiving associations. This can be linked to anti-FW approaches implemented by supermarkets, such as

percentage sales or the app “Too Good to Go”, where products were sold rather than given to associations (Mourad, 2022), which can be considered a win in the fight against FW. However, from my experience at the organisations, it is apparent that a significant amount of food still had to be thrown away due to a lack of capacity or due to getting expired and mouldy products (see section 5.2.2). The informal associations being overwhelmed with surplus is a fitting illustration of the shortcomings of resting on food redistribution as a sole solution to reduce FW.

5.4. Advantages

Though associations face challenges and constraints, they also derive advantages from food donations. First, associations mentioned that it enables them to achieve their objectives of reducing food precarity by distributing free meals. Second, it provides a stable food source that associations rely on every week. The RDC centre, where I volunteered, relies on an average of 1.2 tonnes of products weekly, the BA on 30-40 tonnes. Third, it enables people to feel useful and build a sense of mutual aid. Many volunteers I interviewed mentioned how gratifying it feels to have an active impact and to see that your actions help other people. One volunteer said: “[W]e are happy to give them what we give because, in the end, when you give to someone, they give back to you. It’s an exchange” (Interview 5).

Lastly, volunteers participating in the associations have mentioned that it enables the creation of a social space to meet people, chat and help each other out. In a time “where everyone seems to be curled up into their own little selves” (Interview 9), this enables bringing people together around the values of care, support and aid to strengthen a more human and caring society.

6. Reconfiguration of Responsibilities for Food Waste Reduction

The following paragraphs will answer research question two by explaining how the Loi Garot has reconfigured responsibilities for food surplus/waste management between retail and associations receiving donations, guided by responsabilisation theory and FPE. Additionally, I will discuss the shortcomings of FW redistribution under the Loi Garot and engage with the limitations of my research.

6.1. Neoliberal practices

Several actors I interviewed, both directly and indirectly, questioned the overproduction of food embedded in neoliberal practices. Interviewees also felt like supermarkets were using associations to keep overproducing without questioning their modes of production. When talking about the BA having

to throw tonnes of food away, a volunteer explained:

But it's upstream. I think the problem lies there, not here. It's upstream, the overproduction of certain things. When you see that right now, we're getting kilos of tomatoes that come from Morocco, not firm, with no taste. Or mozzarella in winter [...] we don't eat that here. It's in the summer when we eat salads. And well, we produce, we produce, we produce. [...] The charities, they don't want mozzarella anymore. [...] It's the problem of a consumer society, of overconsumption, that's for sure. (Interview undisclosed)

This is in line with several authors who claimed that food redistribution does not address the root causes of food waste, i.e., capitalist overproduction, but enables powerful actors in the food supply chain to continue doing business as usual (Mourad, 2022; Sundin et al., 2023; Szulecka et al., 2024). Responsibilisation theory, which is associated with neoliberal politics (Juhila & Raitakari, 2016), highlights that the powerful actors, the supermarkets, have managed to find a way out of their obligations, i.e., actively decreasing their surplus (Mustalahti et al., 2020).

6.2. Expectations and power from supermarkets

Several volunteers have mentioned that supermarkets are incentivised to give donations through tax cuts and therefore profits from their donations. Indeed, France has had an active tax policy on food donations since the 1980s (Szulecka et al., 2024). This means that supermarkets get money back from the state if they donate food instead of throwing it away. On the other hand, all associations sometimes feel obliged to accept donations that are harder to manage, because if they refuse these products, they fear that supermarkets will stop the partnerships. As mentioned by one interviewee: “[I]n fact, we’re in a situation where we’ve been given; it’s almost a service to the person to get rid of these bananas, and we’re obligated to take them, because if we don’t, tomorrow they’ll choose another charity” (interview 1). Additionally, volunteers explained that supermarkets expect them to be regular every week.

[S]hops don't want to waste time. They want us to be reliable. They want us to be consistent [...] not just show up once. [...] They want us to commit to a certain weekday and to actually be there on that day. There can be an exception, of course, but it shouldn't happen again because, well,

that's part of the deal. They want regularity, reliability, that's it. (Interview 9)

While I was volunteering at the RDC, in a week where they did not have redistributions, they still went to the stores with whom they have partnerships in fear of losing them.

The findings show that the Loi Garot advantages supermarkets at the expense of the associations receiving donations. One volunteer explained “There's blackmail from the big stores. They say: You take our garbage, then a few good products. But don't bother us, or we won't give you anything anymore.” (Interview 7). This shows a clear power dynamic. Supermarkets profit from their waste through tax breaks and have less cost for its management, while associations feel obligated to accept hard-to-manage donations and end up with the cost of the waste management. As the previous quote highlights, associations sometimes figuratively have a knife to their throat, as they depend on these donations. This enables supermarkets to not completely abide by the rules while facing no consequence. It indicates how supermarkets are significant power holders over the whole food supply chain (Gascón, 2018). They dictate how much needs to be produced to meet customers’ demands and decide when a product becomes “waste” by losing its monetary value (Arcuri, 2019). Through these findings, it became apparent that supermarkets also hold power over associations with which they have partnerships.

6.3. Volunteers: the pillars of food redistribution

6.3.1. *The workforce behind redistribution*

My research shows that volunteers constitute the main workforce behind food redistribution. Some contribute a few hours a week, while some volunteer most weekdays. Therefore, it is important to ask who, specifically, is doing this work. From my time in different associations, it became apparent that volunteers are often retired people, women doing care work at home, refugees waiting for asylum, people with disabilities, students, unemployed people, and some doing community service. These groups are often, to varying degrees, marginalised within broader societal structures (Clement et al., 2019). While working with Elsa in her informal association, it became apparent that she is “doing a crazy amount of work” (interview 8). She works every day and is constantly available for possible pick-ups, which she has mentioned could be considered an unpaid full-time job.

Bauhardt & Harcourt (2018) brought up that environmental governance often relies on undervalued labour to implement sustainability initiatives. This raises the question of the sustainability of food

redistribution systems, as it may reproduce inequalities by normalising reliance on unpaid and undervalued labour instead of implementing systemic solutions. Harcourt (2023) has argued that unpaid care work forms the basis of unseen work reproducing capitalist societies. This study highlights that through redistribution of surplus, shifting the work for FW reduction on unremunerated volunteers enhances capitalist practices considered the root cause of FLW (Mourad, 2022; Szulecka et al., 2024).

While some organisations with fewer distributions have enough volunteers, some bigger associations struggle to find enough people, as every volunteer has their own personal life and constraints. An employee mentioned:

They do what they can, depending on their availability, their schedule, and all that. They have constraints too; they're volunteers, we can't demand anything from them. They come, they lend a hand, so overall that's great. But I'd say we don't have enough volunteers on the days we need them. (Interview 6)

For example, at the BA, they are short on volunteers on Wednesdays and Fridays, as retired people often keep their grandchildren on those days. This entails that they do not have enough people to sort out products, which consequently need to be discarded when past their date. At the RDC, the consequences are that more work ends up on the shoulders of a few, leading to more demanding shifts.

6.3.2. *Personal impacts*

Volunteers in the different associations have shared that their work can be physically and mentally demanding. Sorting and distributing food require carrying heavy boxes or standing for several hours during distributions. One volunteer at the RDC mentioned: "It's very intense, sometimes I don't even have time to go to the toilet" (Interview undisclosed), when talking about the 4-hour distribution in their centre. I have also experienced food distribution as a challenging task, demanding a lot of physical and mental energy. Being in contact with a precarious societal group has a mental effect on the volunteers, as it is challenging to see how other people struggle. Sometimes, volunteers also had to cope with beneficiaries' dissatisfaction, their struggles, and frustrations, as explained by one volunteer:

It's not easy sometimes to see the people. You are very close to people who are in need, so at the beginning it's a bit hard. So, I needed to get detached a little; otherwise, I would be crying all the time. (Interview 4)

Volunteers were also frustrated that many projects could not materialise due to a lack of funding or helping hands. Additionally, at the BA, volunteers explained that throwing extensive amounts of food away, though they considered it still edible, was what impacted them the most. They said it hurt their hearts to see very good products being discarded. One of them explained: "What hurts us the most is what we throw away. Really. It's very, very hard at the beginning [...], you tell yourself: but this is good to eat, this is good to eat, that is good to eat." (Interview undisclosed)

Lastly, Elsa runs her informal association on her own means. As she does not have the capacities to follow the cold-chain, food stored uncooled outside of her house or in her cellar has also led to rats on her property and significant costs related to their management. She also had issues with a neighbour bringing her to court for "public nuisance". Moreover, she needs to organise distributions herself. The issue is that she is informally doing most distributions, which are then unsupervised. The one I participated in was after a market where people were nearly fighting each other over the food. People were shouting at each other, and it became very heated to the point where Elsa stopped the distribution and went back. She told me she hated the market, but that she still had to go because she did not know what else to do with all the food.

By exposing the invisible physical and emotional labour tied to food redistribution, I demonstrate that the Loi Garot overlooks the social costs of its implementation. From a FPE standpoint, depending on often marginalised groups, whose time and emotional energy are historically undervalued (Harcourt, 2023), to reduce food waste is arguably unsustainable.

6.4. Responsibilised service providers

The state supports official organisations redistributing surplus through financial means and/or food donations through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). As one actor mentioned, 'the state has given us a mission of public interest' (Interview 1). This mission is to redistribute food to people experiencing food precarity. Ilcan and Basok (2004) argue that voluntary agencies are becoming largely responsible for assisting disadvantaged people. France has experienced an increase in poverty over the past few

years (Tecchio et al., 2023), and assisting these people has fallen on the shoulders of these associations. Interviewees mentioned that they are sometimes not even able to provide food for everyone as they lack capacity (Interview 10). In line with Rose et al. (2009), I argue that the state has divested itself of its obligations to fight food precarity by responsabilising NGOs to perform a service rather than actively fighting against the causes of poverty.

Additionally, associations have been compared to a “work structure” (Interview 4), where people need to be committed to their positions and carry certain responsibilities. This reiterates Mustalahti and Agrawal (2020)’s claim that transferring responsibilities onto associations, i.e. the reduction of food waste and the fight against food insecurity, risks turning NGOs from voluntary activism towards professional working arrangements.

This is important to consider when analysing the impact of the Loi Garot. Naturally, using surplus is the cheapest option and aids in providing the demanded service. Though associations are supported through the European Social Fund Plus scheme (ESF+), these donations only cover “basic” products such as flour, canned food, sugar, pasta, rice, etc. Interviewees have mentioned that without donations from supermarkets or financial means to buy products, beneficiaries would be left with few nutritional varieties. By implementing the Loi Garot, it seemed that the government was able to kill two birds with one stone, namely reducing surplus from stores while providing associations with food that they can redistribute to people experiencing food precarity. Eubanks (2019) has argued that the Loi Garot was able to reduce food waste while fighting against hunger at no cost to the state or businesses. Supermarkets ultimately even profit from the surplus they donate through tax cuts.

I argue that it has been overlooked that the Loi Garot brings high costs to the associations commissioned to redistribute the surplus. The previous sections have clearly shown that the work behind distribution is carried out by volunteers not remunerated for their work and that it requires significant labour, logistics, equipment, (cold)storage and time. At the same time, it redirects the responsibility for food waste away from supermarkets, having leverage and power for FLW reduction at the source (Döbbe, 2023). When discussing the Loi Garot with an interviewee, they mentioned: “I think that we have sensitised supermarkets but have not held them accountable” (Interview 1). A volunteer has shared their frustration about the fact that actors who produce FW are not able to take responsibility for it with the following quote:

[food waste] is also something that shouldn’t happen in a society that prides itself on human rights,

the land of food, etc. [...] that throws food away, whatever the quality, when nobody sees it, when people are starving just five metres away, but the manager isn't capable of saying to himself, 'Oh, right, I'll take my leftovers and go and give them to those people'. It must go through an organisation that takes care of it for me. It's about behaviour; we seem to curl up into our own little selves. [...] We live in a world where these reflections are dissimulated, avoided, they are unpleasant and never really set straight. (Interview 9)

The responsibility is not only shifted to associations to deal with the externalities of the system at their expense, but it has also, at times, been shifted to individuals. The same actor who participates in informal organisations explained:

Now that I know what's going on [...] Well, actually, yes, now I'm partly responsible for this too. Because I know where there are people living in abject poverty. And I know where I can salvage the waste of capitalism, which is wealth, which are things that shouldn't be thrown away. So, in a way, it's a bit like being Robin Hood, isn't it? (interview 9)

Redistribution of surplus food leads to individuals using their free time trying to put a band-aid on issues that should be addressed by other actors holding more power for transformative change.

6.5. Reduction of food waste

As my research aim was to understand the impacts and the shortcomings of the Loi Garot from the perspective of associations handling surplus, I asked the interviewees how impactful this law is and what further steps should be taken. Most said that it did actively help to reduce FW from stores, as without its redistribution, it would be discarded. However, some have also mentioned that the law was only a band-aid for the issue of food waste, as it does not address the broader system of overproduction and overconsumption.

This law has clearly accelerated a lot of things. It has raised awareness among a great number of people. I think it's a structuring law in terms of meaning and ethics for a society. [...] there are still absurdities that I think this law addresses. [...] But the law does reduce food waste, yes. However,

does it challenge it? No. [...] It is those who waste food who are the ones who still benefit. (Interview 1)

The law has helped raise awareness of food waste and of the fact that many products are still consumable after their expiry date. Some volunteers have said that there is still considerable work to do in society, as people need to trust their senses rather than a date on a package. “Because a saucisson with an expiration date of 6 March... you'll have to explain to me how a saucisson can be inedible on 6 March, when they're hung and left to sweat for months by shepherds.” (Interview 7). Some have argued that there is a need for a cultural change where food is more valued. “It’s education, it’s showing that food is something sacred, that it’s something so important, it’s vital [...]. So, we must respect food.” (Interview 5). Ultimately, employees have argued that there is a need to engage the retail sector more in everything that is happening after their food donations. Stores need to play by the rules and support either financially for the logistics or make it easier for the supermarkets to handle the surplus. Interviewee 1 explained: “I think [the Loi Garot] is a way forward, but it is missing a step. That is to say, to allow these associations to pick up and redistribute the food more easily and perhaps in better condition.”

Based on my findings, I argue that governments intending to implement FW redistribution measures such as the Loi Garot must ensure that food aid organisations are equipped to carry them out, and that the policy framework is combined with other FW reduction measures. Additionally, as has been raised in section 6.3., it is important to question the sustainability of a system reliant on undervalued labour to achieve a reduction in FW, rather than systematically addressing the powerful actors responsible for its production.

Lastly, volunteers have brought up the worry that “if [Food Waste] is decreasing, there will be fewer donations” (Interview 3). Bringing it back to the paradox that while surplus needs to be decreased, it is at the same time a resource in high demand to be redistributed (Arcuri, 2019). My argumentation is in line with Bergtröm et al. (2020) arguing that FW and poverty both need to be reduced to achieve a sustainable society, as the reduction of FW should not rely on people living in food insecurity.

6.6. Limitations

The scope of this research was limited to the main associations receiving food donations in Lyon. Though I was able to show the state of play of the Loi Garot within these associations, I was potentially

limited in showing the variety of challenges that associations face. Due to a lack of time, I could not participate in all of them, especially those getting donations from the BA. Challenges and constraints of associations might also differ depending on different political landscapes, influencing the application of the law and the capacities of associations. Additionally, it could have been impactful to include supermarkets' perspectives for a more nuanced analysis, but due to time restrictions, I did not pursue this approach. Despite these shortcomings, I was able to shed light on previously overshadowed processes related to the Loi Garot, thereby contributing to the current body of knowledge on food redistribution and on responsabilisation processes within natural governance.

7. Concluding Discussion

While the Loi Garot has been praised by many for being a sustainable approach to fighting food waste, this research highlights overlooked processes of food redistribution. By applying responsabilisation theory and a feminist political ecology lens, I demonstrated that the responsibility to reduce food waste initially lying with supermarkets has been transferred to charity organisations dealing with the surplus.

The Loi Garot has expanded the operational role of associations receiving donations that need to handle large quantities of (often low-quality) surplus from the retail sector. Consequently, the work and the costs involved with picking up the donations, sorting and redistributing them fall on the shoulders of the associations distributing the surplus. This requires significant logistics, storage space, transportation, workforce and time. Additionally, associations are constrained by strict hygiene and safety norms tied to the donations, which are often close to/over the expiry date or in poor condition. This forces associations to throw them away and pay disposal costs, leading to associations feeling like they have partly become the supermarkets' garbage bins.

Associations have become dependent on these donations as it enables them to provide the service to assist people experiencing food precarity. This leads to unequal power relations between the supermarkets and the associations, as the latter feel like they cannot refuse hard-to-manage donations for fear of losing partnerships. Meanwhile, supermarkets benefit from donations by getting tax breaks, leading to those who waste to profit from it.

Food redistribution under the Loi Garot relies on the unpaid care work of volunteers, which is both

mentally and physically demanding. Harcourt (2023) has previously raised that unpaid care work forms the basis for unseen work reproducing capitalist societies. Here, volunteer work forms the basis for FW reduction from the retail sector, allowing stores to avoid reconsidering practices leading to overproduction and consumption, identified as the primary cause for FLW. Additionally, when associations are not sufficiently supported, as highlighted in this research, they are limited in the amount of donations they are able to handle. Taken together, this research suggests that this system is not sustainable, underscored by the considerable amount of food that still needs to be thrown away.

Further research would benefit from insights into the possibilities for the state and the retail sector to support the associations in meeting the demand for surplus management. Subsequent research into food waste prevention could focus on combining food redistribution with measures to prevent surplus at the source. This paper also forms a base for further research into responsabilisation processes within food waste governance.

To conclude, shortcomings in food redistribution lie in considering it as a main channel for reducing FW from the retail sector. As presented in the food-waste hierarchy, it is only the second-best solution after prevention measures. While it has been raised that without surplus, no more food could be distributed to people experiencing food precarity, I argue that food waste reduction should go hand in hand with addressing the causes of food precarity. The Loi Garot has been an important first step in addressing FLW, but given its shortcomings, it is essential to continue developing further solutions to combat FLW. Actively reducing FLW will depend on the extent to which society is ready to look beyond capitalism and start valuing food for its nutritional rather than monetary value.

8. References

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9. Appendix

Appendix A: Table listing recorded interviews

Case	Organisation & donation type	(recorded) Interviews
1	Official & direct donations	#1: Employee (27 February – 43 minutes) - online #2: Volunteer 1 (2 March – 17 minutes) #3: Volunteer 2 (9 March – 27 minutes)
2	Official & direct donations	#4: Volunteer 1 (4 March - 31 minutes) #5: Volunteer 2 (10 March – 1h19)
3	Official & direct donations	#6: Employee (5 March – 46 minutes) #7: Volunteer 1, Volunteer 2 & Volunteer 3 (5 March – 43 minutes)
4 & 5	Informal associations & direct donations	#8: Elsa (10 March – 41 minutes) #9: Volunteer (17 March – 48 minutes)
6	Official organisation & indirect donations	#10: Volunteer 1 & Volunteer 2 (6 March – 43 minutes)
7	Official organisation & indirect donations	#11: Volunteer 1 (11 March – 38 minutes)

Appendix B: Interview guide volunteers

Demographics: age, gender, nationality

Volunteering work:

- Can you describe your organisation and your role within it ?
How long have you been doing this?
- What are the reasons you engage in this association?
- How much time do you spend at the association and when?
- How demanding is the work (both physically and mentally)?
- Have you ever thought about stopping volunteering at this organisation? Why ?
- Can you give me an example of a really good day you had at the association and one where you encountered complications?

Donations:

- Have the quantity and quality of donations (food that you handle) changed over the last years/ the time you have been at the association?
Why would you say that is ?
- Do you have to sometimes throw food away and why ?
How do you feel about it?
Do you think there would be ways to minimise what gets thrown away?

Food waste:

- Have you heard about the Loi Garot (if not explain) - what are your opinions on it?
Is it effective, fair, could it be improved?
- Do you think donating food helps reduce food waste from supermarkets?
- Do you feel responsible for decreasing food waste in this association?
- Do you think large retailers benefit from donations to associations (eg reputation, monetary, sustainability image?)
- What, in your opinion, could help contribute to reducing food waste and whose responsibility should it be?
- Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you want to add?

Appendix C: Interview guide logistics

Demographics: age, gender, profession

Background questions:

- Can you describe your organisation and your role within it ?
How long have you been doing this?
- Can you tell me since when you have been receiving donations from supermarkets?
- Can you tell me roughly how much food you get from retailers compared to other donations (what do you get most?).

Operations:

- Can your association operate without the donations of unsold food from supermarkets ?
Why ?
What would happen if you don't get donations from stores anymore?
- Have the quantity and quality of donations changed over the last years
Why would you say that is ?
How does it affect your association?
- Do you ever feel pressured to accept donations even when they are difficult to manage?
- Which problems do you encounter the most with donated food from supermarkets?
- Do you encounter problems with retailers?
Have you ever refused donations – why ? What were the consequences?
- What expectations do retailers place on you regarding collection & sorting of the donated products?
- Can you describe to me the typical volunteer in your association
Do you have enough volunteers for the amount of donations you get?
How many people do you need ?
Do you sometimes struggle with not having enough people to help out? What are the consequences ?

Food waste:

- Have you heard about the Loi Garot (if not explain) - what are your opinions on it?

Is it effective, fair, could it be improved?

- Do you think donating food helps reduce food waste from supermarkets?
- Do you feel responsible for decreasing food waste in this association?
- Do you think large retailers benefit from donations to associations (eg reputation, monetary, sustainability image?)
- What, in your opinion, could help contribute to reducing food waste and whose responsibility should it be?
- Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you want to add?

Appendix D: Consent form (in French)

Déclaration de consentement

Pour participer à la recherche: « Réduire le gaspillage alimentaire grâce à la redistribution? Évaluation qualitative de la durabilité de la loi Garot du point de vue des organisations bénéficiaires de dons alimentaires à Lyon ».

POUR TOUTE QUESTION CONCERNANT L'ÉTUDE, Contactez Mila Danklefsen. Tél. : (+32) 477 18 52 87. E-mail : mi4353da-s@student.lu.se

Description : Vous êtes invité(e) à participer à une étude dans le cadre du mémoire de Mila Danklefsen. Je suis étudiante en master d'études environnementales et de sciences de développement durable à l'université de Lund. Mon objectif de recherche est de comprendre l'impact de la loi Garot sur les associations qui reçoivent directement ou indirectement des dons alimentaires des supermarchés. Je m'intéresse plus particulièrement à la manière dont les associations bénéficiaires et leurs bénévoles perçoivent leurs responsabilités en matière de lutte contre le gaspillage alimentaire. J'analyse également l'impact des dons alimentaires sur la durabilité générale du système alimentaire. J'interviewe des bénévoles de différentes associations à Lyon ainsi que des responsables logistiques. L'entretien durera environ 30 à 60 minutes, selon votre rôle au sein de l'association.

Droits des participants, collecte et stockage des données (plus détaillées en Annexe A)

1. Votre participation à cette recherche est entièrement volontaire et vous avez le droit de retirer votre consentement ou d'interrompre votre participation à tout moment sans pénalité. Vous avez le droit de refuser de répondre à certaines questions.
2. Les enregistrements, transcriptions et notes de l'entretien deviendront la propriété du projet de recherche et seront anonymisés et conservés dans un environnement sécurisé, sans aucune référence à votre identité. Seuls la chercheuse et ses superviseurs, de l'université de Lund, auront accès aux données.
3. Les enregistrements et les transcriptions écrites seront traités de manière confidentielle en anonymisant les noms des participants. Les enregistrements seront supprimés après leur analyse.
4. Les données collectées seront utilisées uniquement à des fins académiques sous la forme d'un mémoire qui sera publié sur un site web public géré par la bibliothèque de l'université de Lund (<https://www.ub.lu.se/en/lund-university-library>).

5. Des citations tirées des entretiens ne pourront y être incluses qu'avec votre consentement.
6. Afin de garantir votre vie privée, vos droits en tant que participant sont garantis par le règlement général sur la protection des données (RGPD) et la loi suédoise sur la protection des données, en plus des directives du Conseil suédois de la recherche (<https://www.vr.se/english/analysis/reports/our-reports/2017-08-31-good-research-practice.html>).

Veillez répondre aux questions suivantes en sélectionnant « Oui » ou « Non »:

J'ai lu ce formulaire dans son intégralité et j'accepte de participer à cette recherche en connaissant mes droits et les procédures de collecte et de stockage des données.

OUI / NON

J'accepte que cette interview soit enregistrée

OUI / NON

J'accepte que des citations tirées de mes réponses lors de l'interview soient utilisées dans la rédaction du mémoire.

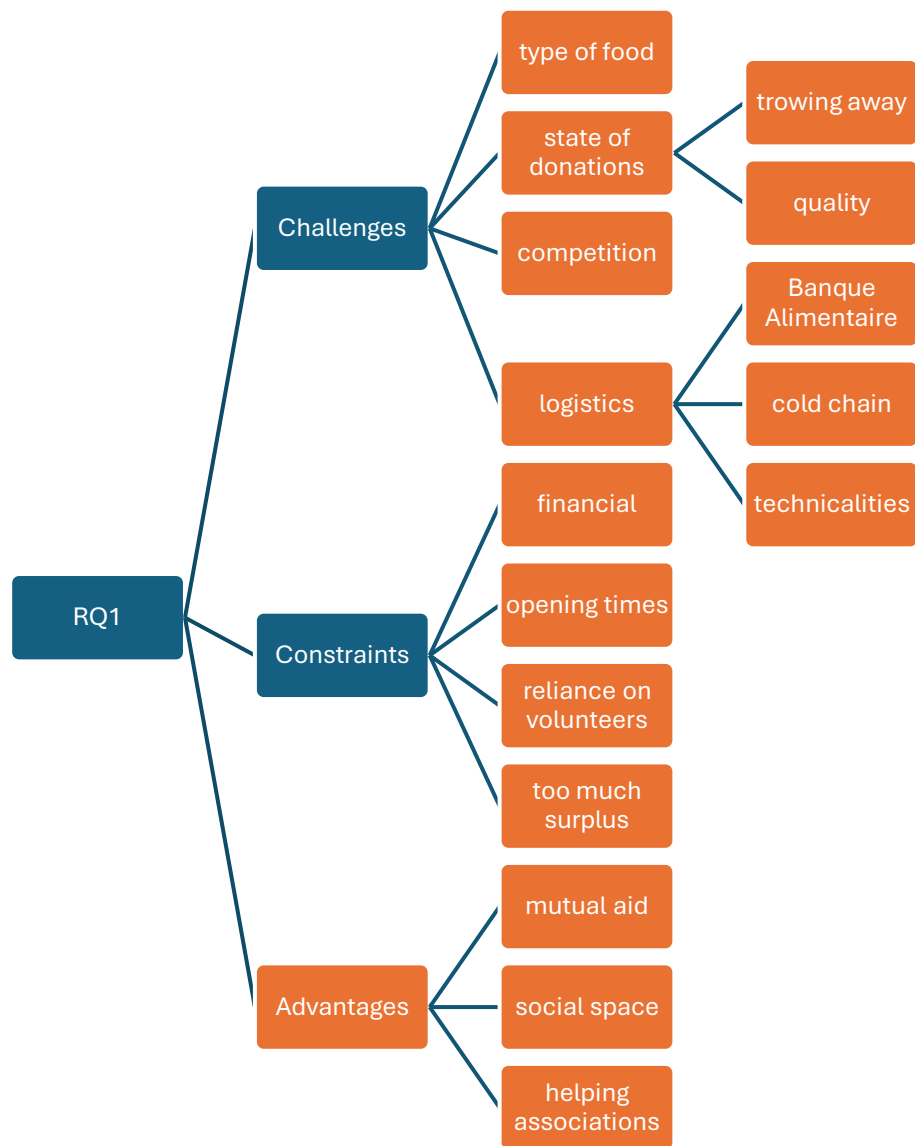
OUI / NON

Nom

Signature

Lieu & Date

Appendix E: Coding tree





Colour code: Blue equals preliminary deductive themes and orange equals inductive themes