



Local Food System Development in Hungary

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Abstract. This article examines local food system (LFS) development pathways in the context of recent regulatory reforms in Hungary implemented to promote local product sales and short food supply chains (SFSCs). Taking a SFSC approach, two case studies demonstrate how new types of local food systems initiated by non-farmers attempt to shorten the distance between consumers and producers. The findings are based on qualitative key informant interviews and a consumer attitude survey data that seek to identify how LFSs promote or enact sustainable food supply and how consumers perceive the nature of the relationships between consumers and producers. The results from the ‘Gödöllő Local Food Council’ and the ‘Szekszárd local food system’ show various specificities and challenges of new types of emerging urban civic food networks. The article concludes by pointing to critical factors and tools for developing LFSs, as well as reflecting on the role of original research to facilitate change for a more sustainable food system.

Introduction

In the context of an increasingly globalized food system, recent critical assessments in sustainability science noted that only a sharp decrease in per capita consumption and resource use by the wealthy and developed world could successfully contribute to a more sustainable and equitable world (MEA, 2005; IFPRI, 2009; Rockström et al., 2009; Government Office for Science, 2011; SCAR, 2011; United Nations, 2011). When policymakers, researchers and CSOs analyse, plan and implement tangible sustainability strategies or policies they increasingly express societal concerns about the ways in which global forces and disproportionate consumption patterns are shaping

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our food system. Agri-food scholars record a recent trend in food governance emphases from the national to the regional and local level (Renting et al., 2003; Donald et al., 2010). Often referred to as local food systems (LFSs), these complex socio-ecological systems produce, process and retail food within a defined geographical area and thus provide multiple benefits, desirable socio-economic and environmental impacts (Karner et al., 2010). Most empirical evidence on LFSs has originated from EU-funded comparative research projects (SUS-CHAIN, COFAMI, FAAN)¹ and recorded a great diversity of schemes, variations within and between EU countries (Roep and Wiskerke, 2006; Knickel et al., 2008; Karner et al., 2010; Schermer et al., 2010). The post-socialist contexts of LFSs in Central and Eastern European countries and the difficulties of rebuilding cooperation are rarely discussed (Bodorkós and Kelemen, 2007; Karner et al., 2010; Megyesi et al., 2010; Tisenkopfs et al., 2011).

As an emerging European sector, LFSs bring together supportive constituencies of the state (public sector, regular army, local and regional authorities, municipalities), the market (producer and supply chain-led initiatives) and civil society (civic groups, consumers and NGOs). Built as a collaborative effort to shape self-reliant food economies LFSs integrate production, processing, distribution and consumption with the explicit aim to enhance the well-being (economic, environmental and social health) of a particular locality (Feenstra, 2002). Through local processing and selling, an increasing proportion of total added value is captured by small-scale quality farmers; moreover, LFSs often contribute to local employment and economic regeneration (Karner et al., 2010). As a main benefit LFSs encourage proximate relations between food producers and consumers – ‘between farm and fork’ – and may also promote more environmentally sustainable modes of production and consumption (Renting et al., 2003). LFSs often rely on collective organization and human labour at the local level: social cooperation, proximate social relations between producers and consumers (Holloway et al., 2007). In this regard, local quality has become the key aspect of contemporary agri-food systems; even supermarkets promote increasingly their products as ‘local’, while through consumer–producer proximity LFSs strengthen value-laden, trust-based quality attributes of food (Karner et al., 2010).

In this article, I draw on case-study research conducted within two regional projects in Hungary in 2010 to understand various ways in which local food communities implement sustainability.² The mixed methods approach consisted of secondary data analysis of the principal national policy processes of relevance to LFSs, along with primary data collection from key informant interviews with the relevant stakeholders, consumer surveys at both regional and national scales, group discussions with consumers and local actors. The two localities, as real focal points around which alternatives were shaped and conceptualized, serve as illustrative examples of transition pathways within the current institutional setting. The article is structured as follows: after outlining the theoretical–conceptual frameworks that shaped the analysis, I look first at the legal–institutional contexts and draw on available national level data and studies to show what these mean for consumer attitudes. Second, I will present the research focus in the local context of the case-study areas, showing results from surveys on consumer attitudes towards local food. Finally, I will discuss these findings pointing to success factors, critical processes and a ‘tool-box’ strategy for developing local food systems.

LFSs: An Ideal and a Pathway towards Sustainability

Agri-food systems are being reconsidered by policymakers, scholars and CSOs in recent decades especially in the light of environmental and safety issues arising from the current commodity-driven, industrialized, conventional, intensive and 'productivist' systems of food provision (Wright and Middendorf, 2007). New initiatives created rapidly expanding arenas in the food economy and counterbalanced the worsening trend of poor diets through multifaceted LFSs, innovative networks and processes. Due to the reinventions of various food traditions, rediscovery and revitalization of food cultures, we are witnessing a growing demand for local and regional food met by new alternative practices. These proliferations of academic and applied research as well as the mushrooming of diverse initiatives to develop LFSs present a double challenge for empirical researchers. There are several attempts in the literature to categorize approaches and overlapping, partly interchangeable conceptualizations referred to as 'alternative', 'local', 'locally-based', 'civic', 'community' food networks, enterprises, initiatives and systems, short food supply chains (SFSCs) (Balázs, 2009). LFSs are conceptualized mainly as links between farmers and consumers. For the sake of operationalization, this research uses the analytical concept of SFSCs as defined by Marsden et al. (2000) to emphasize spatial-social proximity in LFSs. To gain an empirical understanding of the nature of relationships between producers and consumers, different theoretical frameworks of the SFSC perspective are introduced below. However, for carrying out the empirical research and for communicating with the non-professional stakeholders in the case studies the much broader and normative term of LFSs was used.

Theories of sustainable consumption emphasize interpretative frames and conceptualizations that highlight different socio-economic and environmental impacts of LFSs (Jackson, 2006). Relocalization as a main type of such interpretative frame refers to the social-spatial proximity of producers and consumers leading to collective action for reducing environmental and social problems in 'food relocalization initiatives' (Fonte, 2008). At the same time, a locality gains social and spatial meaning by creating specificity and uniqueness. In a collaborative effort to foster local well-being, create more inclusive communities, build trust by shortening the distance of producers and consumers, new revitalized local(ly specific) forms of agricultural knowledge arise (Renting et al., 2003; Holloway et al., 2007; Karner et al., 2010). Relocalization strategies can be traced in initiatives that practically bring consumers closer to the origins of their food and involve more direct contact between farmers and the end users of their products. Direct involvement in food production, processing, distribution, and consumption implies proximate relations, smaller-scale production, and also a much wider product range (Watts et al., 2005). Another interpretative frame – *reconnecting* – emphasizes the knowledge sharing, solidarity and the social consequences of food purchasing (Eden et al., 2008a, 2008b). Reconnection can be the basis of improvements in social capital and provide a sense of community, even turn back the conventionalization of organic agriculture (Fonte and Grando, 2006) and may foster a new moral economy by revitalizing linkages between agriculture and society (Hartwick, 1998; Marsden, 2000; Ilbery and Maye, 2005). *Localism* (or regionalism), as an interpretative frame, concentrates on the counter-hegemonic tendencies in LFSs, and how they fight against food system globalization (Winter, 2003). LFSs may impose resistance and counter-pressure to conventional globalizing food systems by actively searching for possible ways (convivial venues, arenas, infrastructures) to counter the anomies of global agri-food networks (Goodman and

DuPuis, 2002). LFSs are also referred to as *knowledge systems* and, when successful, are frequently conceptualized as fruitful interactions of local-lay and expert codified-scientific knowledge. This revitalization of traditional local knowledge also contributes to the development of managerial/commercial and technical skills (Fonte and Grando, 2006; Knickel et al., 2008). *Intermediaries* in new urban–rural relations LFS leaders are developing knowledge for planning new projects, understanding policy, handling regulations, gaining sources, providing support, marketing skills and reaching consumers, deciding in economic and administrative issues and transmitting rural goods and services to urban consumers (Kovách and Kristóf, 2009). As a form of *social innovation*, LFSs nurture social learning and create social spaces of producers and consumers where there is an on-going experience-based learning process (Renting et al., 2003). LFSs often profit from technological innovations improving the bargaining power and commercial performance of farmers (Marsden and Smith, 2005) coupled with a more differentiated product range and interlinkage with economic and tourism activities in the region (Roep and Wiskerke, 2006). Recent research also recognized urban food strategies and procurement practices as central constituents of LFS development (e.g. Sonnino, 2009).

These theoretical frameworks highlight normally the somewhat idealistic social functions, ethical–political goals and desirable impacts of LFSs. The following case studies and consumer surveys show how consumers perceive LFSs and derive their understanding of food, farming and sales. First, I briefly present the cultural and institutional context, including relevant policies on local food initiatives and what they mean for LFSs development and consumer attitudes.

Cultural Context: Institutional Support and Consumer Trends

In Hungary, local food culture remained strong even after the Socialist regime. It built normally on persisting local markets and remnants of informal economies through family households that maintained traditional agriculture practices. In marginal areas, local livelihoods and economies could survive only with support, such as through the alliance of civic food networks, agri-environmental schemes or Leader programmes. Alternative food supply systems (farmers' markets, farm-gate sales, pick-your-own, local food festivals, food trails) already have a significant role in Hungary whereas specific forms (food box delivery, buying groups, CSAs and community gardens) are usually initiated by urban intellectuals in urban and peri-urban areas with rudimentary success. The local food movement is initiated by the alliance of civic food networks whose primary aim is to ease the enormous amount of legislation that must be met by LFSs (Szabadkai, 2010).

Policy Framework Transformed to Help LFS Development

Several EU-funded research projects have emphasized already the role of policy frameworks to facilitate the development of LFSs through financial support, public support (exemptions to food safety regulations), support for labelling, promotion, collective marketing (Karner et al., 2010; Schermer et al., 2010). In Hungary, CAP implementation after the 2004 EU accession advocated an agro-industrial policy framework for international economic competitiveness and mass production (mostly by foreign investors) through subsidy criteria, and thus it marginalized disproportional

tionately 80% of 220 000 registered professional small-scale agricultural farms from subsidizing their farm investments. Several green NGOs and farmers organizations, such as the National Association of Hungarian Farmers' Societies and Cooperatives (Magyar Gazdakörök és Gazdaszövetkezetek Országos Szövetsége, MAGOSZ), had criticized this rural development policy on the procedural and substantial level, namely for presenting small-scale farming as weakness of agriculture and providing less support to local/regional markets, as well as for arranging flawed stakeholder participation during the rural development policy planning (Balázs et al., 2009). The legislation on small-scale trading applied high tax/fiscal, commercial and social insurance costs and thus marginalized the marketing of processed foods by small farmers between 2004 and 2006. Hygiene and food safety rules did not take advantage of the flexibility principle offered by the EU Regulation 852/2004 (European Parliament and Council Regulation (EC) 852/2004, *OJ*, L 139, 30 April 2004, pp. 1–54, para. 16), which enable the continued use of traditional methods at any stage from farm to fork. This unpreparedness of the government in managing the European Fund for Rural Development hit smallholders and food processors particularly hard, especially in the dairy and the meat sectors (Csatári and Farkas, 2008; Karner et al., 2010), which still limits the capacity for local food system development. In these circumstances, multinational food retailers could easily block small-scale food producers and processors to enter into LFSs (Balázs, 2009).

After the change of government in 2010, the institutional context has been transformed completely to be in line with ethnocentric–protectionist political agenda(s). The policy reform initiative channelled by the local food movement in Hungary reached a window of opportunity when it met with strong desire from the political establishment to develop SFSCs/LFSs at the national and local community level. This resulted in an increasingly important policy process of the *New Agricultural and Rural Development Strategy 2020* (Ministry of Rural Development Hungary, 2012). This foresight policy document, also referred to as 'The Constitution of Rural Hungary', covers the agro-economy, rural development, environmental protection and food economy and aims to strengthen the integrity of landscapes, people, good quality food, safe food supplies and sustainable natural resource management. It claims a proportionately much higher allocation of resources for the development of LFSs/SFSCs than any previous high-level policy document. Moreover, it promotes the development of local food systems as a primary tool of local economic development. More broadly, the strategy acknowledges that social functions of food and agriculture extend beyond rural development policy and to health, environment and national security (Darányi Ignác Plan, 2012). Further institutional support and technical assistance for LFS development at the national level is provided by the Hungarian National Rural Network (HNRN) as part of the European Network for Rural Development. As the main driving actor to promote LFSs in Hungary, the network helps local food market organizers and initiatives with technical assistance, collective marketing and training to develop knowledge for brand development and provide demonstration cases for good practices.

Three new regulations also offer an impetus to LFSs at the national level.

1. In a series of amendments the *decree for small producers* finally regulated all issues relating to small-scale production, manufacturing, hygiene, trade, control and certification. The original, 2006 regulation on small-scale producers was created to ease food-hygiene conditions but only for natural persons producing and selling products in small quantities. The 2010 amendment to the regulation

- increased the quantities for selling and allowed small-scale producers living in any part of the country to sell their products in the capital (Szabadkai, 2010).
2. The *Public Procurement Act*, which previously hampered local sourcing through the prevalence of the lowest price principle, has also been recently amended (Act CVIII of 2011 on Public Procurement). Farm products such as cold food-stuff and raw cooking materials, fresh and processed vegetables and fruits, milk and dairy products, cereals, bread and bakery products, honey, eggs, horticultural plants are now exempt from the procurement process up to the EU threshold limit (Balázs et al., 2010). As a result much more flexible local food sourcing became possible, yet institutions and staff lack the adequate knowledge and skills to apply the new rules.
 3. The concept of the *local farmers' market* was originally delineated by the Trade Law (Act CLXIV of 2005 on Trade), which gave a full definition of a market where small-scale producers (kistermelő) can sell their produce within the county, or in a 40 km radius of the market, or in Budapest (2§. 5a.). Recently various new government regulations³ redefined the compulsory legal procedures to start a market. Simplified notification process and hygienic restrictions were introduced in 2012 for local farmers' markets for facilitating short food supply chains and direct sales specifically. Still, administrative burdens on small and family farm businesses are very high (with obligations to issue an invoice, pesticide-use logbook, sales logbook, manufacturing data sheet, cold chain, and so on) (Szabadkai, 2010).

What seems clear is that policies gradually turned to short food supply chains for support. The top-down policy processes under the framework of the *New Agricultural and Rural Development Strategy 2020* opened a window of opportunity for long-neglected reform initiatives coming from the alliance of civic food networks. Recently, exemptions and flexibility rules were introduced successfully, according to production method and sales contexts, favouring local food systems and direct marketing.

Consumer Attitudes to Local Food

Several studies already contended that consumers may provide growing public demand for the local food sector with motives ranging from environmental and health consciousness, quality choice, sense of community in local shops and solidarity purchasing for local farmers (Kirwan, 2004; Brunori et al., 2012, Eden et al., 2008a). Today three out of four Hungarian consumers prefer to buy local food, while according to a recent calculation the net yield in the local food sector is two and a half times more than on a national and global level (Szigeti et al., 2009). Normally consumers' food-store choice is determined mostly by the highly concentrated food retail sector. Regionally, food supply is concentrated mostly in Budapest and Pest County. Traditional middle-sized food shops (less than 200 m²) and small food shops (less than 50 m²) are the dominant types, but their numbers are declining (Nielsen, 2012). New technology, such as web-based purchasing also affects how consumers decide to buy food. Recent research by Nielsen indicated that only 8% of Hungarian consumers are planning to buy food over the Internet. However, this number represents a 33% increase in two years, while the global average is 26%, and the European average is 14% (Nielsen, 2012).

A recent national level representative survey initiated by the Association of Conscious Consumers (<http://tudatosvasarlo.hu>) and planned by the author was looking at food consumption patterns and the public perception of supermarkets vs. local food (Medián, 2012). The omnibus survey was carried out by the Medián public opinion and market research institute through 1,200 personal interviews in July 2012. The main lesson that can be learned from food store choice is ambivalent: Hungarians most often buy food either in local, small food shops or in supermarkets – both retail venues are frequented by seven out of 10 people. Hypermarkets and farmers' markets are visited by every second adult to buy food, while two fifths (37%) prefer discount shops. Strangely, only a minority, 13%, buy food directly from farmers on a regular basis. Clearly, this difference between the high proportion of people willing to buy local food and the low proportion of people buying food at local markets, or farmers' markets could be explained by the restricted physical or financial access to local produce that stops consumers from buying what they would like to buy.

The findings on buying food also reveal marked differences between urban and rural social groups. Local food shops or direct sales from farmers are most frequent in the villages. In Budapest, consumers typically prefer supermarkets, hypermarkets and farmers markets, at the same time. People over 60 years of age only rarely go to super- and hypermarkets or discount shops. The 9% who only buy food from supermarkets and hypermarkets are typically younger than 40, and one third of them belong to the highest income category (household income per person in the top quintile).

As main constituents of product quality, freshness and price are well considered by most respondents. However, awareness of the social consequences of purchasing behaviour plays much less of a role than expected. Three out of four respondents found it important that their buying could help the livelihood of farmers, while only 55% considered the livelihood of farmers overseas important. Here education and income can explain these differences somewhat: the price of the product is important particularly in the lower education categories while chemical free and healthy alongside seasonal products are preferred by people with a diploma.

The social effect of buying behaviour on local producers is considered important by the most educated while the global effects of buying behaviour are solely considered by the highest income groups. Paying an extra 10% for any political–ethical reason is not really preferred by the population. Whereas more than half of the respondents would be willing to pay an extra 10% for good quality and healthy products, solidarity purchasing (improving the livelihood of local food producers) would reach only 37%, while solidarity with producers in other parts of the world reached only 18%. All in all, paying extra to improve the livelihoods of small farmers is only acceptable in Budapest, to people with a diploma and in the highest income quintile.

A much wider agreement was detected in the statements about the social consequences of food purchasing. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents agreed (absolutely or rather) that 'local producers who sell to supermarkets can get into trouble'. Two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement that 'with food purchases we do a lot for the livelihood of small-scale producers in distant, poor countries'. Such value statements are accepted above the average by respondents from the capital while only the most educated support the statement that 'distant and poor countries who sell their produce to supermarkets due to unfavourable conditions can get into trouble'.

Thus, with regard to attitudes to local food, consumers are keen to support LFSs/SFSCs for environmental and ethical reasons. Solidarity with local producers is also significant and local produce is associated mostly with higher quality. Hence, the following case studies focus on the nature of farmer–consumer relationships in LFSs as well as how food supply, quality and produce are perceived in the given locality. The case-study areas will be presented through the trajectory of the initiative, organization, activities, plans and local policies that shape the initiative. These findings are derived from qualitative interviews with local stakeholders and consumer attitude survey data that seek to identify how LFSs construct and use local values as a quality attribute to promote and enact sustainable food consumption.⁴

Choice of Case Studies

In the choice of case studies it is important to point at some commonalities (see Appendix 1). Both cases represent a collective endeavour in a certain well-defined locality, led by citizen groups who suffered from limited access to fresh local food. Both civic networks aim for revitalized agricultural knowledge and a flourishing local food sector, while finding ways in which fresh, vital, healthy, specialty, quality food products can become accessible to wider social groups. Also in both cases, local farmers are encouraged to take an active role in helping the initiatives. LFSs promote local food as a form of regional branding, and attempt to involve local farmers with quality products in their supply chains. Hence, the organizational form of initiatives best fit to the goals of their members. All these lead us to consider how the truly urban intellectual food groups in Szekszárd and Gödöllő have handled consumer awareness and demand for local food, while engaging meaningfully with local farmers and encouraging them out of their historically passive farming roles.

Gödöllő Local Food Council – G7

Case Study Area

Gödöllő is located 30 kilometres north-east of Budapest in the country of Pest with a population of 33 575. Formerly an important Hungarian agricultural community (including the agricultural-oriented Szent István University), now a home for a highly mobile population: two-fifths of local inhabitants find their workplaces outside Gödöllő, primarily in Budapest, while 8,000 people employed in Gödöllő come from outside the area, which exceeds the number of local workers. In a socio-demographic sense the region (Gödöllő Hills) has a growing population, which is strongly connected to the closeness of the capital, Budapest. Due to industrial investments, the employment structure in the region lost its previous agrarian character over the last 40 years. Already in the 1960s industry became the region's decisive sector, after which the service sector started to dominate from the 1970s onwards. The former agrarian traditions were finally lost in the 1980s, a decade of population decline. Today the fully urbanite region is practically part of the suburbia around Budapest, where the main territorial challenge is maintenance of the former agricultural landscape and the conservation of small-scale farming (IVS Gödöllő, 2007; Molnár, 2009).

Trajectory of the Initiative

A local food network has operated in the region for years but awareness of the importance of consuming local and organic food has risen only recently. In the local farmers' market several organic and local growers operate stalls. In these circumstances the Local Food Council (Gödöllői Helyi Élelmiszer Tanács, or 'G7') was established in 2010 with the aim to provide the necessary human infrastructure to reconnect local producers and consumers through festivals, local food markets, gastronomic events and cookery schools, organize community-supported agriculture, explore buying groups to organize bulk orders, develop local food infrastructure, distribution, and an order-delivery system. As a civic network it intends to integrate every local stakeholder from the territory to promote healthy and sustainable lifestyles.

Organization

G7 members include various local stakeholders, ranging from researchers, civic groups, through entrepreneurs, to citizens cooperation. Organizations are represented through green civic groups (Green Dependent Sustainable Solutions Association, Open Garden Foundation) responsible for awareness raising and education in sustainable food production and consumption or even operating a producer-consumer network for a sustainable local food system distributing organic produce. University researchers (from Szent István University) take part in specific professional programmes and are responsible for the facilitation of the LFS. Solier Café (a meeting place in town offering coffee, confectionery and locally sourced food) is represented in the network by its owner and almost acts as the engine of all activities. Gödöllye Social Enterprise integrates the local organic food chain from farm to fork while local community groups (such as the Waldorf Schools, working on principles of anthroposophy) bring in the culture of voluntarism. The main operative member, the Gödöllő Agribusiness Centre Public Benefit Company, is owned by the Szent István University, and the largest agri-food companies of Hungary provide public benefit services for agri-food development and rural communities.

Activities

This broadly open social partnership in the public and private sector anchors joint activities for the benefit of the local community, creating a common platform for shaping the foodscape around Gödöllő. In a self-reflexive workshop the leader of the G7 noted that the groups' aim was to 'learn from the experiments of internal and external others and constantly build networks among these diverse individuals who have skilful access to institutional resources in the public, voluntary and entrepreneur sectors'. These diverse stakeholder aims are channelled through three specific working groups: one concentrating on produce and quality issues, another on locally based marketing and event organization, and a third on local food culture and public food procurement. The network currently uses a blog for its members to communicate, which works as a platform for interaction around healthy lifestyle, where environmentally friendly, regional, organic and vegetarian food issues are promoted. Currently the G7 is developing a database of local food producers in order to match fair-priced, quality, healthy, seasonal produce with local consumer

needs. The LFS is promoting local events: cookery schools, cooking competitions, festivals for local food, harvest festival, gastronomic programmes, or fine dining.

Plans

The collaboration is nurturing the relationships between farmers, processors, restaurants, consumers by promoting local food and direct relations. Through various events, the LFS develops the local food culture by taste-education programmes and several local food schemes (festivals, local food markets, gastronomic events, cookery schools, CSA, buying groups, local food infrastructures, distribution, community gardening projects). A further aim is to develop urban and community gardening projects in the city by bringing together the necessary stakeholders and providing necessary infrastructures to local residents without access to land. Members interested in a school-garden initiative planned the region wide project to teach about sustainable lifestyles and eating. Finally as the ultimate distance aim, the LFS started a competition with children to rethink how school canteens can lead the transformation of public food procurement.

Policies

Local policies also have a crucial role in facilitating local sustainability transitions. The city council has developed various strategic documents concerning housing, employment, town development, tourism, waste management, environmental protection, transport and culture. It is exactly in this context that the G7 initiative would like to shape the direction of the local food system according to the network economy – from the local through to the regional towards the national and global (export-oriented) level. G7 rapidly managed to reach out to the local municipality after a consultation with the mayor who gave the special mandate to G7 by asking their help in shaping the ecotown concept adopted by the municipality in 2006 from a local food focus. G7 planned to organize a series of stakeholder forums to develop a sustainable food strategy with the acknowledgment of the local municipality to complete the ecotown policy with a solid strategy on local food. With the special mandate to integrate local food in urban policy and planning, G7 gained a role in shaping urban food strategy and the procurement practices.

Szekszárd Local Food System

Case Study Area

Szekszárd, with a population of 33 720, is the smallest county (Tolna) capital in Hungary. Connecting the Transdanubian Hills and the Great Hungarian Plain, it has a peculiar transitional character with series of small hills and valleys. Even if Szekszárd is the seat of the county and the micro-region, its geographical potential for bridging external ties (being 50 km from Budapest and 50 km from Croatia) was not fully realized (Szekszárd MJV IVS, 2007). Szekszárd is famous for its meat and milk factories, and for many decades experienced the difficulties of extensive Socialist industrialization, which also facilitated its rapid urbanization. After the political transitions, only the service industries, trade and tourism sector managed to survive. Today,

consumers will find seven conventional farmers' markets in Tolna county. Szekszárd preserved in part the continuity of its food tradition since small-scale farmers recreated their food heritage. Recent research also noted that lost opportunities in local economic regeneration are unmistakably rooted in the lack of institutionalized cooperation between local municipalities and local businesses (Kabai et al., 2012).

Trajectory of the Initiative

The Szekszárd LFS was developed by Eco-Sensus Non-profit Ltd, comprising food producers and experts in the Szekszárd wine region, extending to 26 settlements around 20 km of the town. The geographical boundaries delimiting the LFS followed the boundaries of the famous Szekszárd wine region. The main aim of the LFS has been to bring local consumers closer to agriculture, by creating a point of sale and a community-based enterprise for local food. Moreover, the LFS showcases agricultural product diversity, ranging from salami, flour, honey, through to paprika, sunflower oil, jams and cheese in a region principally famous for its red wine. As a main aim of the LFS, the abundance and full range of local food supply needs to be present in a community-based local food shop, where programmes help create a culture of local food identity and a new sense of community with the local farmers. In an effort to enhance democratic access to local food heritage, and to make local food knowledge accessible to lower income consumers, the LFS started regional branding in the community-based local food shop and started to present basic and seasonal products that can be found in the region presently accessible only to the connoisseurs. A further aim is to help local producers in their direct sales by further developing their marketing skills.

Organization

This partnership was formed by urban intellectuals, who had strong personal ties to the region as well as many professional contacts outside the region. The main engine of the organization is an agricultural economist with solid theoretical and practical experience and with farming and processing experience in the family. His intermediary role enabled the LFS to develop new knowledge for planning such a complex project on urban–rural relations, effectively consulting with and gaining support from policymakers, authorities, and local stakeholders. Through several meetings in 2010 with stakeholders from the territory, the leader of the initiative managed to focus the LFS's objective to create a localized food system by building stronger connections between local farming and food supply sectors. As a main tool for shortening the distance towards consumers, a new purchasing infrastructure development and systemic mapping of the desirable elements of a local agri-food landscape were planned.

Activities

From the first survey on local food issues, it became clear that access to local products is very limited, so from the very beginning the LFS organized awareness-raising campaigns for local consumers about the quality and multiple benefits of local products. As a key message, the local food marketing campaign underlined environ-

mental benefits of buying local foods (transport cost savings, fewer emissions). As a result, local consumers buy and eat more local produce. During a second cycle, local consumers and producers started to develop together a directory of local food producers and recipes of regional dishes, quality gastronomic products. A new type of local food trademark was developed for food rooted in the region. As a further step they started a local community food shop that is serving as a point of sale for locally produced food and that, by promoting local quality products, can also be used for further awareness raising about local food issues and re-socialization of consumers.

Plans

The key feature of the LFS is to transform the agro-economic image of the region and to strengthen ecologically sound, small-scale production. The LFS aims to create benefits on both sides: for the producers it provides a stable market through a community-based shop, for the consumers it offers the best available, ecologically sound, quality food from the region. From the very beginning these plans faced a paradox. On the one hand, the LFS encourages more sustainable consumption patterns and initiates a consumer–producer reconnection through campaigns (or knowledge fixes such as the local food label) whereas, on the other hand, local consumer demand for local food cannot be easily served from local produce. In these circumstances, the LFS first turned to event-based communication and a behaviour-change campaign to raise awareness about the environmental impact of local food purchase, and later started to initiate a complex project to create a sense of community with the farmers. This aspect was clearly pointed out by the leader of the local food shop:

‘These products are handled only here in our locality. Consumers are more and more attracted by important production-related information. If channelled through this local speciality food shop a constant and valuable point of information and sale could be established, a convivial place for exchange on the produce origin, process methods, serving tips.’

Policies

The initiative gained substantive support at the seed phase from the European Regional Development Fund for campaigning about sustainable food consumption and production, for developing the necessary local food infrastructures and schemes, and for organizing collective marketing and quality assurance of local quality products. Later, institutional support at the local level was provided by the Hungarian National Rural Network in the form of short-term technical assistance and advice on good practices, training to develop knowledge for further development.

Discussion: Farmers and Consumers

Since LSFs are conceptualized mainly as links between farmers and consumers (Feenstra, 2002; Renting et al., 2003; Holloway et al., 2007), in the following I will discuss original research data collected on both farmers and consumers in their LFS contexts.

The willingness and capability of farmers to join LFSs is very much context dependent. In the G7 case, actors have been gathering positive feedback when recruiting farmers to the LFS for off-farm sales. Clearly, for many producers the seasonality determines which supply channel they rely on. Farmers' markets offer the most convenient off-farm sale opportunity; although for many small-scale producers stall fees are too high, and, indeed, older farmers do not like the convivial arenas of farmers' markets. In these circumstances, small-scale farmers often gain autonomy by selling their produce directly on-farm. Some farmers cannot extend the season by processing, do not want or are not capable of extending their activities with marketing. Very often older producers work completely alone, and are unable to find a farm successor. Still, they normally appreciate the G7 initiative and want to keep a weak tie to the LFS.

In Szekszárd, a supplier-side survey preceded the development of a local vendors' network, which helped reconnection of actors in various supply chains in the 26 settlements. The database of 200 local farmers became the raw material of an exemplary guidebook in which the LFS is presented through the local food producers' profiles and their quality products. However, the benefits of the local quality certification system are hard to communicate to farmers. As the leader of the shop described:

'It is tough here with some growers and winemakers. We need to explain that we do not need the leftovers from the local market. I remind them regularly of the values of our locality, which they keep forgetting when they are negotiating with players in the conventional agri-food system. We challenge well-established relationships and attempt to send a signal about how they can support their locality.'

Thus, local farmers are encouraged to qualify for the local food label based on criteria developed and constantly fine-tuned in a participatory way through local stakeholder workshops. Local farmers are also presented on a special website dedicated to their produce and the local food shop. By introducing the quality label for local farmers, both the supply and the demand side will get the opportunity to take part in a mutual and trust-based relationship around food.

As for consumer preferences, surveys of the G7 are based on a target group-specific, online data gathering (223 respondents) planned by the author in 2010 and organized in Gödöllő and its region about organic farming, veganism, healthy food choices. Responses are indicative of the beliefs of consumers' purchasing behaviour, rather than actual metered data. Consumer attitudes towards food purchasing reflect the most important environmental and health concerns in the target group of the initiative. Origin of food, place of buying and the personal relationship with the producer is decisive for almost every consumer (90%). Many respondents were vegetarians (three times more than the average European proportion) and they rejected convenience food almost unanimously. Some perceive this exclusivity of the LFS as narrowing its focus too much on the healthy diets of the privileged – as one consumer asked in the questionnaire: 'If I am not vegetarian, am I no longer interesting?'

Not surprisingly, the main consumer concerns around buying food were health (50%), environment (33%) and animal welfare (10%). While the survey recorded a general sense of loss of control of the food eaten, three fifths of respondents still believed that they had the opportunity to eat healthy food. The main problem is accessing appropriate food constituents for a fair price, as some respondents noted: 'I

cannot afford what I would like to eat' and 'The price of organics is unreal'. In these circumstances, three quarters of the respondents would be ready to join an initiative that aims to shape the local food system.

Buying fruit and vegetables is mainly (four out of five) happening at the local market, and local smaller shops, whereas only every fifth consumer buys directly from the farmer. One third of the respondents practise food self-provisioning and grow their own produce in their gardens. Four fifths follow seasonal choices. The terms 'organic' and 'outdoor growing' are clear to the customers, but the meaning of other terms such as 'firstlings', 'reform eating', 'natural food' are much more uncertain. Two thirds of respondents are organic buyers and need more information on local farmers and the availability of seasonal food. Finally, when looking at the benefit side, respondents mention the health benefits of local organic food and most often note that (by buying through SFSCs) 'we do not poison ourselves'.

In 2010 the author also planned for the benefit of the Szekszárd LFS a representative consumer survey in Tolna county (n=533) on the main characteristics of local food consumption and the willingness to buy local produce (<<http://www.tolnaitemek.hu>>, accessed 31 July 2012). Sampling and weighing procedures were provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The main finding of the survey is the clear profile of the typical food buyer of the region, who is a middle-aged woman with secondary education residing in one of the middle-sized towns of the county with at least one child and one income earner. Consumers are keen to trust local food although the concept of 'what is local' is unclear. If consumers use the term at all, they rather understand 'locally purchased' instead of 'locally produced' and associate it with safety. Urban consumers prefer local shops, while families with kids prefer farmers' markets. In rural areas a high proportion of food self-provisioning has been traced. One third of the total population of Tolna County consumes predominantly local food. While 98% believes that organic food means meat-free food, one in four consumers buys organic products – typically the younger, more educated, higher income groups. The decisive consumer demand for local food is related to the more educated, younger, urban consumers with families. Food origin is overly important in this locavore⁵ group, and they put their trust in local food as much as that they buy in local shops. Two fifths of them buy organic food, and frequently engage in solidarity purchasing. As for food buying venues, local shops are the most popular (72%), while supermarkets are frequented by only 18%, typically belonging to the older generations, and 10% prefers farmers market. In 2011, a representative survey of 257 respondents was replicated in the concentrated area around Szekszárd (the wine region) to investigate consumer awareness of local food specificities. The findings again point to a remarkable group (47%) of rather urban, better-educated, high-income strata of conscious consumers, who are willing to pay extra for local food.

In summary, the main finding of the nature of consumer–producer relations is that in practice LFSs are socially, spatially, culturally quite clearly delineated. As for the farmers, there is some evidence that LFSs provide viable opportunity for farmers with a unique preference for off-farm sales in proximity. In this sense, increasing demand for quality produce has a role in maintaining locally distinctive, traditional and artisanal skills of producers. In these circumstances, the success of LFS initiatives depends to a large extent on how local producers are capable of catering to place-based consumer demand. Again case studies demonstrate that through sales in proximity small-scale farmers can link with a circle of locally resident customers if

they are concerned about social and environmental values of produce. On the other hand consumer surveys in both case studies demonstrated that practices in relation to local food are quite complex. Even if the concept of local food is misleading for the average consumer, LFSs attract urban, better-educated, high-income groups of conscious consumers, with child and disposable income, who are willing to pay extra for local food. Consumers attracted by LFSs often act in solidarity with producers and mostly support these LFSs for health, environmental and ethical reasons. Local in this context means healthy, better quality, freshness. Overall, there seems to be a strong consumer interest in local produce, but there is also a lack of availability of such produce. Hence, LFSs need to develop in a way to help organizing better physical or financial access to local produce.

Summary and Conclusion

The results presented in this article indicate four very main findings related to the focus of research.

1. A new generation of civic-led LFSs cultivate in Hungary complex local food agendas in urban settings and build on extended collaborative networks of producers–consumers and stakeholders. Similarly to Western-European examples, these food relocalization initiatives are driven and mostly supported by urban customers and promote social and environmental values (Fonte, 2008; Karner et al., 2010). Clearly, the initiatives are centred around non-profit activities and perform collective actions to sustain producers' livelihoods, revitalizing linkages between agriculture and society (Marsden, 2000). Both cases demonstrate that in post-Socialist contexts new emerging types of LFSs develop through meaningful collaboration within the local food sector. As the concept of intermediaries also assumes creating demand for local purchasing, providing logistics, developing labelling schemes, LFSs build up a new social-business model on the ethical principles of sustainability and local cultural heritage. In all these respects, my case study examples belong to the 'second generation' of local food initiatives in Hungary, which benefited from the better regulatory context since 2006, and could take active part in the social debate around food and agriculture. As part of the emerging local food movement in Hungary, both initiatives actively build bridges with the alliance of civic food networks created in the regulatory fights of 2009–2010 (Karner et al., 2010). It is also important to recognize here that both initiatives promote quality criteria related to environmental and health benefits of local food (Winter, 2003).
2. The case studies highlight the distinguished role of urban intellectuals as drivers for LFS. LFS operators are relying on personal, in-kind investments but also are able to gain public funding and community support. Being the engines of the LFSs and well-known figures in their locality with respectable managerial skills, they managed to build strong local community ties to maintain the dynamic internal operation of networks. Through their long-term personal involvement, LFS development has great potential in shaping the culture of socially innovative local cooperation and to further missing values in post-Socialist Hungary, such as integration of various interest groups, building a new sense of community, reinventing local traditions, preserving the value-centred professionalism and community-based character of LFSs.

3. Beyond the complexity and dynamism of the initiatives a concise and generalizable 'toolbox' methodology could be identified for developing LFSs. After systematic mapping of local stakeholders and geographical delimitation, LFSs need to analyse the socio-economic characteristics of local production and consumption. Building place-based agri-food marketing on stakeholder intuition and local contextual knowledge, territorial branding and labelling can be planned. Producer databases and consumer surveys are helpful in finding adequate engagement strategies. Event organization, active communication in the local community develops organizational capabilities, whereas rather solid legal-technical knowledge is necessary for the provision of logistics coupled with non-profit organizational management skills. Furthermore, conscious planning of the LFSs requires constant feedback and evaluation from the extended stakeholder groups. In these respects both initiatives require much more professionalization for future success, and timely institutional support would be essential without disproportionate administrative and financial burdens.
4. As a self-referential lesson, this research also acknowledges the critical role of the researcher and my own research in providing vital support for the development of local food initiatives. While investigating consumer willingness to buy local food or the role of food champions in organizing events, or meeting with stakeholders, the researcher also helps the translation process and knowledge sharing among these and other external actors (producers, consumers, manufacturers, retailers, decision-makers). Research also had a role in identifying local intermediaries who can shape LFS development standards (quality criteria, advertising, logos, labels, and regional trademarks). By taking part in stakeholder workshops, critical researchers might support the fruitful integration of local-lay and expert-scientific knowledge forms but also point to capabilities needed to solve legal, production, management, commercial difficulties in the LFSs. Further research would be required to gain more recognition for LFS's contributions to a sustainable and accessible quality food supply, as well as to point out how traditional skills and different types of knowledge are cultivated to develop LFSs. Practice-oriented research settings could be cooperatively developed with the beneficiaries and performed as a translation process and knowledge-sharing exercise among diverse territorial stakeholders.

Notes

1. SUS-CHAIN (<<http://www.sus-chain.org>>) – Marketing Sustainable Agriculture: an analysis of the potential role of new food supply chains in sustainable rural development; COFAMI (<<http://www.cofami.org>>) – Encouraging Collective Farmers Marketing Initiatives; FAAN (<<http://www.faanweb.eu>>): Facilitating Alternative Agro-food Networks – stakeholder perspectives on research needs.
2. Research questions and analytical approaches of this chapter build on two specific EU projects that shaped the focus of the case studies: the CONVERGE project (Rethinking Globalisation in the light of Contractions and CONVERGence, <<http://www.convergeproject.org>>) looked at policies that simultaneously handle global equity and ecological sustainability, investigated how communities contribute to the goal of global equity and greater social fairness within biophysical planetary boundaries; the FAAN project (Facilitating Alternative Agro-Food Networks: stakeholder perspectives on research needs, <<http://www.faanweb.eu>>) examined the main benefits of LFSs and how various policies and stakeholder strategies strengthen LFSs.
3. For example, see regulation on markets and fairs – 55/2009, regulation on small scale producers – 52/2010, and the hygienic and food safety regulation on local farmers markets – 51/2012.
4. Consumer survey findings in this case-study research are based on 223 respondents from Gödöllő and its region with online access, as well as on representative surveys of 533 and 257 respondents in

Szekszárd. The online methodology is limited in that it provides a perspective only on the habits of existing Internet users, not of the total population of local consumers. In the Gödöllő case, the specific online survey responses of the target group are indicative of the beliefs about consumers purchasing behaviour, rather than actual metered data.

5. A locavore is defined as a person whose diet consists only or principally of locally grown or produced food (Oxford Word Of The Year: Locavore - <http://blog.oup.com/2007/11/locavore/>).

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Appendix

Table A1. Summary description of the case studies.

| Details | Szekszárd | Gödöllő |
|---|--|---|
| Characteristics of the locality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • medium-sized town, Transdanubian hills with long tradition of growing grapes • severe socio-demographic decline • extensive outskirts (cascade of vineyards) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • medium-sized town with a solid agri-background • unprecedented demographic increase • suburbanization, in- and out-mobility for work |
| Socio-political vision, strategic orientation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • localized urban food system focusing on quality products' origin • strong connections between local agricultural and food supply sectors • attribute a place-based identity to products and create new meeting places, access to local products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote healthy and sustainable lifestyle for the peri-urban population • facilitate direct relations of local producers and consumers, a network of local food supply schemes • maintenance of former agricultural landscape and remaining small scale farming with conscious food planning |
| Data sources, methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key informants: academics, officials, consumers • target group specific consumer survey, May and Nov 2010 • group discussion: staff and customers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interviews: extended network members • survey: 2010 April online questionnaire • workshop: participants of the network |
| Organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • centred around a community-based local food shop and quality label | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • network of citizens, organised voluntarily |
| Social impacts, activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboration of food producers and experts in the Szekszárd vine region (20 km surrounding) • promotion of environmentally friendly, regional food • directory of local food producers and recipes of regional dishes, quality gastronomic products • introduction of local food quality trademark | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working groups: produce and quality, marketing and event organization, food culture and public procurement • blog, email list as a platform for interaction • promotion of environmentally friendly, local, organic, vegetarian food • database of local food producers, match seasonal produce and local consumers' needs |