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Contents

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The Food We Eat...

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Abstract. This article focuses on those aspects that are closely related to the food choices mothers make on daily basis. Everyday food choices, such as what we eat, how much we eat, what quality our food has, or where our food comes from, are highly influencing our life quality. For a better understanding of food-related behaviour, we have collected data through a self-administered questionnaire, which was disseminated in a closed Facebook group (more than 2,200 members during data collection) formed by mothers from Miercurea Ciuc (Romania) and its surroundings. The used questionnaire considered a great variety of aspects from questions on diet to using health supplements, being pro or against vaccinations for children, exercising routines, and shopping habits. We asked mothers participating in our study to allow us to understand the process of everyday decisions that they are making for the maximum benefit of their family. What kind of food do the mothers provide for their children and their family? Is there any difference between the health consciousness levels in food providing for the children and for the parents respectively? Which are the main food sources they rely on and why? These were the guiding questions of the research. The majority of the respondents consider home-cooked meals very important: almost all the families have their breakfast and dinner at home, and the majority even their lunch. And three-quarters of them also defined their family as a traditional Szekler family regarding the eating habits.

Keywords: food, diet, eating habit, mother, children

Introduction

The food that we eat is part of who we are, it is a personal characteristic, it is part of our identity and it can embody several feelings. We make different choices

based on when, with whom, and why we eat. We eat different things if we are alone, with family or with friends, if we are hungry or we celebrate something, if we look for comfort, we are stressed or we want to indulge ourselves, etc. Some of us choose to stay in close touch with our food – growing vegetables, raising animals –, while others are more alienated from what ends up on their plate.

Food decisions are deeply grounded in ethical, religious, personal backgrounds, and they are very political in nature. Most people have an understanding of what a healthy diet is and what they are supposed to do to maintain or to reach the health benefits resulting from it. Eating lots of fruits and vegetables, having a balanced diet are the most cited theories/practices. Most adults consider healthy eating not only important in itself but also a responsibility of the parents to provide it for and teach it to their children.

According to public knowledge – highly promoted in the media –, a healthy diet consists in adding several foods in large amounts (fruits and vegetables, whole grains, water) and restricting, limiting those that are seen as unhealthy or risky (fat, especially saturated fat, sugar, salt, etc.).

The trend of obesity and less healthy eating habits are catching up in Eastern Europe as well.[1] Popular media shows that according to Romanians healthy eating is expensive and unreachable for many as these products are either hard to find on the market or are unaffordable for average salaries. Popescu showed how eating habits are age- and income-dependent. Young people with high income are more prone to maintain a balanced diet, preferring more simple foods, fruits and vegetables, and they choose ecological foods even at a higher price. The consumption of fast-food products is also spreading: over 70% of Romanians living in urban areas prefer the quick meal offers by fast-food restaurants – over half of the respondents goes once in a month to such restaurants, while one in three only in the weekends and one in five has fast-food meals both on weekdays and in the weekend (Popescu 2008). In 2008, less than 1% of the Romanian farm food products were ecological (Popescu 2008: 378). In the last couple of years, the number of firms registered in organic agriculture has increased (4.55 times from 2006 to 2012) (Vasile et al. 2015: 260). This suggests that the organic sector could be a viable option for rural farmers and even an attractive business sector. And the organic farming might be more suitable in Romania than the conventional one since the agricultural territory is highly fragmented (Vasile et al. 2015: 265). However, in our region (Szeklerland), there are very few initiatives regarding organic farming.

1 http://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/Obesity-Update-2014.pdfhttp://www.romania-insider.com/what-are-the-romanians-fast-food-eating-habits/142508/, http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2015/02/21/just-2-percent-of-romanians-dine-out-on-a-daily-basis-survey--19-54-20, http://www.gandul.info/magazin/cine-sunt-romanii-care-mananca-sanatos-studiu-10887144.

Theoretical frame

Eating habits – often conceptualized through grocery shopping behaviour – is a topic well-researched in marketing, nutrition, dietetics, medicine, etc. (Sholderer et al. 2004, Steptoe et al. 1995, Turrell et al. 2002; Wardle et al. 2004, Worsley et al. 2010), and research shows that health is one of the basic motivations for product selection. Other factors – such as hedonism, healthfulness, price, convenience, tradition, familiarity, mood, weight control, ethical concerns, etc. – are also influencing our grocery shopping motivations (ex. Arnold & Reynolds 2003, Rapport et al. 1992, Drenowski 1992, Dholakia 1999; Jayawardhena et al. 2007, Rohm and Swaminathan 2004). Shopping can be task-related/rational (Batra & Ahtola 1999) or "mission"-motivated (Babin et al. 1994), and according to Capaldi (1996) the greatest drive behind food choices can be seen as short-term expectations such as taste, pleasure, or satiety. Taste is an important factor when it comes to the consumer to choose among certain foods (Grunet et al. 2000, Urala & Lahteemaki 2003), and people are not likely to compromise for a possible health benefit (Gilbert 2000; Ko et al. 2004, Urala & Lahtenmaki 2004). Criticism towards functional foods has been growing in the past couple of years and it translates into a lower willingness to compromise (Verbeke, 2006).

There is a stereotypical belief according to which we categorize foods as either good or bad, healthy or not healthy (Rozin et al. 1996; Oakes & Slotterback 2001a,b; Oakes 2003, etc.), and we have the tendency to overindulge in bad foods as soon as we think that the healthy diet was compromised. Stereotypes suggesting that low-fat snacks are healthier than their regular versions lead to an increased consumption of these low-fat products (Geskens et al. 2007). The judgement of the people who have oatmeal with fruits and nuts and those who have pie for breakfast is based on whether they eat "good" or "bad" food, even if the two foods are very similar calorie-wise (Oakes & Slotterback 2004–2005). The healthiness of the food is most often evaluated along freshness and fat content regardless of the age, gender, or dieting status of the respondent (Oakes & Slotterback 2002).

Studies in the field of nutrition, consumption, and lifestyle show the close relationship between diet and health (Bucher et al. 2013, Gustafson et al. 2011, etc.), but the way consumers interpret the healthiness of their choices, shopping, and therefore diet is still lacking consistent research.

A certain level of nutrition knowledge is needed in order to make healthy food decisions, and studies show a relation between greater nutrition knowledge and healthy eating (Dickson-Spillman & Siegrist 2011, Dickson-Spillman et al. 2011).

Healthy grocery shopping is identified along three categories: by including healthful foods, avoiding or restricting certain items, and achieving a balance between these two categories (Hollywood et al. 2013). We are expected to follow

guidelines[2] provided by governmental organizations and health institutes prescribing a 'balanced diet', but most of the time consumers find it difficult to translate these suggestions into practice (Lobstein & Davis 2009, Wiggins, 2004).

Data and methodology

Parents often make different nutrition decisions for themselves and for their children (Falk et al. 2001). To better understand food-related behaviour, we have collected data through a self-administered questionnaire in a closed Facebook group of mothers from the Miercurea Ciuc (in Hungarian: Csíkszereda) area, Romania. The area is part of Romania's Harghita County, respectively that of Széklerland, which can be considered an ethnic enclave since Harghita County has a more than 80% Hungarian majority.

We used an online questionnaire with 40 questions, from which 5 were open-ended and 35 closed-ended, having one or multiple choices. The applied questionnaire considered a great variety of aspects that help understand everyday health decisions and behaviours. From diet-related questions to using health supplements, being pro or against vaccinations for children, exercising routines and shopping habits, we asked mothers participating in our study to allow us to understand the process of everyday decisions that they are making for the maximum benefit of their family. We disseminated the questionnaires among mothers who have at least one child under 6 years and live in Miercurea Ciuc or its surroundings. For a period of 3 weeks, we shared the link of the online questionnaire in a Facebook group, which had more than 2,200 members in August 2015. During this period, 139 mothers answered our questionnaire. The sample could not be representative to the region since not every mother is part of this group, not everybody read the call, and not everybody answered the question. Hence, we think that the results provide some general data about women's attitude and behaviour towards healthy eating.

Szeklerland – with a tourist's or an outsider's eye – is a very beautiful, supremely preserved ecological landscape, where everything is – again, with an outsider's eyes – all natural, authentic. The food is healthy since the cattle herds growing on the beautiful mountain meadows give healthy milk. The water is healthy since the eye-catching spring waters provide uncontaminated water. The food is healthy and locally produced since the majority of the families from the villages behind the hills keep animals and assure the essentials. There are no big industries

2 Food Pyramid (US – Department of Agriculture, Ireland – Department of Health, etc.), the Eatwell Plate (UK – Food Standards Agency, etc.), Okostányér (Recommendation of the MDOSZ – The National Association of Hungarian Dietitians), Ghid pentru alimentația sănătoasă (Recommendation of the Ministry of Health).

with contaminating pollutant by-products. There are no big fast-food restaurants offering a lot of junk foods. So, everyone in Szeklerland can eat very bio and very organic food and can have a healthy food regime. And do they eat this way? What do they eat and what kind of accent do they put on a healthy food regime?

In order to obtain proper answers, Harghita County was chosen for several reasons: on the one hand, it is an emphatically rural region still displaying a lot of urban characteristics in Miercurea Ciuc and its surroundings. This is such a region where most of the families do not only dispose of land ownership but the self-sustaining or supplementary income type of family farming is still significant as well. It seems an important issue to see what kind of food sources they use and in what proportion home-produced foods appear in the families' daily diet.

In the same time, numerous – small and large-scale – sociological and cultural anthropological research was conducted in the region in the last decade, examining current social scientific issues. This type of sociological inquiry may fit well into these sociological cognitive processes. The terrain for the fieldwork was somewhat "familiar", the Facebook group of mothers from Ciuc had been analysed earlier and known as an active, dynamic on-line group, with a very large number of mothers actively present in a group where health, healthcare, food and child nutrition are very common topics (see Gergely 2015: 120). We assumed this group can provide a good platform for an exploratory research.

In Harghita County, the average net salary is very low, almost the lowest in the country. For example, in 2013,[3] it was only RON 1,325;[4] unemployment is affecting at least 10,500 people, with an unemployment rate of 7.4 (8.4 for men and 6.3. for women) compared to the 5.8 national average (6.5 for men and 5.1 for women).

The respondents of our research are 25–55-year-old mothers (the average age being 36.35, SD=5.954), 89.2% of whom is married, about 2/3 living in urban areas, half of them having a college or university degree, and 62% having a non-manual job. Half of the husbands also have college or university degree, 40% has a non-manual job, 20% is an entrepreneur, and another 17% is manual worker. Two-thirds of the households have an income between RON 1,500 and RON 3,500, the average salary being around RON 3,000 per household. The households range from 2 to 10 members, with an average of 4 members (SD=1.085), from which on average 1.67 (SD=0.856) are underage.

Based on the findings of the literature, on the characteristics of the field – namely that providing food for the family is part of the identity of mothers –, and the importance of this role in a more traditional society, we have compiled research questions such as:

3 http://elemzo.hargitamegye.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/HR_CV_MS_Munkaero_Secured.pdf.

4 This changed for 2016 to 1,317 RON (cca. 294 EUR). http://www.gandul.info/financiar/harta-salariilor-in-2016-unde-se-gaseste-in-romania-cel-mai-usor-de-munca-14953446.

What kind of food do Szekler mothers from the Csíkszereda area provide for their children? Is there any difference between the health consciousness level in providing for their children, respectively for themselves and the father? And which are the main food sources they rely on and why?

Although our research is first of all exploratory, we hypothesise that:

H1: Due to the traditional characteristics of the region, the majority of the families eat (at home) home-made dishes.

H2: For the people from the town, the grocery market is an important (primary) source of food: in our region, a more important source than the supermarket.

H3: In the everyday diet, the meat–bread–potato triad is the most frequent.

H4: The mothers consider fresh fruits and vegetables very important, but because of the region's particularity[5] very few fruits and vegetables can be purchased from local gardening.

This article focuses on those aspects that are closely related to the food choices mothers make on a daily basis. Everyday food choices, such as what we eat, how much we eat, what quality our food has, or where our food comes from, are highly influencing our life quality. Health consciousness and the related decisions are often controlled by several other factors, such as income, lifestyle, access to or the ease of access to certain products, etc., and are influenced by other people, groups, or interests (ex. school, work environment, healthcare, media, government, etc.). According to our respondents, the primary responsibility comes to the parents in ensuring and teaching a healthy lifestyle to the children. When asked to rank parents and family, school, environment, marketing government, healthcare, public figures, and media on their responsibility list, the number one position was taken by the family: 98.6% of respondents agree that it is the parents who must prepare their children for a healthy lifestyle. Teaching the importance of a healthy lifestyle within the family has to start with teaching healthy food choices. The personal responsibility of parents for ensuring the health of the next generation provides our starting point in this health consciousness analysis.

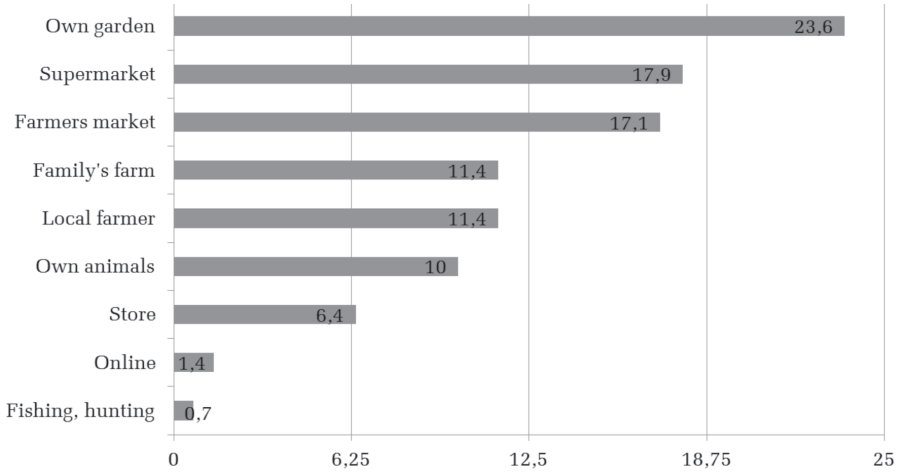
Results

In our survey, we considered several aspects of healthy eating such as: where does the food originate from? How much are our respondents spending on food? What do they eat? And how is that connected with the education level of the mother (assuming that she makes most of the grocery shopping and cooking decisions) and the income of the family?

5 The region is the coldest area in Romania. From September until May, there can be frost. For example, the nut trees do not yield, just like the case with tomato, sweet pepper, and maize.

The shift of diet from own grown vegetables and raised animals to purchased products is often seen as a shift of quality as well. In our sample, nearly half (45%) of the respondents have as a primary food source their own garden (24%) or their own animals (10%) or the garden of a family member (11%).

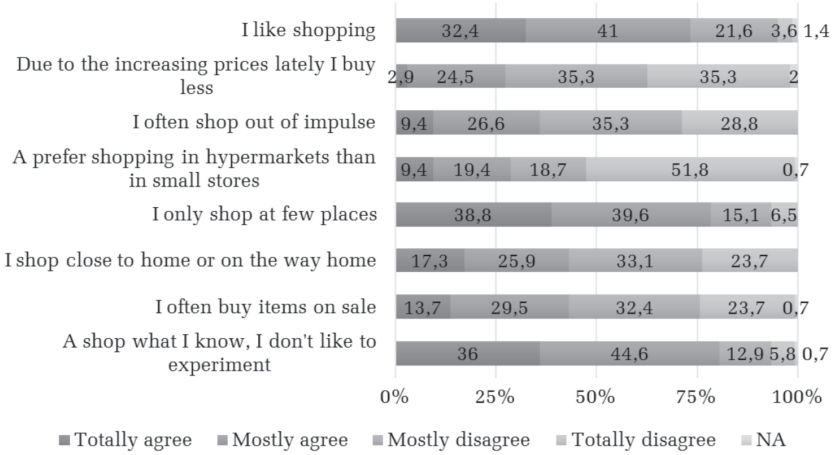
Local farmers add another 11% to the primary food source where our respondents have control over the quality or at least have a good understanding of the origin and quality of their food. The farmers' market in Miercurea Ciuc is another important source, with 18% of the respondents naming it as primary source. Most sellers of the farmers' market come from the southern parts of Romania, but local sellers are also present. The supermarkets, stores, and online grocery shopping are listed as primary food source for less than a quarter of the respondents.



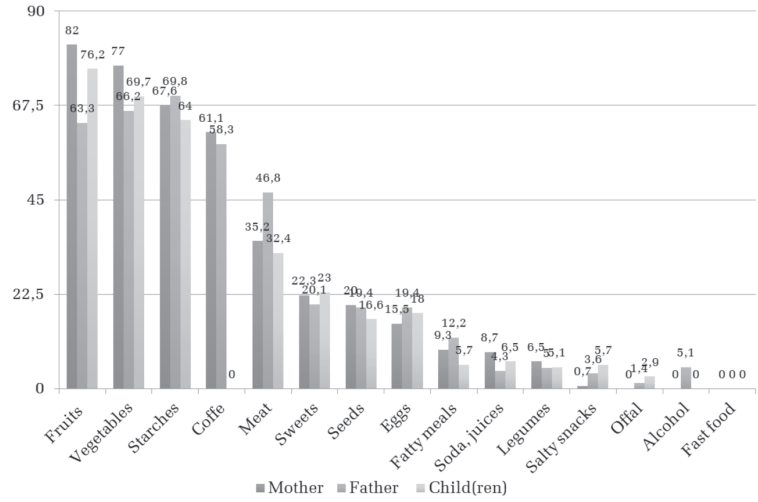
Graph 1. Distribution of primary food sources

While the grocery stores and supermarkets are not the primary food source for most respondents, 80% of all respondents is doing grocery shopping several times a week, 16.5% once a week, and only 2.2% reported a frequency lower than that. The average spending on one grocery shopping trip shows great variety, ranging from RON 25 to more than RON 300, the average being somewhere between RON 76 and 100.

Our respondents "are people of habit": while they do like grocery shopping, they buy products they already know and like (not really experimenting with new things) at few places and they prefer small stores over hypermarkets. Our data suggest that most mothers care about what food they buy, and when it comes to decisions they put their trust in tested products and sellers that they already know.



Graph 2. Respondents' attitude towards grocery shops and products



Graph 3. Daily food: food categories consumed at least once a day

The type of food is at least as important for a healthy lifestyle as its origin. Keeping in mind that our respondents are likely more health-conscious than the average inhabitants of the region, the following graph shows – in descending order – those food categories that most respondents consume at least once a day.

The first thing that we can see is that the diet of the children is following the trend of mothers, while fathers have quasi different eating habits, yet the majority of the families mostly follow the nutrition guideline of fruits and vegetables, starches. Fathers have less fruits and vegetables, more meat, eggs, and fatty meals, while in very few cases, and only for the father, the daily alcohol was also

mentioned. Coffee is also consumed daily by most parents, while there is no one who consumes fast-food[6] on a daily basis.

In the case of meat consumption, lean pork is the number one favourite: 25.7% of respondents said that they had it regularly at least 3 times a week. Chicken and turkey breast (16.4%), fish (10.7%), chicken and turkey drumsticks (10%) are also among the more frequent meat choices, while the consumption of beef, fatty pork, rabbit, game, and seafood characterizes only less than 5% of the respondents. No one was eating regularly duck, marrow, or tripe – although all three are present in the traditional Hungarian/Transylvanian cooking habits –, and there was one vegetarian respondent.

The majority of respondents is using sunflower oil, 90% of mothers is using it as the basic fat source. Olive oil and lard are also widely used. If we look into fat usage in relation to the mothers' level of education, we can see that mothers with a college/university degree use less sunflower oil (83.9% vs. 68.5%) and lard (19.4% vs. 6.5%) as primary source than mothers with lower education, the former rather naming olive oil (0% vs. 21.3%) and coconut oil (0% vs. 3.7%) as their primary fat source. Neither olive oil nor coconut oil were named as primary fat source by any mothers with a low level of education. These suggest a correlation between education and nutrition knowledge that should be further tested with a mixed methodology, seeking to understand the motivations and consequences.

Not surprisingly (the Szekler area is known for many traditional potato recipes), the most frequently used vegetable is the potato,[7] very closely followed by tomato and a couple of other breakfast veggies (tomato, cucumber, pepper). Low-carb vegetables (spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, mushroom, lettuce) are less rarely consumed than high-carb ones (potato, tomato, carrot, sweet peas, cabbages, green beans, corn).

The several-times-a-week consumption pattern suggests that the main meal of the day is meat and potato or meat and cabbage, etc. (*Graph 4*).

We were interested in how the understanding of health and (culinary) tradition appears in the case of Szeklers, so we asked our respondents to name a typical/everyday meal (breakfast, lunch, and dinner). We all grew up learning that breakfast is the most important meal of the day with a great impact on our health, while, on the other hand, lunch is the main meal of the day as it brings the family together.

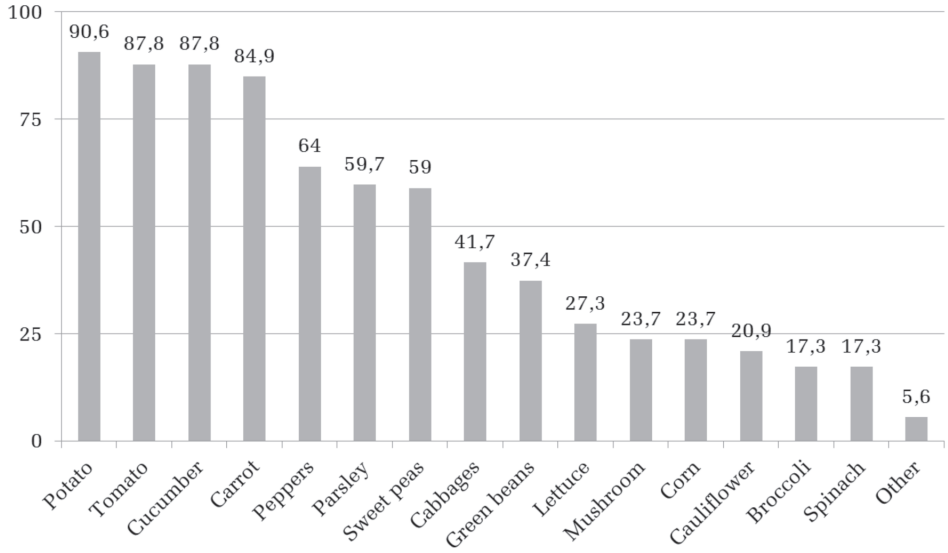
In the Csíkszereda area, the breakfast is a mix of traditional meals and more modern ones. Sandwich breakfasts (bread, spread, deli meat, and vegetables) are very typical but eggs and dairy products are also often consumed. Almost all respondents have either milk or tea with their breakfast. 72% of all respondents consume bread for breakfast, which was often mentioned to be a home-made

6 We probably should have named bakery and pre-prepared meals as part of the fast food category.

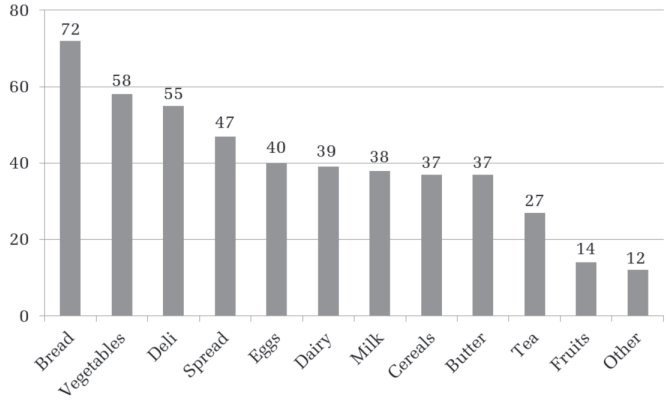
7 Health-wise it is questionable whether its place among vegetables, rather than starches, is acceptable or not.

bread. Bread and butter (and jam or honey) is one of the basic breakfasts, toast and French toast are also frequent, just like pâté and home-made spreads. From the breakfast veggies, tomato was the most often named, while pepper, cucumber, lettuce, and radish are also consumed (*Graph 5*).

Deli meats are a favourite choice as well, most frequently including ham, salami, and hot-dog, but sausages (mostly home-made) and bacon are also consumed by many. While milk and yoghurt are the unquestionable favourite dairy products, a great variety of other items are also found in the diet of Szeklers: butter, cheese, kefir, curd, and other fermented milk products.



Graph 4. Vegetables consumed at least three times a week



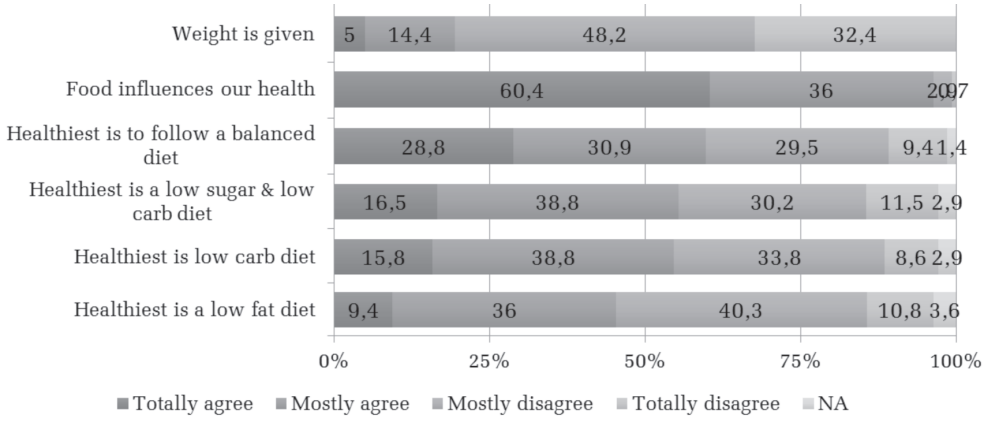
Graph 5. Typical breakfasts among the respondents

A typical Szekler lunch is home-cooked and it has two dishes: soup comes first, and then meat with some side-dish. From all respondents, less than 10 people said that they typically do not have soup for lunch, while 4 said that their lunch is often a very filling, rich soup in "which the wooden spoon would stand". The first favourite, most often prepared one is the veggie soup that is made both with and without meat. A great variety of soups – more filling ones like bean, lentil, potato, or cabbage, and lighter ones as fruit, cream, tomato, pea, cauliflower – make the base of a Szekler's lunch. As one mother said, it is always different but always home-cooked, and "there cannot be a day without a warm soup".

Several respondents said that usually only one of the dishes has meat in it, and if the soup is richer, then the second dish is lighter or if the main dish is rich, they match it with a light soup. Dessert was barely named, but if they mentioned it they named fruit or pancake following a one-dish lunch such as a bean soup. Meals with meat are often seen as heavy, and several respondents emphasized the "light, meat-free, vegetable dish".

The great majority of respondents said that the main dish of the meal is some sort of meat (there was no preference for the kind) and potato; half of those who named any side-dish mentioned potato (mostly boiled and purée). While meat is considered the main nutrition, different vegetable pottages are also very much liked and often served with egg, sausage, fried cheese, or fish. Vegetables as side-dishes, casseroles, or ratatouille are also very typical meals.

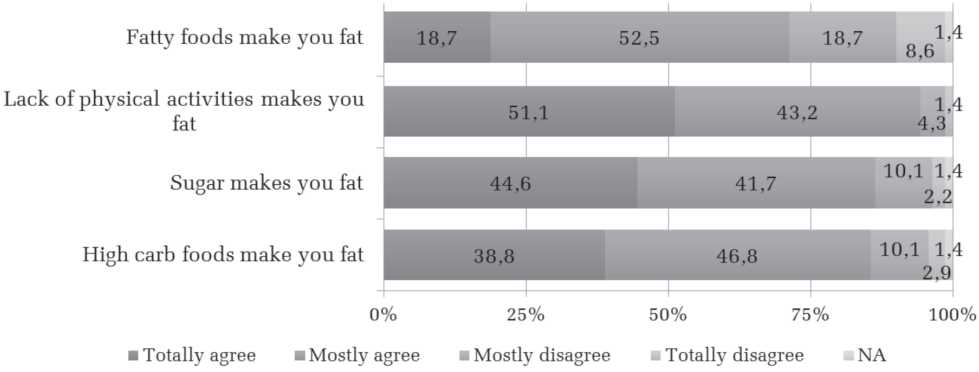
After seeing what our respondents and their families consume, we turned our attention to a question that aimed to check how they think about mainstream diets and how the diet/health and weight perception goes with the practicality of what they consume.



Graph 6. Health perception of mainstream diets

Graph 6 shows high agreement in the importance of food in our health and also high disagreement in seeing weight as something given/set. While diet obviously influences our health, there is a less clear opinion about what makes the difference between a healthy diet and a less healthy one. A balanced diet has the greatest support and the low-sugar and low-fat diet has the biggest disagreement. The low-fat diet seems to be the most controversial, given that it almost perfectly divides our respondents into two groups with 45.4% agreeing that low fat is healthy and 51% disagreeing.

For a closer look – or in order to put it differently –, we asked our respondents how much they agree or disagree with 4 statements often heard as causes of weight gain.[8]



Graph 7. Perception of the major causes of weight gain

While previously our respondents said that food is influencing our health, it seems (*Graph 7*) that weight gain is not (closely) connected to health, as it seems food has much less influence (through weight gain at least) on our health than exercising. Fatty meals, sugar, and high-carb diets are all seen as causes of weight gain, and our respondents seem to agree that a high-sugar/high-carb diet is more responsible for weight gain than a high-fat one.

Discussion

Szekler families follow a mixed diet in the sense that both nutrition textbook meals and traditional dishes can be found on the families' menu, leading to an often contradictory situation.

Statements like: "freshly squeezed vegetable juices", "fresh fruits and vegetables", "many-many vegetables", "yoghurt and one slice of bread and

8 We did not specify all the health-related implications of being overweight or obese.

veggies and deli", "oatmeal with milk or one slice of bread with butter and jam" sound like taken out from a nutrition book on healthy breakfast. Meanwhile, other statements such as "our own, home-made pâté and other spreads…", "traditional home-made bread", "soft eggs, deli, vegetables (tomato and peppers) and curd", "butter, bread, tomato, sausage or bacon, home-made (smoked) cheese" emphasize the importance of tradition and inherited recipes and customs.

The practice of having a garden and raising animals or having access to local farmers is meeting the widely spread opinion of low-fat, low-carb, and high-vegetable and -fruit consumption dietary expectations.

The majority of the respondents consider home-cooked meals to be very important, quasi all the families have breakfast and dinner at home, and the majority even lunch. And three-quarters also defined their family as a traditional Szekler family regarding eating habits. We also found out that the grocery market seems to be the most important food source – but for those, who are living in the town. And yes, the market is a more important food source than the supermarket.

We could also see that the meat–bread–potato triad is the most essential part of the eating habit. The most frequently used vegetable is potato: more than ninety per cent of the respondents consume it in various ways at least three time a week. 51.1% eats meat at least several times per week, while 35.3% eats it daily or several times in one day. 67.7% eats bread on a daily basis (or several times a day) and only one per cent declared never eating bread. 80% of the families eat fruit on a daily basis – the mothers eat the most and the fathers the least, but everybody eats fruit. On the other hand, fruit makes part of the three main courses only in 14% of the families. 14% eats fruit for breakfast. And some children eat fruit as snack in the school or between main meals.

The concept of *controversies* in the Szekler diet was suggested by the following findings:

1) while agreeing that low-carb food is healthy and that sugar/carbs lead to weight gain, both breakfast and lunch in the case of Szeklers is a dominantly carb-rich meal (bread in the morning, potato for lunch);

2) meals with meat are often seen as heavy – whereas several respondents emphasized the "light, meat-free, vegetable dish", the main meal of the day is always meat and side-dish;

3) while the majority of the respondents[9] consider their diet a traditional Szekler diet based on breakfast meals, the modern diet would be more suitable as "light breakfasts" are emphasized with toast, cereals, bread with butter and jam, or butter and honey.

We consider that the region is following the trends observed in the US and Western Europe. Given that it is a mostly rural area, a region with the lowest

9 74% of respondents answered traditional Szekler diet, 1.4% follows a modern diet, 3.6% are vegetarians, and 2.9% are paleo. 17.3% named different other diets.

income in the country, the switch from traditional meals to a modern diet is still in process. While the spread of fast-food consumption following low-fat (and healthy high-carb) diets are present in other countries as well as in more urbanized areas of the country (see Popescu 2008), in our region, we can observe a mix of the traditional meals with the more modern ones.

The upcoming years will answer whether the region will close the gap with the global dietary trends of eating out, fast-food meals, and pre-prepared meals, and as such also follow the trend set by several western countries in obesity and worsening health conditions or it will maintain (or turn back to) their traditional culinary heritage and nutrition. We may assume that with a delay in the aforementioned trends the region is at a turning point and the role that mothers play today has a significant importance in the health of the future generation. While our research has its methodological limitations, its results urge for a more structured, larger data collection that allows statistical hypothesis testing.

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The Tangible Qualities of Organically-Sourced Products

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Abstract. In the present study, I survey the current situation of labelling organically produced or -sourced products and the type and range of the most frequently purchased and consumed organic goods in Hungary. The focus of the present work entails the elaboration of the value of organic labelling, including its various definitions and interpretations. The terms organic or 'bio' with the associated notions of healthy way of living have become increasingly popular in the past few years, thereby generating a number of interesting topics for discussion. What is the actual meaning of the terms organic or 'öko-bio'? Should/can this be regarded as a lasting condition or merely as a passing phenomenon merely satisfying the latest nutritional trends?

The first segment of the study covers organic labelling from the aspects of the legal regulatory framework and relevant competent bodies, relying on the opinions of Hungarian and foreign experts. The second segment provides a comprehensive picture of organic production in Hungary, based on available statistical data and theoretical approaches about the necessary production methods as adapted to the specific conditions prevalent in Hungary.

Finally, upon the assessment of the existing international legal framework, the Hungarian certification system is delineated with its peculiarities and controversial aspects. Additionally, the labelling and logos used to ascertain genuine organic products, and the implemented quality control procedures are described. In connection with the topic, the National Board Against Counterfeiting commissioned the Industorg Védjegyiroda Minőségügyi Kft. (Industorg Trademark Quality Assessment Ltd) to conduct a research study, which was accomplished in cooperation with the Homo Oecologicus Foundation and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) Centre for Social Sciences – Institute for Sociology. The main motivation for the study was that thus far no comprehensive analytical research work focusing on both the market actors and consumers has been carried out in Hungary. The goal of the study was to accurately measure the market of locally produced and marketed organic food items in Hungary. Additionally, it aimed through the use of focus groups and personal interviews to demonstrate the approach and opinions of Hungarian consumers, producers, as well as retailers toward organic products.

Keywords: organic products, organically produced products, certification, consumption habits

Introduction

Organic farming

The terms *organic farming* and *organic production* are by and large identical in meaning; in many countries, the words 'öko' or 'bio' refer to the same category of agricultural products that the term 'organic' does in the English language. In each member state, depending on the official language used, various terms are being used to designate organic products in the legal vocabulary and relevant documents. The terms 'chemical-free' and 'natural', on the other hand, do not indicate organic farming practices (www.biokutatas.hu 2016).

The European Council Regulation (EC) 834/2007 lays out the framework for organic production within the European Union (Council Regulation 2007). The preamble of the Regulation states that "Organic production is an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environmental practices, a high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources, the application of high animal welfare standards and a production method in line with the preference of certain consumers for products produced using natural substances and processes" (Council Regulation 2007: 1). According to Article 2 (Definitions), "'organic production' means the use of the production method compliant with the rules established in this Regulation, at all stages of production, preparation and distribution" (Council Regulation 2007: 1).

In line with the above Council Regulation, the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture summarized the general guidelines of organic farming as a unique form of agricultural production, which gives preference during the production processes to the use of local and available natural resources opposed to non-renewables and off-farm inputs, thereby aiming to recycle wastes and by-products while adhering to strict energy conservancy. Accordingly, the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, as well as GMOs is not permissible (www.biokutatas.hu 2016).

Péter Roszík, Executive Manager of Biokontroll Hungária Nonprofit Ltd, begins his book – *Ökológiai gazdálkodásról gazdáknak közérthetően* (in English: A Comprehensive Guide to Farmers on Organic Farming) – by listing a number of definitions available for the description of organic farming of which perhaps the version put forward by the IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) is the most fitting one: "Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines

tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved" (Roszik 2008: 12).

In the view of János Berényi, University Professor and Head Researcher at the Institute of Field and Vegetable Crops in Novi Sad, Serbia, the need for the theory and practice of organic farming primarily stems from the necessity to align agricultural production with the specificities of available natural resources and ecological systems, including the requirements to guarantee their continued survival and least affected functioning (Berényi 2011). He identifies as organic, or ecological farming those agricultural practices which do not involve the use of synthetic or artificial pesticides and fertilizers (Berényi 2011). The author considers a primary feature of organic farming that it is a sustainable form of agricultural activity, both from economic and environmental aspects, which contributes to the sustainability of agro-biodiversity and to the production of organic foodstuffs with environmentally friendly methods, without endangering health and the presence of any harmful chemicals (Berényi 2011).

The nature of organic farming requires that it must become a distinct and an entirely separate system from conventional agricultural production, both in the cultivation and commercialization processes, i.e. the cultivation of organic foodstuffs in every respect, including the sourcing and types of seeds for planting. Thus, it must be independent from the traditional agricultural methods (Kovács 2006).

Organic farming in contemporary Hungary

At the end of the previous decade, approximately 37 million hectares of land were under organic cultivation worldwide. Of the arable land available for organic cultivation, the largest area, 2.5 million hectares, was taken up by cereals, followed by oil-bearing crops: 0.5 million hectares, and protein-bearing crops and vegetables: 0.3 million hectares each. The size of organically cultivated permanent crops was also sizable, reaching roughly 3 million hectares. The largest organic agricultural land area in 2009 was in Australia with 12 million hectares, Argentina being second with 4.4 million hectares, and the USA third with 1.9 million hectares. At the same time, countries with the highest share of organic agricultural land were the Falkland Islands (36%), Liechtenstein (27%), and Austria (18.5%); additionally, there were 1.8 million organic producers worldwide (Roszik 2008).

In the European Union, the number of organic farms increased from about 5,000 in 1985 to 186,000 in 2011 and the land area under organic cultivation was also enlarged from 125,000 hectares to 9.6 million hectares, constituting 5.4% of all agricultural land in the EU (Ministry of Rural Development 2014).

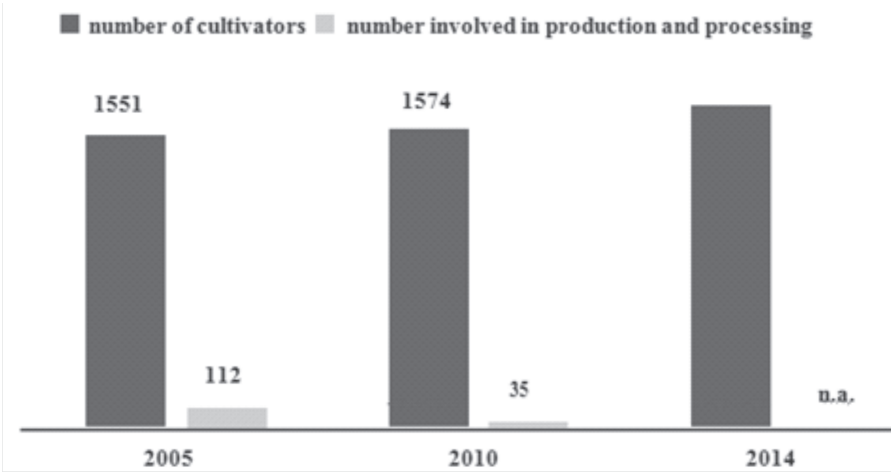
In 2004, the European Commission compiled an action plan for the development of organic farming and production. The Commission paper defined 21 actions as

development goals, giving particular attention to the development of information sharing on organic farming, increasing productivity and yield, and within the scope of rural development schemes, the realization of wider synergies and awareness, and finally more pronounced research and innovation in this area.

Since the year 2000, the land area under organic farming has increased by approximately 150% in Hungary; however, after 2004, the development trajectory has become somewhat muted as no support mechanism was set aside for organic farming in the agri-environment programme (Galambos 2010). A significant change in policy occurred in 2009; from that year onwards, organic farmers have again been able to apply for subsidies from agri-environment programmes. According to the latest available data, in the 2014–2020 budget period, funding accessible for subsidies for organic farming is three times as high as in the previous budget cycle, now reaching 60 billion HUF (Mezei 2015).

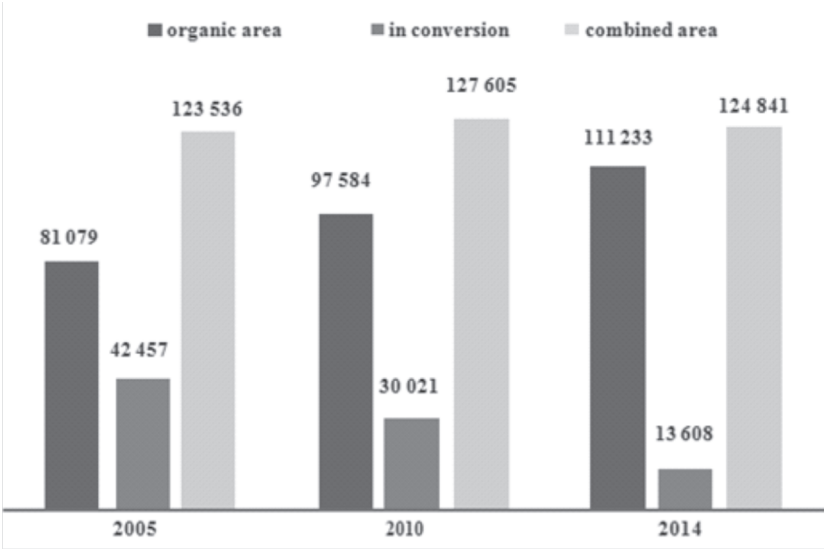
In 2014, the *National Action Plan for the Development of Organic Farming (2014–2020)* was adopted, which identified clear goals and measures to provide further incentives for the expansion of organic farming. As the Hungarian organic food and products sector is primarily export-oriented, the domestic development strategy should be based on the popularization of organic farming and the specific foodstuffs and products it generates with the simultaneous elevation of the share of processed goods (Ministry of Rural Development 2014). These goals are to be realized through the following six actions: 1. regulations of organic farming and production, 2. increasing production volumes and developing sales activities to satisfy market demand, 3. furthering research and innovation, as well as advisory schemes related to supervised organic farming activities, 4. establishing uniform and transparent information and data gathering systems, 5. popularizing organically-sourced products and product categories, and raising customer awareness and trust, 6. assisting cooperation between involved actors and the development of retail networks marketing the full range of relevant product groups.

Due to these efforts, the number of cultivators in organic agriculture in the past twenty years has steadily grown, although at a slow pace, which also translates to the parallel expansion of land area under organic cultivation and its concomitant strict supervision by competent bodies. From the accessible research data and a number of studies done in this field, it is clearly visible that the number of actors dedicated to and engaged in organic farming is rising, especially among those already practising traditional farming techniques and methods.



Source: http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_ua001.html [1A] (Laki, I. (ed.), 2015)

Graph 1. Organic production. Number of cultivators between 2005 and 2014



Source: http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_ua001.html [1B] (Laki, I. (ed.), 2015)

Graph 2. Extent of agricultural land under organic cultivation in hectares between 2005 and 2014

About two-thirds of all organically produced and certified foodstuffs in Hungary are exported abroad mainly in unprocessed form. In order to protect the already attained market positions of Hungarian organic products in foreign

countries – and even to expand them –, it is indispensable to achieve the complete integration of the production process, institute quality certification codes, including advisory services for producers, and provide generous financial support for organic farming. The lucrative opportunities in the foreign markets do not work for the benefit of making any pronounced efforts on the part of the cultivators to expand the share of organic products on the domestic market, especially as the existing demand is currently insignificant. The consumption of organic foodstuffs in Hungary is negligible in comparison to the traditionally or non-organically cultivated products. In part, this can be attributed to consumers having only limited knowledge on the availability of the range of organic products, including the benefits derived from their consumption. Meanwhile, those who do purchase such products and can be considered as regular customers are highly price conscious (cf. results of the focus-group research, 2015).

Domestically, it can be stated that the greatest share in the consumption of organic products is concentrated in Budapest with most of the retail trade in organic goods realized in the capital city; other larger regional population centres offer a far less significant market for organic products (cf. results of the focus-group research, 2015).

The majority of interested and actual consumers of organic products belong to high-income, health-conscious families with small children who consume organically-sourced products and foodstuffs only occasionally, not on a regular basis. Concerning retail outlets, on the Hungarian domestic market, they mainly include specialized organic shops, farmers' markets, and community gardens; additionally, in the past few years, online sales of organic products have gained both in volume and significance (cf. results of the focus-group research, 2015).

Legal regulation in the European Union

The European Union's regulations on organic agriculture, besides provisions on appropriate and permissible forms of cultivations, substances, and chemicals, also cover precise rules for labelling, and the establishment and structure of control systems capable of enforcement. Organic farming is subject to regulation since 1991 in the European Community.

It was in 1991 that Council Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 was adopted, which established the first proper comprehensive legal environment for the regulation of organic production of agricultural products and indications. This Regulation had been amended a number of times and was finally replaced by a new legal framework, (EC) No 834/2007, applicable as of 1 January 2009. The major changes undertaken in this area are as follows:

– Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 repeals Regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 on organic production and labelling of organic products.

– Commission Regulation (EC) 889/2008 lays down the detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products with regard to organic production, labelling, and control.

– Commission Regulation (EC) No 1235/2008 lays down the detailed rules for the arrangements of imports of organic products from third countries.

Domestic legal regulation

In Hungary, Act XLVI of 2008 on Food Chain Safety and Control and Ministerial Decree 34/2013 (Ministry of Rural Development) concerning the proper certification, production, labelling, marketing, and control of organic agricultural products regulate organic farming and production as well as establish a framework for certification and control.

– Ministerial Decree 63/2012 (VII.2) (Ministry of Rural Development) assesses and regulates the administrative fees and protocols for applications related to organic agricultural production either to be collected by the National Food Chain Safety Office (NFCSO) or the food and agricultural departments of government offices in each county (Teaching Material 7, 2012).

The certification system in Hungary

Within the European Union, organic products have to meet identical criteria. Only those products can be labelled as organic where the involved actors (plant or livestock producers, food companies, or retailers) participate in the prescribed control scheme. It is within the competence of each member state to establish the kind of control mechanism they wish to operate. In the majority of them, a number of control bodies are recognized and accredited. Their activities are overseen and, if necessary, sanctioned by the competent public authorities. The involved control bodies are required to operate with adequate guarantees of objectivity and impartiality, and have at their disposal the qualified staff and resources necessary to carry out their functions.

In Hungary, for organic production, the designated competent authority is the NFCSO as part of its food chain safety role. The NFCSO, however, delegates its certification functions to a number of control bodies. By law, the approval and supervision of control bodies is the competence of the NFCSO, being the competent authority to ensure that their activities are in compliance with the set requirements.

Only those organizations may be accredited as control bodies which are NFCSO-certified, thereby being in full conformity of both the European and Hungarian prerequisites for such activities.

Currently, organic producers can operate under the supervision of two control bodies in Hungary. These two bodies are Biokontroll Hungária Nonprofit Ltd, control number HU-ÖKO-01, and Hungária Öko Garancia Ltd, control number HU-ÖKO-02. It is not permissible to have any significant differences between the operations of the two bodies from the aspects of control and certification as both of them operate under the same statutes. It is a binding requirement on the control bodies to carry out on-site inspections at least once a year at all actors and organizations certified by them to ensure full compliance with all relevant EU regulations. Additionally, the control body is also liable to execute unannounced inspections if any of the certified actors or organizations are under the suspicion of non-compliance (Teaching Material 7, 2012). As part of their mandate, the control bodies can supervise and certify the following activities: plant production, collection of wild plants, beekeeping, mushroom cultivation, livestock production, processed food production, viniculture, production of organic animal feed, wholesale and retail trade and marketing, as well as importation of organic products from outside the EU.

Beyond these tasks, both control bodies engage in other control activities based on their own specific qualification criteria. Thus, Biokontroll Hungária Nonprofit Ltd is certified to fulfil control activities of catering and cafeteria services, cuniculture, game and quail keeping, and provisionally organic viniculture. Simultaneously, Hungária Öko Garancia Ltd provides control and certification based on its own set of requirements for organic ostrich and emu farming.

Any operator who produces or is involved in activities at any stage of production, preparation, and distribution, or who imports from a third country products that are to be classified as organic or who places such products on the market shall – prior to placing any products on the market as organic or in conversion to organic – notify the competent authorities of the Member State where the activity is to be carried out and must submit his undertaking to the relevant and applicable control system (Teaching Material 7, 2012).

Those operators may be exempt from the application of this requirement who sell products directly to the final consumer or user, provided they do not produce, prepare, or store other than in connection with the point of sale or import such products from a third country or have not contracted out such activities to a third party.

From the perspective of the consumers, it is of more pronounced significance to be able to clearly differentiate between organically produced, controlled, and certified products complying with all relevant legal requirements, on the one hand, and traditionally produced foodstuffs and goods, on the other. The logos of control bodies attached to organic products serve this end.

Source: Teaching material 7, 2012

Graph 3. The logo of Hungária Öko Garancia Ltd

Source: Teaching Material 7, 2012

Graph 4. The logo of Biokontroll Hungária Nonprofit Ltd

Control bodies in the European Union

Similarly to Hungary, in the majority of EU member states, control bodies are designated to carry out certification and supervisory functions. The competent authority of each member state issues a specific code number for each accredited control body operating within its territory, e.g. Austria BioGarantie GmbH – AT-BIO-301. Therefore, it is possible that some commercially marketed organic products may carry the logos and code numbers issued by European Union member states other than where they are being marketed (www.nebih.gov.hu 2015).

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/downloads/logo_hu

Graph 5. Salzburger Landwirtschaftliche Kontrolle GmbH (SLK) Code number of the control body (Austrian)

Source: http://organicrules.org/2025/1/LACON_EU_logo.gif

Graph 6. *Lacon GmbH Code* number of the control body (Austrian)

Source: http://www.icea.info/en/

Graph 7. ICEA – Istituto per la Certificazione Etica e Ambientale (Cod. Min. IT – ICA) Code number of the control body (Italian)

Import of organic products from third countries

In order to import and market organic products from third countries, i.e. non-EU member states, a number of conditions must be met. It is Commission Regulation (EC) No 1235/2008 which lays down the rules for such imports. Imports are classified into two categories: the compilation of third countries where given product groups are considered equivalent and could be imported into the EU and the compilation of recognized control bodies and control authorities for the purpose of compliance.

The specific groups are listed in the annexes of Regulation (EC) No 1235/2008:

Certified organic products from third countries could be imported if the country of origin is listed in Annex III of Regulation (EC) 1235/2008 or if the country is considered a safe country of origin but the product category intended to be imported into the EU or the control body by which it is certified are not included in the preceding Annex. Furthermore, imports from third countries are permissible if the organic products were certified by control bodies or authorities recognized for equivalence, as stipulated in Article 10 of Regulation (EC) 1235/2008, or the imported products were certified by the prior control bodies and authorities and which are listed in Annex IV of the Regulation (list of control bodies and control authorities for the purpose of equivalence and relevant specifications referred to in Article 10) and belong to one of the product categories enumerated (Teaching material 7, 2012).

For products from third countries, compulsory labelling requirements on packaging include the code number of the control body, country or place of

origin; the use of the Community organic logo is not mandatory; however, if it appears on the packaging, it must appear in a manner that satisfies all pertinent requirements.

Source: http://organicrules.org/1815/

Graph 8. Code number of BCS Öko-Garantie GmbH, a German control body, for certifications in China

The focus-group research

In connection with the topic, the National Board Against Counterfeiting commissioned Industorg Védjegyiroda Minőségügyi Kft. (Industorg Trademark Quality Assessment Ltd) to conduct a research study, which was accomplished in cooperation with the Homo Oecologicus Foundation and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) Centre for Social Sciences – Institute for Sociology. The main motivation for the study was that thus far no comprehensive analytical research work focusing on both the market actors and consumers has been carried out in Hungary.

The goal of the study was to accurately measure the market of locally produced and marketed organic food items in Hungary. Additionally, it aimed through the use of focus groups and personal interviews to demonstrate the approach and opinions of Hungarian consumers, producers as well as retailers toward organic products.

An issue of prime significance in the case of organic products is the clear definition of counterfeiting. If the suspicion of counterfeiting appears, it must be first and foremost determined whether the producers or retailers, by rigorously adhering to all pertinent requirements, are justified in their use of organic labels and the EU organic leaf logo. For the consumers, these organic labels and the leaf logo are the clearest indication that the given food item was sourced and produced in compliance with the existing strict requirements; therefore, the focal point of the research work was to map the presence or lack of consumer trust or confidence in relation to these symbols.

In the research, a number of distinct topics were emphasized, e.g. what can be considered organically-sourced products, how organic farming can be defined, how reliable the labelling on the packaging of organically-sourced products is, how can consumer interest be raised in connection with organic products, and why it is worthwhile to purchase and consume organic products.

Results of the focus-group study

The study followed the snowball sampling method in a focus-group discussion format. The number of participants was 15 x 5 individuals of whom two-thirds were women and one-third were men. The medium age of the women was 41.6 and of the men 47.6 years. The sample participants were in majority white-collar workers (67.4%), similar to the research studies on employment data (Hungary in Figures 2014 – Hungarian Central Statistical Office – KSH publication).

The focus-group discussions aimed primarily to gain insight as to what the participants representing consumers who are not actively involved in the organic products sector believe the designation 'organic' stands for and what organic farming encompasses according to their definition. It was the aim of the study to ascertain what impact organic farming has on their everyday lives and the level of information they possess on the health benefits offered by the use and consumption of organically-sourced foods and products.

For the question "What can be considered in your opinion an organically sourced-product?" (Question 1), 56% of the focus-group participants gave an acceptable definition as to what constitutes an organic product, whereas 44% did not or could not provide an answer.

"Chemical and additive free foodstuff"; "Products containing only natural ingredients. They do not contain additives and artificial colours."

The consumer group responded to the question "What is considered organic farming?" (Question 2) mainly in conjunction with the first question. At this question, 30.6% of the respondents deliberated on the term, and indicated that they prefer the 'bio' designation during the course of the study as opposed to 'öko', even though 25.3% of them were fully aware that academic literature does not use 'bio' in reference to organic products. However, 74.7% of the participants either did not possess any or had incorrect information on or did not concern themselves with the terms employed.

"In organic farming, fruits and vegetables cannot be sprayed with synthetic pesticides, the use of artificial fertilizers and other chemicals are not permissible. Animal feed must not contain any chemicals either."

"Organic farming uses no artificial fertilizers and synthetic chemicals in the cultivation of plants and the raising of animals."

The question concerning the importance of organic farming partially served to supplement the previous questions and in part aimed to map the personal experience of the participants. The responses given to the question "How beneficial is organic farming in Hungary from the consumers' point of view?" (Question 4)[1] diverged from the previous ones and showed a markedly higher level of scepticism. About 36% of the respondents viewed organic farming as becoming more popular, especially among those emphasizing healthy lifestyles. 26% hoped that the consumption of organic products will further rise and consumers will become more health conscious and open-minded. Simultaneously, 22.6% believed that a sizable portion of the consumers have no first-hand experience with these products and are even uncertain whether they have any actual health benefits. Of the respondents representing the consumers' group, 15.4% gave a negative or not applicable answer.

"Organic products are not so readily available in Hungary. For most people, the price can be prohibitive, that is they simply can't afford to pay for high-quality products."

"The same segment purchases them for whom healthy eating and general well-being are also important."

It appears to be a generally accepted notion that consumers identify organic products as healthy choices. In the focus-group discussion, 97.3% of the participants representing the consumer side responded positively to the question "Is it commonly held that organically-sourced products are often equated with healthy eating habits" (Question 6).[2] Consumers believe that any organically-sourced product must be of necessity also a healthy choice.

The consumers' opinions expressed to the question "What makes organic products healthy options?" (Question 7) included guaranteed freshness, chemical-free cultivation, and positive effects on the human organism. Some of the responses from the consumers' side gave a perfect illustration why organic products are considered healthy by the public.

"They do not contain any artificial additives and material, and are healthier than food produced under normal farming practices."

"They constitute an essential element of life. You are what you eat! In the long-run, they can contribute to health preservation by being integrated into our consumer culture."

Consumers in Hungary encountered organically-sourced products in the following categories: fruits (34%), vegetables (23%), and dairy products (12%) as

1 The exact wording of the question asked was: "What is your opinion about how important organic farming is in Hungary from the consumers' point of view?"

2 The exact wording of the question asked was: "It is a generally held notion that organically-sourced products are identified with healthy eating or dietary habits. Do you agree with this statement?"

the most common ones; however, other categories, such as meat (5%), grains (10%), and bakery products (4%), are becoming more popular as well. Additionally, respondents mentioned confectionary items and alcoholic beverages (2-2%) as well. In individual preferences for available food items and products, there is a strong link whether there is any interest or demand on the consumers' side for organic products; if there is such demand, then its level should be ascertained and also the price range properly calculated at which these products are still commercially marketable.

To the question "What is the level of demand among consumers for organically-sourced products?" (Question 12), 46.6% of the respondents stated that they are less active but still conscious consumers and buyers of such products although they only selectively purchase them. 30.6% of the participants clearly stated that many simply cannot afford these types of products, given the assumed, not too beneficial price–value ratio. On the other hand, 21.3% believed that consumers show an active interest in buying organically-sourced products. Those belonging to this latter group, have considered healthy living and eating habits of great significance in their lives for many years.

For the question "How affordable are organically-sourced products?" (Question 11), the consumers' group clearly indicated that organic goods are too expensive. According to 37.3%, only a certain segment of consumers can afford them, and 25.3% consider them to have an unfavourable price–value ratio, thereby making them unappealing for many customers.

"With all the environmental pollution around us, they offer a good price–value ratio, but when it comes to price they are simply too expensive."

"Retailers tend not to offer them as promotional items."

By surveying the contents of the interviews conducted within the focus groups, it can be deduced that consumers are by and large familiar with organically-sourced products, yet, due to the prohibitive prices, they cannot afford them. However, we encountered groups of respondents who either had no or very limited information concerning this product category; consequently, they do not purchase them and could be included in the study only with difficulty due to lack of interest or trust.

For the question "In what ways do you think can consumer interest be raised for organically-sourced products?" (Question 12), 37.3% of respondents most prominently named a change in pricing practices for the sake of affordability; 26.6% think that an important factor is to provide adequate information about the authenticity and added values of organic products, and 8% mentioned that to raise the public's awareness of organic goods is to make them more widely available commercially. 9.7% of the consumers referred to two points simultaneously: on the one hand, making organic goods available on a wide scale, while at the same time pricing them at levels that place them within the reach of

the average consumer. About 4% of the consumers' group indicated three aspects as of prime importance, i.e. the authenticity of organic products, making them widely obtainable, as well as proper and affordable pricing.

Concerning the question whether "In your opinion are organic labels and logos used illegally?"(Question 13), 64% of the respondents answered positively, 23% stated that improper or unwarranted use is not common, and 13% either had no information about it or did not concern him/herself with this question.

"Counterfeiting is practised, but I do not know how they do it – perhaps they include additives which are not listed on the packaging."

For the question on the wilful mislabelling of products, "Which products are most commonly misrepresented as organic?" (Question 14), respondents mentioned fruits and vegetables in 37–28% of the cases, 7% indicated meat products, 14% bread and bakery products, and 10% stated that all the already listed product categories are being counterfeited. The consumers held diverse opinions about the value and content of organic labelling and logos; these were certainly influenced by the level of faith or distrust they had in the actual validity of products claiming to be organically sourced. For the question "How trustworthy is organic labelling or logos on products claiming to be organically sourced?" (Question 16), 52% of the consumers believed that counterfeiting is widely practised; of these, 28% further stated that for them organic labelling is not a credible indicator of quality. However, 20% of the consumers responded that if a product carries organic labelling it must be genuine, guaranteeing the quality of the given article.

"I do not have any faith in the labelling as I cannot actually have these products analysed, they may put on such logos only to generate sales at higher prices."

"I consider them genuine. To be labelled as such you have to fulfil stringent criteria. If a product carries the organic logo, it means that it can be traced from the cultivation/production all the way to the store shelf."

From the responses, it can be ascertained that the study participants considered the credibility and trustworthiness of organically-sourced products and deemed it important to have an official certifying body for this purpose. Of the consumers, 58.6% did not know which organization carries out the certification of organically-sourced products in Hungary; 6% assumed that such a body does exist but have no specific information about it; 22% were certain that such organization does exist; of these, 3% mentioned Biokontroll Hungária Nonprofit Ltd, 4% Hungária Öko Garancia Ltd, 4% the National Food Chain Safety Office, 2% the Central Environmental and Food Research Institute and the Hungarian Chamber of Agriculture; 13.6% of those surveyed did not provide an answer to this question.

The focus-group discussions were concluded with a question concerning the purchasing habits of consumers of organically-sourced products.[3] Here, the

3 18: "Where or from which retail outlet do you purchase organically-sourced products if any? (e.g. from farmers, supermarkets, specialized shops, or some other venues)."

primary emphasis lay on the actual buying habits in relation to organic goods. Those consumers who purchase organically-sourced products primarily prefer small farmers (33.3%), secondly supermarket chains (14.5%), thirdly specialized organic stores (11.8%), and lastly all other small retail outlets (13.8%) to acquire such goods. Some rely on their family or social networks to make these purchases, yet others favour various drug store chains, e.g. Müller Drogéria, Rossmann, or DM (12%). 2% only rarely while 4% only in specialized organic shops and small-sized retail outlets make such purchases and 8.6% never buy any organic products.

Summary of the main findings of the empirical and theoretical study

The consumers, producers or manufacturers, as well as the retailers of Hungarian organically-sourced products, based on a small sample size study and personal interviews, while cannot give a precise definition of what constitutes organic products, are fully aware of what they refer to. Research carried out among consumers indicated that there are two distinct groups present; on the one hand, those who are active consumers of such products, and therefore they are normally knowledgeable about the production process of such goods; while, in the other group, there are those who are often disinterested and do not have any information about organic products.

The participants of the study confirmed the validity and effectiveness of the use of organic labelling on the Hungarian market. The retail sector recognizes the quality and has a high regard for products carrying organic logos. In contrast, the consumers participating in the study showed mixed results. Customers purchasing organically-sourced products are mainly motivated by the availability of healthy choices for lifestyle and dietary needs, which, however, is also influenced by the prevailing prices for such products. Consumer demand can be increased by making information easily accessible on the beneficial effects of organic products and increasing the level of trust consumers have in such articles. Counterfeiting is undeniably present in the entire spectrum of organic products. This phenomenon is apparent form the side of the consumers as well as producers/manufacturers, retailers, and the organic certification agencies, and it especially affects the categories of vegetables, fruit, bread, and other bakery products.

A counterfeit product does not necessarily pose a health hazard; rather, it means that the production or cultivation of the specific article does not meet the strict criteria for organic farming and production.

Consumers who purchase organic products on a regular basis mainly obtain them from small organic farmers; nevertheless, the number of those relying on organic shops or supermarket chains is also substantial.

The various actors of the organic market are fully aware of the legal consequences of counterfeiting, and they recommend additional measures such

as the identification of counterfeit products and making their sources public, the compilation of a blacklist of counterfeiters, and increased cooperation between state and private actors for the better prevention of counterfeiting. Among the market participants and consumer groups, there is a clear call for more pronounced action against counterfeiting, for which one strategy could include better and wider dissemination of information, education, and training.

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Community-Supported Agriculture as an Alternative Way of Enhancing Local Economy[1]

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Abstract. The article presents a rural development initiative, which in synergy with other similar programmes contributes to enhancing local economy. The study contains seven chapters. The introduction offers an image of the context of initiatives, and after that the article presents the significance of local small-scale farming at the level of the EU and Romania. In the next chapters, the definition of community-supported agriculture movements follows as well as their origins, international carrier, particularities, Romanian and local experiences from Odorheiu Secuiesc (Harghita County, Romania), difficulties, and finally future perspectives of the presented movements.
ASAT delivers community-supported agriculture initiatives, which consists of partnerships between producers and consumer groups. This project was founded with the aim of supporting local farmers and their farms, whilst practising sustainable forms of agriculture within a fair economy.
ASAT aims to ensure that consumers can buy quality food at a fair price, choosing to opt into purchasing food which has been produced in a certain way. Each ASAT partnership brings together a group of consumers and producers within proximity of one another, formalizing the partnership with a contract. Consumers commit themselves to buy the resulted products through an advanced payment made before the first distribution. The producer, in turn, is committed to deliver quality products grown in a socially responsible and environmentally friendly manner.

Keywords: community, agriculture, solidarity, partnership, local economy

Introduction

Odorheiu Secuiesc (Harghita County, Romania) respectively Szeklerland can be partially characterized with a favourable situation from the point of view of rural development programmes which enhance local economy and local society.

1 Several parts of this article were published in Hungarian language: *A közösség által támogatott mezőgazdaság, mint alternatíva. Magyar Kisebbség*, 2014/3–4 (appeared in 2016), pp. 76–102.

Several initiatives can be enumerated which serve in a synergy different groups of local producers and consumers. Although nowadays a wide publicity of these initiatives cannot be observed, imbibitions of them in collective knowledge is a long-term process and they can function as good examples for other regions, too. Of course, not all these initiatives have their origins in local cultural heritage, there are also some imported programmes, which proved to be viable in our circumstances. There are some programmes of non-governmental organizations, products of companies, trade-marks (of NGOs and local public administrations), and institutions (markets, cooperatives). The civic, business, and public sphere can be identified as initiator of these programmes as well, and there are some examples of partnerships between different institutions. Among the NGO programmes, we can mention the *Átalvető* programme of the Rural development Department of Caritas Alba Iulia, which tries to empower local producers and bring them together with consumers through a direct market system (this programme runs in the Odorhei region, and it was inspired by a similar one from Târgu Mureş, i.e. the *Webkamra* programme of Focus Eco Center). Fruit Manufacture from Lupeni, established by Civitas Foundation, is handled also by an NGO – the Szekler Fruit Association, which aims at improving, protecting, revitalizing, using, selling, and marketing local fruit types. Starting from these initiatives, fruit processing units were launched in other settlements from Szeklerland such as Zetea, Siculeni, etc. There are differences among these programmes in what concerns the legal status of initiators (NGO, Common Forrest Administration Body, local public administration, company, private person), the origins of the invested capital (projects, external and internal sources, etc.), respectively in rules of functioning, but all of them contribute to increasing the added value.

The community card functions also as an NGO programme – it was initiated in 2009 by the Community Foundation, which was adapted in other towns too (in Miercurea Ciuc, Târgu Mureş, Sfântu Gheorghe, etc.). Through a fidelity card cooperation among entrepreneurs, inhabitants, and NGOs, it enhances philanthropy, stimulates community participation, and users can decide about the common financial base (the Community Foundation offers project-based financing to local NGOs). Another NGO programme is the Transylvania Authentica brand, which has been functioning since 2007, initiated by the Partnership Foundation from Miercurea Ciuc. Traditional, good-quality, natural, and environmental-friendly products can receive this label, and so far producers from Szeklerland, Maramureş, and Saxon regions are among certified ones. Similar to the former one but initiated by the Public Administration of Harghita County is the brand of Szekler Product, which was started in 2010; there are evaluation committees in three counties of Szeklerland. So far, several food, handmade, industrial, and spiritual products have earned this certification. The monthly market of traditional local products is also an institution which belongs

to the public sphere; in Miercurea Ciuc, it is organized by the County Public Administration and in Odorheiu Secuiesc by the local public administration in partnership with the Rural Development Department of Caritas Alba Iulia. The objective of the institution is similarly the empowerment of local producers by organizing periodical meeting occasions for them with consumers.

The next example is Târnava Mare Agricultural Cooperative, which was supported by the county public administration. The cooperative was established in 2011, its members are cow keepers, associations, Common Forrest Administration Bodies, investors. Among its objectives, we can list the following: common marketing, selling, processing, organizing the production, professional assistance, and empowerment of local producers (in order to reach the markets). It affects directly a number of five hundred milk producer families.

The Góbé Product Family was launched by a business man in 2010, and it involves the entire territory of Szeklerland. The main criterion of assigning the Góbé brand to a product is the geographical origin of the products. By now, Góbé Products cover more than 60 producers and more than 330 products in nine categories. It facilitates identifying the products by the consumers and serves the empowerment of producers.

Finally, the voluntary movement of the Agora Association – Working Group for Sustainable Development aims to educate high-school students in order to consume consciously, and by enhancing sensitivity of the next generation toward environment. This programme contributes to the objectives of all enumerated programmes. During the programme, thematic, interactive classes serve as frames for workshops about the dimensions of waste, the origin of products, the ingredients of products, and local products. Of course, other environmental and youth organizations also have similar programmes.

Contextualization: the significance of small-scale agriculture. The concept of partially self-sufficient farms and their role in local development

Reports referring to a continuous reform of the Common Agricultural Policy are concerned with the future perspectives of farming. Several reports lay down that the European agricultural sector is constrained to assume roles which complement each other: to produce qualitative foodstuff, to control food security, to preserve environment (soil, water), and to maintain and transmit local cultural traditions. According to these objectives, decision makers, researchers, and actors of the sector gave heed not only to the efficiency and competitiveness of food production (a slow and partial process was started) but also to aspects that refer to multifunctional

agriculture and its role played in sustainable development policy. This sounds comforting, but the redirection of attention, the shift of emphasis is slightly perceived in local society at the level of farmers. They can teach the use of agri-environmental payments, but the criteria are too generally applied, they ignore local climate and soil circumstances, cultural traditions, and regional differences.

Based on the results of the European Agricultural Census of 2010 and according to Eurostat[2] data, between 2003 and 2010, the number of farms in the European Union decreased with 20%. In Romania, the reduction of the number of small farms became stressful after the integration in the European Union.

From the "Report on the future for young farmers under the ongoing reform of the CAP (2008)",[3] we can learn that "the percentage of farmers in the EU aged under 35 was then only 7% and falling, although in future food production will have to continue to increase" and the average age of farmers reached 55 years. These data were interpreted as crisis symptoms of European agriculture, and the elaboration of a conscious strategy and action plan is necessary in order to involve youth.[4]

One of the main objectives of community-supported agriculture is the maintaining/supporting of small-scale farms. In the presentation titled *A future for Europe's small farms* (written by Dacian Cioloş), partially self-sufficient farms appear as significant economic and social service providers of rural areas. The author highlights that small-scale, partially self-sufficient farms assume three main roles in rural and agricultural development: they are puffer-zones against poverty, offer environmental advantages, and serve as a basis for diversification and multifunctional economies.[5]

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2 http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Agricultural_census_2010_-_provisional_results.

3 Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (author of report: Donato Tommaso Veraldi) "Report on the future for young farmers under the ongoing reform of the CAP", 13/5/2008, A-0182/2008.

4 From the main steps presented in the report mentioned in footnote no 2, the following are underlined:
Note No 7 highlights that the main factor in renewing the farming industry's age profile is access to land, given its high cost;
Note No 8 takes the view that, in future, the CAP must seek to remove the barriers currently facing young people wishing to set up in farming, by making generational change one of its priorities;
Note No 12 calls on the Commission to support the Member States in creating a land bank on the basis of land freed up as a result of early retirement; it takes the view that support should be provided for the joint acquisition of expensive machinery and equipment which is used infrequently by each individual farmer;
Note No 15 recommends the introduction of instruments enabling priority in respect of agricultural land transfers to be given to young farmers setting up in business rather than to existing farmers wishing to increase the size of their holdings, including an early-retirement mechanism, deferred-purchase aid, phased setting-up arrangements, and rental of part of the land.

5 http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/ciolos/headlines/speeches/2010/10/20101014_en.htm.

Taking into consideration the significant number of rural inhabitants in Romania, the protective role against poverty is obvious. In their cases, agricultural activity contributes widely to subsistence income for a large part of the population.[6] Households characterized by subsistence and semi-subsistence have an important role for those who live on the edge of poverty. Policies focused on increasing competitiveness and productivity – due to the industrialization of the agricultural sector and the concentration of property – contribute to a significant decrease of survival chances of small, semi-subsistence farms.

The mentioned farms have an important impact on protecting the environment: the majority of small-scale producers can be characterized by production models which take into consideration local biodiversity and particular cultural traditions, thus reducing negative environmental effects. Without idealizing traditional production practices, it can be easily justified that small rural household farms represent a complex agricultural unit – which produces cereals, vegetables, forage, maintains traditional orchards, and has a smaller impact on environment than a big unit specialized on monoculture. The farms belonging to the former type fit organically into local traditions and they direct more attention to elements of the ecosystem (CRIES 2012: 6).

In literature, the short food chain as potential alternative of agro-industrial food production has only a few years of history. The movement discussed in the present paper belongs to mainly strong food industry networks as – opposed to weak networks, which focus on products – cooperation organized around consumer groups concentrates on the process.

Definition of community-supported agriculture (CSA)

Community-supported agriculture can be interpreted as an old and new initiative at the same time. It is old because the offer of rural food production met urban demand centuries ago, and this relation was based on autonomy, trust, and spontaneous organizations. On the other hand, the movement can be interpreted as new because it tries to introduce and enhance reciprocal relations between producers and consumers around values such as transparency, solidarity, voluntary work, and bilateral trust.

The fact that the movement is linked mainly with the orientation towards organic production "can be interpreted as a critique of productivity-focused plant production, and with the help of it another historical conflict can be also resolved. Here I think of the opposition of intensive or organic respectively

6 According to preliminary data of the 2011 census, 44.7% of households are placed in rural areas, which means 9 million inhabitants (47.5% of population). Source: http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Comunicat-date-provizorii-rpl-2011.pdf.

agro-ecological plant production, of conflict of interests between the farmers and environmentalists" (Hoggart & Paniagua 2001, López García 2007 – qtd by Binimelis & Descombes 2010: 11).

Common characteristics of CSA initiatives are the common assumption of responsibility during production of food and reaching the tables of consumers, respectively the direct and continuous relation between the producers' and consumers' groups.

CSA was developed in different forms at the international level, depending on social, historical, geopolitical, agricultural, and economic particularities. Despite the differences, at least four basic characteristics are common in these movements (Bashford et al. 2013: 6–7).

Partnership: CSA is based on a reciprocal commitment through which producers assume the obligation to offer a certain amount and diversity of vegetables, and consumers engage themselves to buy these boxes during a whole season.

Proximity: CSA prefers local transactions, stimulates relocalization of food economy, and facilitates investments in local economy. Besides, relocalization means a resocialization too, which contains a rapprochement of producer and consumer sphere; according to the cited authors, in this relation, maximum one transmitting player can be included. The model of CSA excludes intermediary actors.

Solidarity: the partnership is based on a community of producers and consumers. Solidarity among the actors is manifested in at least two aspects. In practice, this means that the risks, responsibilities, and rewards of the farm are shared between the group of consumers and the farmer. On the part of the producer, their plans respect the environmental, natural, and cultural heritage, and calculate with correct and transparent costs, while consumers offer payments in advance as a warranty for the producer, for preparing the soil and in order to have a financial safety in the everyday life.

Balanced relationship between consumers and producers – tandem: it is based on trust and personal interactions (without intermediary actors, hierarchy, relations, of subordination).

The initiatives can be classified as CSA movements only if the mentioned four principles are respected and implemented.

Motivations of consumers who participate in such networks are based on social, economic, and environmental values (according to our field experiences, the last ones are less stressed in practice among Romanian consumers). They choose to procure organic food from a local, well-known source, which comes from a sustainable production process. The active participation of consumers could be motivated by the following elements: good quality of food; interest, openness, and commitment toward healthy nutrition; interest in supporting local producers; preference of social values such as solidarity with small-scale farmers,

on the one hand, and with consumers interested in accessible healthy nutrition, on the other hand; interest in environmental protection; openness, commitment to reduce pollution caused by the industrialization of agriculture; interest in local seeds; priority of small-scale farmers' autonomy (CRIES 2012: 8).

As it was mentioned, CSA can appear under different forms, but for its running human, social, natural, physical, and financial capitals are needed in every case (Saltmarsh et al. 2011: 8, CRIES 2012: 8).

Human capital consists of people who work in the household as employees or as volunteers and have professional knowledge as well as commitment towards partners. Differences compared to other direct sale systems[7] are the following: members of the consumer group take part actively as volunteers in organizing the distribution of vegetables (preparing the boxes, collecting the monthly rate), in organizing common events, visiting the farmers, helping them during peak seasons, etc. So, the human capital of the initiative means not only the resources of the producer but also the voluntary work of the consumer group.

Social capital is formed by individual and collective contributions of partners during the cooperation. The group becomes a community through collective actions; besides vegetables and other foods, there are "produced" social interactions as well (change of experience, change of recipes, getting to know some of each other's problems), the relation between consumers and producers become stronger, the level of information and consciousness about global social problems increase (environmental crisis, responsible consumption, etc.), a network is progressively formed, and participants can rely on each other. The group – as it is mentioned frequently in literature and as we experience it – means more than the sum of the members. There are possibilities for assuming roles, civic culture is developed, and citizen activity can be practised, while these added values of CSA have fewer chances to come into existence in other alternative sale systems.

Natural capital consists in the land ready for partnership, influenced by former utilization method and by neighbours (i.e. intensive exploitation of agricultural land). In the majority of CSA partnerships, the field remains in the property of the producers, but the costs of utilization are shared between the members of the consumers' group. The aim of involving consumers is to support producers in order to utilize natural capital (the land and the natural resources: water, animal manure, biodiversity) in a sustainable way.

Physical capital plays a complementary role behind natural and human capital and it contains buildings, tools, and machinery. Social capital can be

7 In short-chain initiatives, human capital used in production includes the resources of the household, sale being organized by associations or volunteers. Active participation of consumers is not required as they usually order products on the Internet and they meet the producer when they receive their products. This lack of obligation does not mean that there are no active consumers since some of them visit their producers' farm. Some farmers offer services in agritainment.

converted into natural capital and physical capital (tools and machines can be borrowed through informal external networks of members or can be replaced by the voluntary work of consumers).

Financial capital is the source necessary to start the production. This can come from two main sources: primarily from the advance payments of consumers what they give in autumn when they sign the contract (this is similar to alternative social microcredit forms), and secondly from microcredit loans.

Origins of the movement and models widespread on the international level

CSA is an alternative movement, a response to disintegration and to weakening the relation to land, which characterizes the industrial and post-industrial societies. CSA provides a bilateral relation for groups devoted to production and healthy food, it contributes to healthy families and a healthy Earth (Jill & Franzblau 2010: 9).

It appeared as a response to a crisis situation (disappearance of small-scale farmers and the advantages offered by them on the local market) and as a solidarity form which configures a win-win situation among producers and consumers. This – mainly informal – association leads to two results: notably, it supports the sustainability of very small farms in order to provide local, traditional, and organic products; secondly, it maintains a healthy life model among consumers who take an increased responsibility for their consumption and for the environmental heritage of the next generations (CRIES 2012: 9).

The movement spread in the last three decades on the international level. There are many versions of it and to date it consists of partnerships on the large scale between producers and consumers. Behind the similarities, all the contracted relations are personalized, suited to the local circumstances and cooperative partners. Its early forms evolved approximately fifty years ago. The first organizers of partnerships were Japanese mothers, who worried about the increasing vegetable import, losing arable land, and the migration of farmers to urban areas. These women established the new production and procurement system by building direct links with local producers. This type of partnership is named Teikei in Japanese, and the philosophical meaning of the term is to "personalize the producer, put personalized label on the product!" (Henderson & Van En 2007: 258).

The term found its way to Europe and the USA, where the CSA name became widespread. The term belongs to two initiators: Jan Vander Tuin and Robin Van En (CRIES 2012: 9).[8] In the first season of a partnership from the USA, which started

8 According to some approaches, the system can be originated from theories of Rudolf Steiner about biodynamic and anthroposophist agriculture. CSA considers farm as a whole entity

in 1985, the system was labelled with the following slogan: "share the costs to share the results!" (CRIES 2012: 9, Ehmke and Press 2013: 1). They considered important to pinpoint that the terms of expression are reversible: community-supported agriculture – agriculture-supported community. In the USA, the name CSA is used, while at the national level several other initiatives, expressions are known as suitable for the model (AMAP in France, CSA in Anglo-Saxon territories, ASC in Quebec, Teikei in Japan, Reciproca in Portugal, GAS in Italy, Szivárvány gazdaság in Hungary, ASAT in Romania, etc.).

According to the data of URGENCI (an international network of rural–urban partnerships), at the global level, the number of partnerships is over 10,000, which means more than 17,000 producers and almost 900,000 consumers. According to agricultural statistics, the number of producers involved in the movement in the USA has also multiplied in the last decades (www.urgenci.net).

Table 1. The evolution of the number of farms participating in CSA in the USA

Year	Number of farms participating in CSA partnerships in the USA
1986	2
1992	200
2001	761
2004	1,034
2005	1,144
2009	over 1,500

Sources: Saltmarsh et al. 2011: 12, CRIES 2012: 10

From the presented data, it can be observed that between 2001 and 2004 the number of partnerships increased with more than 25%. The number of consumers inside a partnership varies between 50 and 500 families. According to accessible data, in the USA, 270,000 households participate in one season in this type of cooperation, which means that approximately one third of consumers can be found on the North-American continent (Adam 2006: 4, Bruch & Ernst 2010: 1, Martinez 2011: iii).

In Europe, the most similar initiatives run in France and Italy. They appeared as a consequence of food crisis after a decrease in the local producers' activity and the spread of big-store networks. The model was inspired by producer cooperatives, associations and movements promoting responsible consumption. In France, the first AMAP initiatives were established from 2001; in the last period, the number of producers taking part in the programme increased to

which integrates the clients, educating and involving them in necessary works so the client can contribute more to running and sustaining the farm, not only by supporting it financially.

3,000.[9] So, similarly to American CSAs, the phenomenon shows a fast growth in Europe. In England, based on data of the Soil Association,[10] at least 12,500 families procure their products from this segment (Saltmarsh et al. 2011: 12). The number of producers and consumers from the system continuously increases. But, due to the fact that the movement is relatively new, the level of information and consciousness among the wider public should be improved by mobilizing campaigns. In the eastern part of England, one third of vegetable consumers have heard about CSA and only 6% of them know of a specific initiative.

Table 2. Estimated number of CSAs and eaters in European CSAs in 2015

Countries	Number of CSAs	Number of eaters
France	2,000	32,000
Belgium	138	14,500
Italy	104	22,800
Germany	92	25,000
United Kingdom	80	10,000
Spain	75	7,500
Switzerland	60	26,000
Netherlands	47	25,500
Norway	35	6,000
Austria	26	1,500
Czech Republic	23	1,400
Croatia	20	4,000
Romania	15	1,000
Hungary	12	1,200
Sweden	12	1,000
Finland	10	2,000
Slovakia	10	1,300
Poland	8	800
Ireland	7	485
Serbia	2	70
Totally	**2,276**	**184,055**

Source: Weckenbrock et al. 2016: 9–10

On the international level, there can be found several models suitable for CSA. These partnerships differ in formulating the contract between producer and consumer and in the organic certification and distribution of products, but all

9 www.urgenci.net

10 Soil Association was set up in 1946 by farmers, scientists, and nutrition experts, who discovered a direct link between farming practices and health indicators. Its status is charity organization.

of them include the advance payment of consumers. Four main types can be distinguished (Saltmarsh et al. 2011: 7, Bashford et al. 2013: 22).

(1) In the *CSA shareholder model*, firstly, the consumers organize themselves: some of them are initiators, others follow them, and they find a producer who they cooperate with, whom they offer their help to in work during the production. Within the consumers' group, there can be observed a nucleus, which proves to be more active in sales, farm visits, communication inside the group, and decision-making (i.e. in choosing the producer). These roles can be assumed by a non-governmental organization, too, if it has enough capacity to organize the cooperation.

(2) In *CSA, tenancy model* partnership is initiated by producers, and consumers can enrol/register in it. This model needs only a little help from consumers; the conditions, offers, and costs are fixed by producers, and they are not formed as consequence of a common bargain process. In England, a quarter of initiatives and in the USA the majority of them function in this form.[11]

(3) *Farmers' co-operative model.* In Japan and Germany, there can be found co-operatives of farmers who cooperate in order to increase the diversity of product scale. This model provides the chance of specializing in smaller farms.

(4) *Producers' and consumers' common cooperative model.* This type supposes production on a common field, which is the common property of producers and consumers. In England, half of CSA initiatives are run as joint property.

Behind the enumerated models, there continuously appear new cooperation forms, but we can find less information and data on these.

The conformation of the Teikei model in Japan underlines different forms of partnerships (JOAA 1993). Regarding the main versions, the author highlights the following: (a) a few producers associate in order to organize sale points, where more consumer groups can be served, (b) more consumers associate around a producer, (c) more consumers associate around more producers, etc.

What are the characteristics of CSA and the differences as compared to other local direct sale networks?

In the last few years, there appeared many alternative product sale systems in Romania. Some of them facilitate the procurement of products from a single producer (some of them dispose of organic certification, but in the majority of cases this expensive certification is missing), whereas others promote a diverse product scale from more producers. The majority of these systems do not mean

11 In the USA: 10% of partnerships are administrated by non-governmental organizations, 75% by the producer, who use it as a direct sale system, and 15% by active consumer groups, who find a producer for their network (Henderson and Van En 2007).

long-term commitment for consumers, but procurement is being realized via occasional orders. So, compared to them, CSA partnerships have some particular characteristics (CRIES 2012: 16, Briciu 2016: 83).

The principle of solidarity between consumer and producer is an essential element of the partnership: this principle is manifested in sharing the costs, risks, and results of production. If, due to pests or meteorological calamities (or other factors beyond the powers of the farmer), the yield of the farm is lower than expected, consumers pay the same amount even if the quantity of products delivered is smaller than expected/planned. If, on the other hand, the yield of the farm is larger than expected/planned, the farmer freely shares the surplus with the consumers.

Advance payment is also an essential element of cooperation. It happens at the moment of signing the contract and represents the consumers' contribution to the preparation of the work for the next season. From autumn to spring, the producer prepares the soil for the next season, procures or produces the seeds and plants. If these costs were to be supported by the producer, many of them would renounce the production because of lack of capital.

Consumers' commitment for the whole agricultural season: consumers assume to buy weekly boxes in a long-term and planned process. In different sale systems, the quantity and quality of products are fixed by the producer and the choice of consumers is restricted to require or not the offer – they can subscribe to or unsubscribe from the tenancy at any time.

Application of fair and transparent price: a cost-calculating process provides equity for both producers and consumers. It is important to take all production-related costs into consideration and the invested work should be honoured correctly; the producer and the family should avoid living in difficulties. Due to the voluntary work of consumers (i.e. organizing weekly distributions, promotion of partnership, identifying new consumers, etc.), costs can be kept at a relatively low level in order to make it accessible for a wider public. All the members of the partnership know the elements of tenancy price; this aspect can facilitate the understanding of what the costs of a chemical-free, diverse, human-scale production process are.

The contents of the boxes are consensually negotiated by producers and consumers: decision-making is a common process, all the partners take part in it. The planning of production is based on the number of consumer families and a common bargain process determines the weekly quantities. The organization of production is adapted to local particularities, climate, soil, economic resources and conditions, and to consumers' requirements.

In sale systems where the producer or producers' co-operative offer tenancy, diversity, list of vegetables, production, harvest, and distribution plan are all set.

CSA pulls on economic, social, and environmental impacts. The major economic effect is the financial security offered to the producer. The programme

provides financial sustainability to semi-subsistence farms, namely the producer receives a guarantee to sell the products by the contract signed for the whole season. It assures an equitable price for the producer, which covers the whole budget of production. It reduces the time spent on selling, distributions are organized once a week in a consensual period of a few hours, so the producer can focus on production, and they do not need to spend too much time on selling. The model's target group are especially indigent producers with semi-subsistence farms. CSA contributes to new jobs and it encourages the involvement of youth in the agricultural sector (CRIES 2012: 17). According to former Romanian experiences, besides the poorness of producers, it is important to take into consideration the producer's former experiences in financial management. It happened that social aspects were taken into consideration by organizers and the producer could not meet the conditions of the contract because he did not respect the budget lines responsively.

The social effects of the movement are more complex: they regard appreciation of farming, relation between producers and consumers, social capital, solidarity, and affinity toward environmental aspects. The programme facilitates the increasing appreciation of farmers and enhances their satisfaction with their everyday work. It favours interpersonal and intergenerational communication, information flow, apperception of several cultural, social, environmental values, and the marketing of local knowledge in the agricultural and gastronomical fields. It contributes to the enhancement of trust, social capital, and cohesion between rural and urban regions. It also contributes to increasing the level of information and consciousness concerning healthy products; it favours the information of children about agricultural production. It promotes social solidarity and responsible attitude; it contributes to the improvement of civic culture among citizens. Events organized at producers can endorse community development and the formation of new services (CRIES 2012: 17).

Beyond economic and social impacts, the programme influences the estate of environment too: exclusion of chemicals, short transportation distance, crop rotation, association of plants, utilization of local seeds, and the reducing of packaging materials have positive effects. It facilitates environmentally-friendly treatments (utilization of natural manure, lack of chemical herbicides and pesticides), the protection of local biodiversity, and the utilization of local, GMO-free seeds. It promotes the consumption of local products, which come from a short distance, and thus their ecological impact is smaller. It favours the responsible use of natural resources (soil, water) and a reduced use of packaging materials (CRIES 2012: 17).

In the medium term, CSA's impact on consumers can vary depending on consumption, purchase, and living customs. Consumers, due to this long-term experience, change their gastronomic habits by using more local, provincial,

seasonal, and healthier ingredients. Indirectly, it influences their general consumption habits.[12]

As it can be observed, the functioning of partnerships has impacts not only on the individual but also on the community level. Its shtick, information, education, mobilizing aims are complemented by its social-economic importance. Though currently CSA partnerships have their "price" for organizers, producers, and consumers (continuous communication, exclusion of chemicals, long-term commitment), their benefits are more numerous from the point of view of both the producers and the consumers (financial security, healthy food, etc.); by the complexity of changes started by them, they become more and more relevant and more and more people are interested in their functioning and implementing.

Spreading of CSA partnerships in Romania and its variants

In Romania, the movement's origins are connected to Mihaela Veţan,[13] who started the first initiative in Timişoara in 2007 by importing and adapting it from France. So, the initiative starts from the French AMAP model and in Romanian it earns the ASAT name (Asociaţia pentru Susţinerea Agriculturii Ţărăneşti). The activity of the last few years can be classified as a pioneering, experimenting stage as well as a spreading, transmissive one.

Pioneering period of CSA

In order to test the model (between 2008 and 2010), the following activities were implemented:

The CRIES Association organized meetings, debates with farmers and representatives of academic fields, respectively the (Romanian and French) civil society in order to adapt the model and to analyse its implementation possibilities. They hold public presentations in order to inform different groups about solidarity partnerships: consumers, producers, or representatives of authorities.[14]

12 Based on an English survey, these changes are considered by consumers as natural and easy transitions. Active membership in a CSA means also positive relation to environment; these values play an important role in family socialization (Saltmarsh et al. 2011).

13 In 2007, Mihaela Veţan was the coordinator of a pilot project financed by the European Commission (Timişoara – as a field of common responsibility): she set up several initiatives belonging to social and solidarity economy supported by the European Council (www.coe.int) and IRIS Platform (www.iris-network.eu). Nowadays, Mihaela Veţan is the President of CRIES Association (www.cries.ro).

14 Between 2007 and 2009, they organized meetings with representatives of agricultural, labour, and family ministries because this kind of initiative has an innovative character from the social point of view as well.

They identified an active nucleus interested in supporting and promoting in order to establish the initiative in Timişoara. The first producer was involved in a CSA partnership. They organized further public meetings, campaigns, promoting events in order to recruit consumers; their slogan was the following: *Consume healthily and support the local agriculture!*

In the pioneering period, they adapted the essential work tools for the functioning of the partnerships: i.e. the Charta, the contract model, tools for budget calculation, tools for production, and crop planning.

In the period between 2008 and 2010, they tested several aspects of implementation: ability of consumers to self-organize,[15] relation of the partners to one another, establishment of trustful relations, increasing the number of consumers, capacity of production, etc.

They selected the first producer in 2008 from Belinț, Timis County. Among the criteria of selection, they took into consideration the producer's developmental potential. The partnership started with twenty consumer families and in the first three years the initiating person as well as the organization supported them significantly in order to consolidate the consumer group and to develop the cooperation.[16]

During the first year, the farmer produced eighteen types of vegetables and he introduced an experimental price calculation method, which meant a fixed price for every type of vegetable, calculated on the basis of the average market prices. Being the first year, consumers accepted that prices were calculated differently[17] from the budget calculation method of the model (CRIES 2012). According to the model, the budget calculation starts from sources needed for production: "cost of production (ie. seeds, seedlings, tools, etc.); employee's costs; machinery depreciation; investments; advisory services; overheads" (Bashford et al. 2013: 34).

The growth phase of the pilot project was more and more visible until 2009 the number of consumer families increased to 100. In 2012, 160 families participated from Timişoara and Lugoj, and the distribution period of the vegetables covered a seven-month-long period (from May to November).

In this period, the farmer utilized 5–6 hectares for the production, he employed three permanent workers (himself, his wife, and a helper), while in the summer period further seasonal workers or day-labourers were hired (3–4 part-time employees) on the farm.

15 In Romanian language, instead of consumer (consumator) the term of c*onsumactor* is used, which appeared as a combination of consumer and actor, and it underlines the activity through consumption.

16 The Urgenci Platform supported the costs of study visits of the two producers: to Aubagne, France (2008) and Japan (2010).

17 During a monitoring visit in 2012, it was observed that he applied the same method of calculating prices.

The presented pilot project cannot be seen as a representative one for CSA initiatives because it has developed into a business producing organic food. Compared to CSA partnerships, it shows the following main differences:

Price calculating method: fixed price per product, based on the average market prices; production costs and farmer's income are not transparent, so the fair price and transparent partnership relation are not accomplished.

Lack of solidarity: if a crop spoils independently from the farmer, so not as a consequence of his omission (natural calamity, critical meteorological conditions), the deficit is borne by the producer; if the yield of the farm is larger than expected/planned, the farmer does not share the surplus with the members of the group.

Changing box price: consumers pay a price per kilogram.

Consumers do not help the producer in organizing distributions, in communication within the group, or in organizing farm visits.

This business approach chosen by the farmer has led to the drop-out of some consumers, who thus behaved themselves as participants in an economic transaction, and not as members of a partnership.

In my opinion, the presented farmer can be placed halfway between direct sale systems and CSA solidarity partnerships. In the last few years, the mentioned farmer became independent, he obtained an organic producer certification and rented his own distribution place. But the initiative has its undeniable advantages compared to conventional market and it has a pioneering role in spreading the CSA concept in Romania (CRIES 2012).

Extension of the model, transmission of the sample

In 2011, the CRIES Association supported the setting up of two further groups in Timişoara, around two vegetable growers from Arad County. These two groups respect the original principles.

One of them produces in Ghioroc village and cooperates with approximately twenty families from Timişoara and Arad, her farm covering 0.45 hectares with one permanent and one part-time employee working in the household.

The other produces in Şagu village: he signed a contract with fifty consumer families from Timişoara, the farm covering 1.6 hectares with two permanent and part-time employees working in the household.

In 2012, the CRIES Association supported the initiation of a pilot project in Cluj with the help of several local volunteers.

During the spreading period of the model, they targeted producers who have real difficulties in selling their products, and – speaking in social terms – they really need the programme. Partnerships are stimulated step-by-step by the increasing number of consumers. In this phase, they pay special attention to the sustainability

of partnerships by facilitating the involvement of consumers and developing the communication abilities of producers.

During 2012–2013, the CRIES Association set the aim of extending the number of partnerships at the national level in Arad, Bucharest, Cluj, Iaşi, Oradea, Sibiu, and Odorheiu Secuiesc. For this reason, they organized informing campaigns for potential consumers and farmers. During 2014, fourteen producers participated in the programme in different places of the country. Two of the farmers are Hungarians (one produces in Morăreni and the other in Otelec). For the next seasons, the circle of producers will probably extend because organizers have plans in several other towns such as Mediaş, Zalău, etc.

Experiences in Odorheiu Secuiesc

The initiative reached Odorheiu Secuiesc as a lucky coincidence, as when I was a visiting professor in Timişoara the leaders of CRIES Association asked me about what a more suitable place would be for promoting the movement in the central Romanian region: Sibiu or Braşov. Thus, instead of the two cities, a small town became the target in the central region.

In Odorheiu Secuiesc, the pilot project started in 2013, and since then it has proved to be successful continuously. The initiative was started with the recommendation of four non-governmental organizations: the Community Foundation of Odorheiu Secuiesc, Civitas Foundation, Caritas Alba Iulia – Department of Rural Development, and Agora Association – Working Group for Sustainable Development. Of the mentioned organizations, the latter two are assuming an active role in the functioning of the partnership, Caritas providing an optimal place for vegetable distribution for free in its cellar in the town centre, while Agora working hard towards organizing and promoting the movement.

The initiative from Odorheiu Secuiesc shows some innovative aspects from several points of view. Firstly, out of the Romanian locations, this is the only small town in which the programme was tested, our original hypothesis being that in big cities consumer groups – who do not have their families, relatives in rural areas from where they can procure their vegetables – can be found easily, while, on the other hand, they appear on the demand side of organic vegetables. Secondly, soil and climate conditions differ in Szeklerland from a typical structure of a flat country, so testing the programme is a challenge also from this point of view. Another hypothesis was formulated, according to which the diversity of vegetables and the length of the season are influenced by local conditions. This hypothesis was also disproved. Thirdly, the initiative is unique also due to the fact that in this place utilization of the land is the most efficient. The latter factor is owing to Lehel Ferencz – a young but experienced and professional

horticulturist at the same time –, who realized a crop plan and associating plants plan, which help farmers to produce for one family a diversity of twenty-five types of vegetables on only 0.02 hectares.

In Odorheiu Secuiesc in 2013, a producer from Morăreni concluded an agreement with eighteen consumer families (according to our experience, from a 0.26–0.30-hectare land, this quantity can be produced, and vice versa: 18 families can provide financial security for one producer). This agreement was a very lucky one because both the producer and the consumers understood the programme's essential content. The best indicator of the programme's success is that we practically cannot speak of drop-outs, and consumer families have remained in the programme since its start and we have already finished the fourth successful season.

The current consumers' role is very significant in promoting the programme and transmitting their positive experiences. Consequently, in 2014, the programme was complemented by entering a new producer and 18 more families. The experiences of this new partnership were ambivalent. While the majority of the first group came from the local Rotary Club – so they have known each other, which is a huge advantage –, the families from the second partnership did not maintain such a close relationship with one another prior to the programme, and the attitude of the producer also differed in many aspects from the requirements of the programme.

The solidarity aspect was tested after a natural calamity (flood). We can report on a positive experience in this respect. But in the spring of 2015, one week before the abovementioned producer's first distribution would start, he cried off from the programme, which means that our indicators are similar to those in 2013. By this experience, we could observe that the contract, which contains the principles, values, rules, details, budget, monthly and weekly distribution plans, etc., protects mostly the producer.

In 2017, a new young producer from Poloniţa and his consumer group will start to cooperate with each other. According to our plans, we will facilitate the launch of the programme in other small towns from Szeklerland by offering the know-how to local organizers and producers, but for this it is necessary that external resources be involved as well.

The community development pillar of the programme consists in the fact that behind the weekly meetings, farm visits are organized, where there is occasion for longer, informal communication within the members of the group; furthermore, in 2013 and 2014, we participated as a team in the local festival's cooking competition, and its positive increments can be felt.

We try to empower further producers by offering complementary products without a contract, vegetable consumers can procure eggs, white meat, cheese at the same place, and in the future we plan to involve fruit growers as well.

Consumer families receive 25 types of vegetables (all of them have the same quantity, which can satisfy a four-member family's needs; of course, there are some families who consider this quantity too much or to less) throughout 31 weeks (from May until November) – the diversity of vegetables can change in different seasons. They spend a fair budget on it from production through transportation to packaging, respectively human capital costs, and since 2015 we have introduced travel costs to support exchange of experience. Payment takes place in eight instalments: in autumn, when the partners sign the contract, they pay the first one in advance (for preparation works of the land), while the other seven instalments are paid on the first meeting of every month. Voluntary work means approximately three hours per family per year (distribution of vegetables into equal parts, signing the papers of payment and of acceptance/reception), which is only a fraction of time spent in the market collecting vegetables of dubious origins; at the same time, although its feeling differs from the market, there are opportunities for direct communication between consumers and producer.

Finally, the author thinks that it is important to notice the role of volunteering in the programme, including organizing tasks, in the sense that participants help the consolidation of the project through their voluntary work. So, we hope that our help or assistance will not be necessary for a longer period and that instead the autonomous partnership we can focus our energy on establishing a new partnership.

National-level challenges in connection with the CSA movement

Related to consumers

Low level of information, awareness about the importance of healthy and varied diet based on local products (CRIES 2012: 14). In the socialist agricultural model, utilization of chemicals in food production became widespread mainly due to the heritage of the period. After the regime change, consumption goods appeared on the market in an ever-widening range, and thus the quantity, quality, origins, and diversity of food products started to change for the better. Due to the fact that the main criterion during procurement is price, the consumption of ecologically and socially irresponsibly produced goods became quite frequent.

Non-participation in organizing duties (the active nucleus is hard to evolve) (CRIES 2012: 14). In this respect, we should calculate upon cultural differences between Central-Eastern European societies and those where the movement came from. In the Romanian context where there is a weak tradition of civic self-organization, it is not easy to socialize consumers for voluntary work, but

according to local experiences from Odorheiu Secuiesc the majority of them change their attitudes toward volunteering over time: they are more passive for the first time, but later – when they earn their own experiences – they become more open-minded, willing to organize and realize distributions, farm visits, communication with producers – compared to the time spent on the market selecting, measuring, etc. of vegetables.

There are relatively few initiatives similar to this project, which means a lack of networks that we can tap into (CRIES 2012: 14). It is difficult to inform consumers, they have only little and piecemeal information about producers' challenges.

Maintaining interest and participation is also a challenge – according to former experiences, half of the consumers renew their contract with the same producer (CRIES 2012: 15). Probably those who do not continue their contracted relationship do not understand the essential characteristics of the initiative or they do not have realistic expectations from the partnership. Apart from the mentioned problems, other causes of exit could be the following: quantity of vegetables, consumer obligations, difficulties of changing the style of living (the majority of the consumers need to change their dietary and cooking habits because of the quantity and diversity of seasonal vegetables, which is attached to decreased meat consumption, to a completed diet, new recipes, etc.), financial difficulties, and lack of communication between producers and consumers. The first producer from Odorheiu Secuiesc can be described as a lucky situation because the number of those who drop out from the programme is negligible – the majority of the families have been members for several years. Of course, this lucky situation is not a ready-made gift as consumers remunerate with their fidelity the effort of the producer to accomplish more than planned with heart and hand.

Other direct sale initiatives appear and they are associated with CSA in consumers' minds (CRIES 2012: 15). In the last few years, several different initiatives were launched, which offer vegetable boxes through online ordering with delivery, etc. Some of them proved to be expensive and scam, while others contribute to the empowerment of local economy. Among the latter ones were mentioned the Átalvető programme from Odorheiu Secuiesc and Webkamra from Târgu-Mureş. Due to the fact that in Odorhei the Rural Development Department of Caritas is running the Átalvető programme, and the distribution place of CSA was also offered by Caritas, the population often considers CSA as part of Átalvető.

Consumers are averse from long-term planning. In CSA, the contract can be signed for a whole season. This means regular payments and vegetable consumption. Regarding these aspects, we can refer again to cultural differences among Eastern European societies and consolidated democracies. According to my opinion, increased uncertainty and a more difficult commitment are characteristics of this region.

Some consumers consider the price of the tenancy too high. The equitable price-calculating mechanism includes the costs of production, inputs, human capital, transportation, and packaging, so not the prices for kilograms of vegetables. A comparison of vegetable prices from the market or shop is irrelevant because the utilization of chemicals is completely forbidden/impossible in the programme. East–west differences are manifested also in relation to organic goods. While on the western part of the world, vegetables originated from organic farming are appreciated by consumers (high prices), in our societies, only a thin segment requires them despite that the prices are much lower than those of organic ones. During the recruit of consumers, we supposed that families with small children and the cultural elite would have an open attitude towards the initiative, and we sent our promotional materials to mothers', teachers', and actors' mailing lists in Odorheiu Secuiesc. We had no success with these groups, and one of the reasons of refusal was the price of tenancy.

Related to producers

Reticence of testing the model for the following reasons: part of the producers are opened to producing several kinds of vegetables without using chemicals, but they are afraid of entering into contractual relationship with a number of steady consumers, are not open to making their budget and production method transparent.

Lack of the knowledge and experience needed to get involved, to produce several kinds of vegetables in natural and planned manner (CRIES 2012: 15): neither producers from the system disposed of prior knowledge and experience nor did the new ones who were interested in launching the programme.

Difficulties in communication with customers (CRIES 2012: 15): some producers are hindered by their communication abilities of staying in touch with consumers (the majority of them do not use a personal computer, Internet, or social media for this purpose).

Lack of competencies in the field of budgets/financial planning (CRIES 2012: 15): this is due to the fact that semi-subsistence households generally cannot be characterized by precise financial planning and organizing.

Conclusions, future perspectives

This article tried to contextualize community-supported agriculture, which is conceptualized as an initiative that enhances local economy and constitutes a widespread model on the international level. The study focused on principles of the movement, its particularities compared to other direct sale systems, it

concentrated on its economic, social, environmental, and community impacts. In Romania, I took into consideration local experiences from Odorheiu Secuiesc as well as difficulties that emerged in the last few years.

Throughout the chapters, it was formulated several times that from the point of view of the movement cultural differences between the eastern part of Europe and consolidated democracies play a significant role (relation to voluntary work, long-term planning, appreciation of organic vegetables, etc.) in shaping CSA.

In western societies, this segment of agriculture can be characterized by continuous growth, which can be measured not only by the number of initiatives, producers, consumers, and involved lands but also by investments from the last period. Due to the flexibility of partnerships, the effects of global crisis had influenced them to a lesser degree.

The CSA movement in Romania goes through a pioneering phase. The successful implementation of the model results in certain important social changes[18] and it is conditioned by external and internal factors. Among external factors, the following can be enumerated: dominant consumption model in Romania centred around cheap products; purchasing power decreased in the last few years among the population (the main criterion of procurement being the price); penetration of big retail chains into the food market; high proportion of imported products; breaking with the socialist period of direct sale systems based on informal networks. As internal factors, the following can be counted: the method of organizing and developing partnerships and handling communication with producers and consumers (CRIES 2012: 19). Due to these factors, we assumed that the CSA model should not be imported but adapted to specific Romanian local particularities. But the experiences of the last few years convinced us that inclinations led to failure (the drop-out of consumers) and – similarly to other direct sale systems – to short-term planning. Another challenge is keeping the balance between the organization which promotes the initiative (if there is any) and the members of the partnership, who could easily cry off from duties and would not take a responsible stance towards running a partnership (there can be found examples in this regard in the last few years).

In propagating CSA in Romania, the strategy of CRIES Association was to develop an initiator network consisting of people and organizations that agree with the values and principles of the model and who are involved in the

18 Indicators of these changes, behind the communities, number of producers and consumers, are the organizations, companies, and cooperatives which were set up in order to promote, extend the models, and also the materials, books, studies which appeared in the last two decades, the events, conferences, trainings which focus on CSA and the dissemination thereof. Among the web pages, online and offline materials, one can find not only information disseminated by non-governmental organizations but also that universities, authorities are preoccupied too with the topic and that they study it. These indicators together with the former ones justify a certain level of institutionalization of the movement (CRIES 2012: 19).

voluntary promotion of this alternative. In autumn 2014, the founders of CRIES Association established an organization, the ASAT Association, particularly for this aim, which in the next period, besides promotion, would assume the coordination of information and experience exchange of producers. In autumn 2015, the programme was launched to become a trade-mark.

At the same time, the success of CSA in Romania depends strongly on organization and communication competencies, and on the capacity of forming a trustworthy relationship between consumers and producers.

According to a survey realized in the USA, the most efficient communication of the model happens through personal interactions. These results confirm the experience of organizers not only in America but in post-socialist societies too.[19]

From this point of view, the accent in disseminating the partnership should be put on the consumer–producer tandem. When initiating new partnerships, it is important for active animators to receive voluntary help, assistance from experienced consumers and producers. At the same time, farm visits are important to be organized because potential consumers and producers can ascertain the functioning of the model.[20]

Organizations which partially or totally dedicate their activities for promoting CSA play also an important role. On the international level, Urgenci Network can be highlighted as a prominent actor. Between 2008 and 2011,[21] the network was a programme for the dissemination of partnerships in Eastern Europe.

In sum, the author does not think that this movement will or should become popular en masse, but according to former experiences it could play a significant role among initiatives, alternatives for enhancing local economy.

19 According to research data, information materials do not play a significant role in the promotion of movements. This does not mean that written materials are not needed concerning the values, criteria, functioning, benefits, elements, important steps, etc. of the model but that the credibility of personal experiences seems to be more efficient than any other method. The author considers that written materials play a complementary role in spreading information about CSA, and they should be used responsibly, in electronic form.

20 The costs of these visits are not necessarily high and they can be financed by the interested participants (e.g. sending a consumer and a producer on a study visit). The travel and accommodation costs are more and more affordable because CSA is functioning in several regions of the country.

21 The activity expressed in quantitative indicators: 12 countries participated in the programme, 37 activities were implemented, 126 instances of experience exchange, 121 farm visits, 56 public meetings, approximately 1,500 consumers, and 450 producers participated. Behind this project between 2011 and 2013, a Grundtvig programme was realized (CSA4Europe) with the participation of 8 countries and 100 instances of experience exchange.

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Consumption – between Aesthetics and Ethics. A Discussion

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Abstract. The article discusses some problems connected to ethical consumption. We aimed to show that in spite of the fact that many researches consider ethical consumption as a taken-for-granted phenomenon which can be rooted in specific values and behaviours, there is not clearly revealed the exact content of this concept. In order to clarify such questions, we tried to answer how consumption became an ethical question, what kind of problems consumption implies, and which are those major ethical frameworks within which consumption can be translated. We concluded that the ethics of consumption cannot be placed anymore within the references of modernity. Following Bauman's aesthetics of consumption, we think that ethical consumption is a kind of aesthetics based on a diffuse set of values and becomes interpretable only in the framework of postmodern ethics.

Keywords: consumption, ethics, postmodernism, morality

Introduction

It is already a commonplace that we live in a society of consumption. The scholarly literature on consumption is extremely rich and everyday journalism is also full of texts dealing with the phenomenon of consumption. As a consequence, nowadays, consumption can be approached in very different ways, giving rise to complex theories and ideologies of consumption. Following Gabriel and Lang (2003: 8–9), five major approaches of consumption can be mentioned: consumerism as a moral doctrine – according to which consumerism is the essence of the good life and the vehicle for freedom, power, and happiness; consumerism as the ideology of conspicuous consumption –, meaning that consumption is the mechanism by

which social status can be defined and enhanced; consumerism as an economic ideology – in which consumption is the source of economic well-being, so that the nurturing of consumers is the key to economic development; consumerism as a political ideology –, which refers to the politicization of consumption both in terms that the state guarantees consumer rights and in terms that the state is a major provider of goods, services, and quality-related standards; consumerism as a social movement, which refers to consumer advocacy, not only in the form of quality-related concerns but also in the form of criticizing overconsumption in a world of finite resources.

A careful analysis of such approaches shows that in any of them consumption is frequently discussed in a negative manner, especially when references are made to the so-called hedonistic or conspicuous consumption, i.e. the act of consumption for self-indulgence and status-enhancement. Such viewpoints talk about a moral panic and assume that in the society of consumption we are witnessing the devaluation and moral wrecking of society. In the light of such aspects, it seems reasonable to assume that the critique of the society of consumption appeared earlier than its theory (i.e. the work of the Frankfurt School).

In any case, the phenomenon of consumption, which is frequently dealt with in the contexts of incomes and professions (i.e. who, what, and why consumes), represents an important social structuring force. In accordance with Bauman (2005), today's society shapes its members for the fulfilment of their consumer roles. Or, as Clarke D. B. et al. (2003) contend in the introduction of *The Consumption Reader*, in today's society of consumption, it has become more important how one spends than how one earns his/her money. Thus, in the modern world, consumption can be considered that major force through which social relations are organized, identities are defined, and social interactions take place. Values are not the factors determining consumption, but they are articulated through consumption (cf. Slater 1997).

In the present article, we aim to reflect on the ethics of consumption, on the ways 'how' we consume. The ethical dimension of consumption started to become an important section of consumption-related theories in the 1990s. Since then, and mostly connected to the *Ethical Consumer Research Association* (ECRA) and to the related *Ethical Consumer* magazine, the concept of 'ethical consumer' gathered ground. This does not mean only that consumption-related discourses started to be impregnated by moralizing accents, but it refers also to conscious consumer attitudes, assuming that consumption decisions are or should be made on the ground of certain moral concerns and values. On the basis of such attitudes and decisions, we can speak also about 'ethical consumption', meaning that value-based, conscious consumer attitudes are taking place not only on the level of certain individuals but they also take the form of community-level actions or even macro-level social manifestations. Bauman (1992) talks in this

sense about 'neo-tribes', and contends that in the era of postmodernism ethical consumers are one of those lifestyle groups which propagate several forms of alternative consumption. Such consumption collectives can be perceived as identity movements which manifest themselves through certain values, ways of consumption, and even visible objects like clothing (cf. Wilska 2002).

Without intending to go into a detailed description of ethical consumption, we mention here only that ethical consumption can be conceptualized as a consumer philosophy which refers to the degree to which consumers prioritize their own values and concerns when they make shopping decisions. The moral values which underline ethical consumption are various, but, in general, they can be divided into two major groups: values that concern the self and values that concern others (e.g. the environment or other people) or, as Carrier (2012) puts it, the decision to start consuming ethically can be taken with respect to oneself or it can reflect a desire to become part of a social movement; ethical consumption can be about a better household and/or about a better world. In the same logic, it can be said that ethical consumption satisfies three kinds of needs: control needs, i.e. the necessity of people to have control over everyday activities and over their fears (e.g. certain foods, brands, ingredients, etc. to avoid); social integration needs, i.e. the desire to feel part of a group (e.g. of a movement); authenticity needs, i.e. the search for genuine, natural, eco-friendly products (Lang, 2009: 2).

No matter what the ground of ethical consumption would be, consumers may be different in the ways they express their shopping moral: they can simply buy products which are not harmful to society or the environment, but they can also be involved in more complex and committed social behaviours like boycotting products (Lang 2009: 2). Indeed, ethical consumption comprises various forms of practices, which all illustrate that the concept can be considered an umbrella term for 'softer' or 'harder' consumer practices. In this sense, Gulyás (2008) lists the following forms of consumption practices: non-consumption, which refers to avoiding shopping as much as it is possible; value-based regular shopping, i.e. the regular purchase of fair, green, local, etc. products; boycott – i.e. the refusal of buying from a certain producer because of dissatisfaction with the producers' environmental, social, etc. performance; buycott (positive boycott) – i.e. purchasing products from producers which support a particular case; specific forms of product usage and after usage disposal which cares for others and the environment (e.g. saving, recycling, selective waste collection, etc.).

It is easy to see that in contemporary societies certain consumption choices can work as forms of political protest and shopping can be considered a political act (Sassatelli & Davolio 2010: 205). Besides this, it is also quite self-evident that ethical consumption implies a bio-ethical and an ecological component, and thus environmental ethics is an important pivot in constructing the arguments of ethical consumption.

But how coherent such arguments are? If we deeply analyse the discourse around consumption, it becomes quite difficult to define the genuine ethical consumption. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the ethical discourses have centred on the concept of duty, and thus ethics has been slackened. This phenomenon is signalled, among others, by the works of Gianni Vattimo, Gilles Lipovetsky, Zygmunt Bauman, etc., i.e. those authors who contributed the most to the elaboration of the postmodern ethics. In the same time, there appeared empirical works which defined themselves as documents of social and value change. In this sense, we can make reference to Richard Sennett's *The Fall of the Public Man* (1977), Fukuyama's *The Great Disruption. Human Nature and the Reconstruction of Social Order* (1999), etc.

From the perspective of our article, Zygmunt Bauman's work titled *From the Work Ethic to the Aesthetic of Consumption* (2005) is extremely indicative since the author juxtaposes the ethics of work and the ethics of consumption. In fact, the title of our article gets its reason from this antithesis. When Bauman puts the ethics of work against the ethics of consumption, he contends that within the framework of the society of consumption modernity's major ethical values centred around duty and responsibility started to lose their validity. In the society of consumption, those panoptical institutions (e.g. hospitals, schools, army, etc.) which are the most responsible for the spreading of the work-centred moral of modernity do not exist in their generic forms or they have only limited structuring power and have been replaced by the aesthetics of consumption. This means that consumers are aesthetical subjects whose decisions are motivated by strategies of identity constructions, rather than moral subjects who act in accordance with their duties and responsibilities (see also Venkatesh & Meamber 2008: 46).

In this context, can we speak about 'ethics of consumption' or is it more appropriate to make reference to the more unobtrusive 'ethical consumption'? To what extent can we call ethics the many approaches which try to bring morale to today's consumption? Can such approaches step out from the value matrix of the society of consumption, and establish a more general societal moral? In order to answer such questions, we need broad theoretical approaches.

Because it seems that the ethics of consumption cannot be placed and understood in accordance with the references of modernity, we assume that the most important step is to sketch the ethics of modernity vs the ethics of postmodernity. In order to understand this juxtaposition, it is necessary to observe how a certain social order develops and sustains its own values. It is not less important to outline the patterns of those ethical behaviours which appear within the framework of the so-called postmodern society. At the same time, it is not enough to make reference only to theoretical works. It is obvious that the real nature of the ethical consumption can be tackled in the effective practice of

consumption, so it is important to see which social strata and alongside what kind of values and motivations embrace ethical forms of consumption. Such aspects ask for sociological approaches, and we intend to make reference to them in the course of the following theoretical sections.

Consumption as an ethical question

The ethical problems of consumption represent a fairly new area of research. Until the middle of the 20th century, the question of consumption had been treated outside the ethical approaches. Modern ethics was centred around individuals' relationship with each other and with themselves. The question of consumption was marginal in such a universe where good and bad were mostly measured and judged in terms of interpersonal relationships. Obviously, consumption has always had such aspects which preoccupied normative thought. If we take for instance the case of food consumption, it is well-known that in traditional-religious societies people succeeded to anchor themselves through the practice of eating. In the pre-modern societies, the act of eating took place within the geographical conditions of a certain location, and there resulted particular 'foodscapes' (what, when, how to eat), which bounded the local community together (Bildtgard 2009). Later, nations and communities continued to define themselves through cultures of eating – a practice which continues to be visible even nowadays in the form of gastronomic cultures and specific cuisines.

Later, in the context of recourse shortages, the so-called hedonist consumption which propagates self-centred indulgence and pleasure providing became excessively criticized mostly on ecological grounds. This issue opened the door for debates in which consumption turned to be an ethical question. The vulnerability of natural resources determined ethical thinking to incorporate into the circle of ethical behaviour the human–nature relationship. In this sense, we can make reference to Hans Jonas, who in *Die verwandelten Natur das menschlchen Handelh* (1979) contends that the 'old' ethic is unable to reflect on humans' relationships with the non-human world. Consequently, he suggested the enlargement of the ethical thought on human–nature relationship as well, assuming that in this way we can protect nature and its vulnerability in front of threats coming from the part of humans.

Nature is mostly threatened by consumption itself. Goods and service exchanges rise exponentially, and result not only in the ubiquitous presence of goods and services but also in various forms of pollution and environmental damage. Besides the negative environmental impacts, consumption has other dark sides as well, i.e. child labour, black labour, unequal distribution of goods, etc. Besides these, the hedonistic, conspicuous aspects of consumption determined the need

for normative approaches of consumption. With other words, consumption became an ethical question, which, however, does not mean that we already have a crystal clear connection between consumption and ethics.

Ethical consumption or the ethics of consumption?

The question from this subtitle could be considered a word-play, but in reality it comprises a serious problem. This problem appears once we want to place the phenomenon of ethical consumption in a certain disciplinary framework. Is it enough to appeal to a sociological framework as the majority of empirical works do when analysing the cases and frequencies of value-based consumption practices? Such works usually end with some kind of categorization, which aims to delimit and describe specific lifestyle groups. However, the concept of 'ethical' suggests that besides the sociological framework we need a normative framework as well, which can be offered by an applied ethics. In fact, we should deliberate as to whether we can depart or not from the ethical consumption for somewhere where we can talk about the ethics of consumption, understood as a special area of general ethics. Such ethics has its reason of existence only when it is able to apply moral considerations to specific consumption situations, i.e. if it becomes able to elaborate the normative framework of consumption. But do we not expect too much from a phenomenon which, after all, becomes explainable in the context of the society of consumption?

The existence of ethical consumption and ethical consumer is not questioned by anyone. But the complexity of the situation is well illustrated by the extreme variety of denominations with which such consumption behaviours are described, i.e.: conscious consumption (Willis & Schor 2012), sustainable consumption (e.g. Southerton et al. 2004, Seyfang 2006), critical consumerism (e.g. Sassatelli 2006), quality-conscious consumption, price-conscious consumption (Ding et al. 2010), etc. Out of these, especially conscious consumption can compete with ethical consumption, and it may seem that the former comprises the latter. Similarly to conscious consumption – which presupposes the degree to which consumers prioritize their own values and concerns when they make shopping decisions –, ethical consumption presupposes in its own turn consumers' reflexivity in connection with their consumption decisions, but the major difference between these terms consists in the existence of the normative component in the case of ethical consumption. Thus, while conscious consumption presupposes consumers' awareness in connection with products, production processes, distribution, or impacts of goods (Willis & Schor 2012), ethical consumption comprises the reflexivity in connection with the impact of consumption on others. This *other* may be another individual or group, the future generation,

the environment, but it can also refer to economic considerations in connection with producers. The authors, who consider conscious and ethical consumptions as synonyms, are accentuating especially this others-focusing component of the consumption decisions. As a conclusion, ethical consumers are characterized by the fact that in their consumption decisions they accept and vindicate their adjudication about social fairness (Smith 1990). Such adjudication corresponds, in fact, to the responsibility in connection with others, and constitutes the most salient difference between self-conscious consumption and ethical (i.e. genuine conscious) consumption.[1]

There still remains the question whether we can label as 'unethical' those consumption choices which do not comprise the above mentioned others-oriented consciousness? How can we label the consumption of goods produced with child labour, the consumption of non-ecological goods, etc.?

This problem becomes as much complex as there is a common wisdom sustained by market literature according to which the cost of products is a major factor in participating in ethical consumption practices. As far as organic, local, ecological, etc. products are usually more pricy than conventional products, it seems logical to find more numerous better-educated and affluent people among conscious food consumers. Johnston et al. (2011) recognize that ethical consumption practices are more specific among economic elites, but they also note that the simple dichotomy between rich/ethical and poor/unethical is problematic both politically and empirically. On the political level, such a dichotomy presupposes that moral virtues are specific for economically privileged people, and such a rationale determines the moral marginalization of the economically less better-off citizens. As an empirical argument for this discussion, the authors quote a qualitative study made among Canadian wealthy and less wealthy families, in which they found that wealth goes hand in hand with ethical consumption, knowledge and practice, but low income does not mean immoral eating practices: less wealthy families usually use less discursive repertories about ethical eating, but in practice they adapt ethical consumption practices to their resources (e.g. in the form of recycling).[2]

In spite of these important viewpoints, there still exists a drawn game in connection with ethical consumption. After all, the problem arises from the connection between consumption and ethics in the context of the society of

1 Conscious consumption as a form of reflexive modernization is frequently considered a form of self-indulgence, a form of personal and family healthcare, without amounting – or at least not consciously – to an ethical consumption or to a political statement (e.g. Szasz 2007).

2 In this respect, Starr (2009) opposes two trends. The former assumes that as far as ethical products are more expensive than normal products the buying of such products raises with the income. On the other hand, some ethical consumption practices (e.g. recycling, commuting via public transport) are sometimes intensive in time rather than in money, and so such practices tend to decline with income.

consumption, within which ethical consumption seems to represent only a small niche among the general moral of consumption and consumerism. Such aspect calls for the need to oppose the ethics of modernity and postmodernity and to try a reinterpretation of the ethics of consumption within the framework of the postmodern society.

The ethics of modernity

The ethics of modernity comprises highly diversified approaches which have been developed during centuries and through the works of many scholars; therefore, it is very difficult to epitomize it. In such an endeavour, it is plausible to depart from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1905), whose major thoughts are – even if criticized – accepted by major scholars. In this work, Weber explains the emergence and development of the capitalist system (i.e. the system which can be considered the framework of modernity) through the spreading of the Protestant work ethic able to establish such kind of lifestyle and ethos which are based on the norm of duty. In Weber's approach, the Protestant-ethic-based life conduct encouraged professional employment, tenure and monetary recovery rooted in workmanship.

Another important feature of Weber's approach consists in the placement of *duty* and *rationality* in the centre of the new moral. Gilles Lipovetsky in the *Le Crépuscule du devoir* (1993) considers also that duty and rationality are the central elements of the ethics of modernity. In Lipovetsky's view, modernity is the era of enlightenment, a watershed after which ethical thought becomes radically changed. Lipovetsky differentiated between traditional, religious and modernist, duty-centred morals. He speaks about the secularization of ethics, a phenomenon which occurs between 1750 and 1950 and which consists in the disappearance of the religious overtone from the ethics of duty. This is an era which accepts only rationalist authority, and the duty towards individuals replaces the duty towards God. In this era, the practical rationality aims to develop those moral norms which are accepted by anyone. This change is mostly evident in Kant's ethic, which assumes that the ethical subject and its autonomy are possible even without the supposition of God.

The powerful concept of duty could be only a philosophical artefact without the existence of those social practices which validate this moral. Lipovetsky (1996) accentuates that through approximately two centuries, until the middle of the 20th century, modern societies have been propagated citizens' moral duties by continuously encouraging them to live in accordance with duties towards each other and towards communities. Obviously, these calls would be unprofitable without the existence of such institutions which helped to vindicate them. We

are talking about the so-called panoptical institutions (Foucault 1995), which are based on dominance, social control, rationality, and impersonal power. The role of such institutions in building the social moral of modernity is accentuated by Bauman as well (2005), who contends that the transition from the society of producers to the society of consumers was possible by the gradual disappearance of these institutions. That kind of training which characterized panoptical institutions is not suitable to train the consumers of the society of consumption. The newly emerged situation implies, however, not only different and differently working institutions but also a new social moral. This means that the duty- and rationality-centred moral of modernity was gradually replaced by postmodern ethics and a kind of 'painless morality' (Lipovetsky 1992).

Postmodern ethics

Postmodern ethics – as Bauman (1993) contends – was born from the rejection of the typical, modernist approaches. While in the era of modernity moral authority could be ensured even without the presence of God and moral principles were not questioned, postmodern ethics is not able to rely upon universal and unchangeable principles since it is defined exactly on the basis of uncertainty. Bauman postulates that in the postmodern era there does not exist a singular moral code, and thus the existence of an objectively established ethics becomes practically impossible. The author contends that postmodern moral is not rational, it is rather aporetic and non-universal; thus, the moral self finds itself in an ambivalent, uncertain context within which universal moral answers only rarely appear.

Postmodern ethics builds on the knowledge that with the death of God human condition was not lost; instead, we became part of a thrilling experience whose aim is exactly the definition of human existence. During the course of this exercise, we cannot rely upon steady principles because in this postmodern world moral dilemmas and options are indeed dilemmas and options, and they do not constitute reparable effects originated in human weaknesses.

The uncertainty of moral principles goes hand in hand with the revaluation of the concept of duty. Gilles Lipovetsky (1996) considers this revaluation as the beginning of the emergence of post-duty, post-moral era, which stultifies the ideal of self-sacrifice and duty and, instead of these, propagates the norms of well-being. The hyperbolic imperative of virtue is replaced by the quality of life, personal achievement, and self-indulgence and moral prescriptions are replaced by subjective rights.

The social conditions of this turn can be found in the development of the welfare society. The increasing of leisure time, mobility, the institutional solution

of social conflicts, the growing standards of living allowed to focus not only on subsistence but also on the manner in which this new life is lived, i.e. on lifestyles. Within such context, it became obvious that social practice is not only a matter of prohibition, supervising, and dominance. Prohibitions became replaced by the principle of untrammelled self-realization, and this new ideal allowed to liberate hedonist motivations which hardly can be accommodated with the norms of rational life conduct.

Such changes resulted in the weakening of the concept of duty. It is important to mention that the new context does not exclude the existence of the new forms of 'painless' duties. As Lipovetsky (1996) contends, in the society of consumption, the logic of post-morality is dominant, but it is not the bare tendency of the postmodern era. In the post-duty society, the spirit of morality does not disappear but becomes manifest in the form of charity, humanitarian movements, or even in practices aimed to change the nature of jurisdiction. The moral touchiness of our era is mostly apparent in the form of pornography, abortion, protests against animal experiences and against the curtailment of human freedom. The era of post-morality is dominated by the requisites of rights and justice; however, such ethical requirements are supposed to be met without imposing duties on the individuals. This is what Lipovetsky calls the era of ethical minimalism.

In any case, duties are not convergent with consumption situations. In accordance with Bauman (2005), it is ideal that consumers not be attached too much to anything; commitments are not meant to last forever. Rather, commitments are intended to be volatile and periodic. For instance, brand commitment is much debated in the marketing literature, but scholars tend to agree that consumption incorporates a kind of excess and consumption capacity should go well beyond consumers' natural or learned necessities. Thus, consumers' needs can never be considered fully satisfied; consumers are always open and ready to consume newer and newer products and commitments to certain brands or products are only temporal.

As we have already mentioned, the ethics approached this turn by the concept of post-morality. Obviously, we can speak in parallel about the shift in values and worldviews. Inglehart's (1977) concept of post-materialism shows much similarities with Lipovetsky's concept of post-morality. While materialist values are built around social safety, post-materialistic values are focused on individuals' freedom, humanism, greater civic involvement, environmentalism, etc. Thus, post-materialist values are similar to the conduct of post-moral ethics, in the sense that both are supposing higher-level ethical and aesthetical principles. It can be concluded that the post-materialist value system maps exactly the ethical sensitivity of the era of post-morality. In fact, this could be the effective rationale of the postmodern turn occurring in the history of ethics.

Factors involved in ethical consumption

In the previous chapters, we tried to problematize the question of ethical consumption by focusing also on the unsatisfying deliberation on the term 'ethical'. Our point was that we cannot talk about ethics in connection with consumption in the absence of revealing the effective content and volume of the 'ethical' concept. The chapters dedicated to a short discussion on the modern and postmodern ethics aimed to make clear to some degree the origin and reason of existence of the term ethical consumption in the context of the society of consumption. We think, however, that the above theoretical discussions must be completed by empirical considerations aimed to answer the following questions: Who are the ethical consumers? What are those values which drive ethical consumption? To what degree can socio-demographic backgrounds explain ethical consumption? In the last few decades, there were conducted many empirical analyses in this regard, especially on the level of the Western world. In the following, we will sketch some of the conclusions of these studies.

In terms of the socio-demographic determinants of conscious/ethical consumption, it is difficult to find systematic effects of socio-demographic characteristics. In spite of these, there are certainly several tendencies which contour a more or less stable profile of the ethical consumer. To these variables, we should add the role of motivational and value factors based on which we can speak about the multifaceted profile of the ethical consumers (Guido 2010).

Concerning age, the assumption is that younger people – probably due to the fact that they have been educated more recently in the context of postmodern society – attach greater intrinsic value to ethical consumption. However, because they usually earn less than their older counterparts, the extra expenditure of conscious products may be relatively burdensome for them and, as a consequence, young people do not constitute the most dominant group of ethical consumers (Starr 2009). Based on the data of the General Social Survey, the author (ibidem) also concluded that living in a single-family dwelling, being white and female are associated with significantly higher probability of buying ethical food products. The author, however, did not find any effect of having children or being democrat/republican on ethical consumption. It is, however, notable that people who see themselves as relatively well informed about politics were more likely to buy ethically – a fact which seems to indicate the reflexive nature of conscious consumption.

In connection with the impact of the income, Koos (2012) contends that monetary resources can constitute a budget restriction for ethical consumption since such products have a premium price. However, he also notes that empirical results are rather inconclusive in this respect: while Micheletti and Stolle (2005) find a significant income effect on political consumption in Sweden, other studies report non-significant income effects, e.g. in Denmark (Goul Andersen &

Tobiasen 2004) or in Norway (Stromsens 2005). On the other hand, Harrison et al. (2007) contend that choosing ethical food is mediated by food costs, especially among low-income people, and we can say that ethical consumption is linked to the middle classes and it represents an elitist food culture. Guthman (2003) talks in this sense about 'yuppie chow' and suggests that ethical food consumption is largely linked to gentrification. Adams and Raisborough (2008) found a similar conclusion, and they consider that the ethical consumer is a middle-class person and ethical consumption is a middle-class project of distinguishing itself, so ethical consumption practices are an important aspect of identity construction in the case of middle-class people. Thus, in accordance with Bourdieu (1984), it seems that differences in consumption preferences and actual purchases still do exist, and even in the context of late modernity, when lifestyles are rather more chosen than ascribed, consumption is still very much embedded in social contexts and practices.

However, we must note that ethical consumption is not just a class project. Thus, Johnston et al. (2011) consider that besides economic resources, ethical consumption implies a specific value system and worldview. For instance, in the case of food, it seems that today's food culture is highly politicized since it presupposes the knowledge and discourse about which food is politically, environmentally, socially, etc. correct and citizens who are more aware about such discourses – and who might be better educated – are more dedicated consumers of such products, and so both material and symbolic factors are important shaping the forces of purchasing decisions.

In terms of the value systems, empirical studies showed that among universalism, benevolence, spirituality, and self-direction there are those values which are associated with ethical consumption, while among the motivations, concern over animal welfare, support for the local economy, and the perception of ethical consumption as a fashionable lifestyle are the most important issues which determine consumers to purchase ethically (Alwitt & Pitts 1996). However, there are also authors who found that environmental motivations explain only a small amount of the ethical purchase. In this respect, Lockie et al. (2002) consider also that environmental concern is just one of the motivations which lead consumers to ethical choices. In the case of food products, it has been shown that health and nutritional concerns are important motivations (Padel & Foster 2005), and this raises the question whether ethical consumption is really driven by moral concerns or – on the contrary – it is motivated by self-centred issues like concern for health.

In any case, it seems that the many contradictory findings of the research on ethical consumption show that traditional social factors, such as age, gender, education, etc., do not clearly determine this type of consumption. Neither socio-demographic backgrounds nor political orientation can unequivocally determine

the emergence of ethical consumption. However, all of these factors – under certain conditions – can be involved in the shaping of ethical consumption.

The edification of a certain ethics is not by far an act specified by a single factor; rather, it constitutes the result of a longer community-level process. It is always societal process which builds and sustains a specific social moral. Until this practice was determined by the socio-demographic background, such factors had had a major role in the creation of the social moral itself. For instance, being a woman had always meant a specific state and role in the case of traditional societies. Such role then determined specific choices which were connected to specific values and attitudes. Today, this is not the case: in modern societies, gender roles are fading and they do not clearly specify the different social constructs, among these the ethical consumption as well. But neither income nor political orientation can clearly indicate the emergence of the ethical consumption. In the light of the research data, ethical consumption seems to be a relatively freely floating situation and the theories of the society of consumption compel us to rethink our basic social categories.

Conclusions

The title of our article tried to polarize the problems connected to ethical consumption. We aimed to show that in spite of the fact that many researches consider ethical consumption as a taken-for-granted phenomenon which can be rooted in specific values and behaviours, the exact content of this concept is not clearly revealed. In order to clarify such questions, we tried to answer how consumption became an ethical question, what kind of problems the term 'consumption' implies, and which are those major ethical frameworks within which consumption can be translated.

In the course of this theoretical journey, we concluded that the ethics of consumption cannot be placed within the references of modernity anymore. Ethical consumption is not a way to express the unsparing, duty-centred imperatives of modernity. This occurs because those panoptical institutions which trained people to follow certain values are themselves disappearing. The ethics of work has always been attached to a certain social role and to the duties associated with this role. The subject of work ethics subordinated his/herself to his/her duties, and in this way succeeded to be a useful citizen. Contrary to this, a subject who consumes ethically does not temper his/herself in order to respect a certain moral imperative, but works on his/her self-enhancement and through his/her consumption decision tries to define his/herself as a valuable person. With this observation, we enter the terrain of postmodern ethics, which – in our opinion – can function as the most adequate framework for interpreting ethical consumption.

In the previous chapters, we outlined that the moral subject of ethical consumption is hard to be taken, both theoretically and empirically. This difficulty arises mostly from the methods of the traditional approaches, which try to clearly localize – e.g. along socio-demographic variables – ethical consumers. Another problem is related to the conceptualization of the ethics of consumption in the form of a traditional ethics, i.e. as a normative framework which regulates consumption. Consumption, however, is not a homogenous act and its moral problems and value-systems cannot be clearly outlined similarly to the professional ethics. There is also the question to what degree we can speak about consumer communities, since ethical consumption shows mostly as a loose community which occurs alongside different contexts, interests, and values and can have a temporal rather than permanent nature.

Ethical consumption does not show the value system of a certain social class; rather it offers an arena of expression for various social values: critics of globalization, environmentalism, fairness, healthism, etc. Normally, it is very difficult to arrange such diffuse values on the same platform. Yet, when we speak about ethics of consumption, we tend to affirm something comparable to Bauman's aesthetics of consumption. In accordance with the author, the aesthetics of consumption links the purport of consumption to the fever of new sensations. The aesthetics-based consumption does not assign values to well-respected duties but to high-level, ever-changing experiences. Ethical consumption goes beyond such aesthetics only through the fact that it occurs on the basis of diffuse yet stipulated values. Thus, ethical consumption is characterized by a kind of value set which becomes interpretable only within the framework of postmodern ethics.

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Book Reviews

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Socio.hu, The Social Meaning of Food. Special Issue in English, No 3 (2015)

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In the last two decades, we have been able to witness a new momentum of nutrition research in the social sciences. This is thanks to new phenomena that have been published on this subject in areas such as gastro-tourism, gastronomic festivals, and the significance of certain aspects of nutrition in development endeavours as well as the introduction of the ecological theme into nutrition. Questions related to starvation and social justice have also been raised again in this context. But perhaps the most striking is the emergence of a wide variety of AFNs, which have both become extremely popular research objects in themselves and in association with economic, social, ethical, legal, and other issues. The literature on alternative agriculture, local food, and AFNs has grown enormously in recent years not only in activist narratives but also in academic debates (see Cucco & Fonte 2015: 23), but until recently Central and Eastern Europe has been almost absent in the analysis of them.

The volume of studies titled *Ethical Eating in the Postsocialist and Socialist World* (Klein, Jung, and Caldwell 2014), which shows the movements and the related processes of a more restricted region, is an exception. On the one hand, this volume fits comfortably into western studies on the subject, while, on the other, it shows the differences caused by the time "backlog" of different social processes. Its virtue is that it reveals that although a global phenomenon and movements are involved, certain individual movements are still deeply rooted in the national/regional/local historical and political context. The authors indicate this with the results of research in the post-socialist countries.

I consider the special issue of *Socio.hu* (2015) under the title *The Social Meaning of Food*[1] especially important; its subject is nutrition, and within this a special emphasis is on the examination of alternative food networks (almost all of the studies connected to it in one way or another).

This issue includes theoretical works as well as case studies. It is characterized by methodological diversity: the authors worked with interviews, participant

1 http://www.socio.hu/en/special-issue-2015-food

observation (Bilewicz & Śpiewak), surveys (Nistor), and analysis of historical sources and cookbooks (Duvnjak, Macan, Martin, and Sampeck).

Food and nutrition is presented in a broad perspective, but studies clearly outline two main concerns about nutrition: the amount of food (its existence at all; see Asztalos Morell, Šikić-Mićanović) and quality (see Bilewicz & Śpiewak, Cucco & Fonte, Csurgó & Megyesi, Nistor). The appearance of these two questions in nutrition literature is not new for the right quantity and quality of food is essential in any society. Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil, when showing the historical context of the concerns about nutrition, consider the lack of food and hunger and contaminated food throughout history as main sources of troubles. According to them, modern societies are also experiencing various risk elements in nutrition, but while in the past religion, tradition, and culture determined what was safe and what was not, in modern societies everyone must make a decision in the field of nutrition, with a kind of *nutritional normlessness* – as the authors put it. The disappearance of forms of risk identification and management providing traditional models that are valid for everyone is putting a much greater decision-making burden on the individual, which in itself generates anxiety (Beardsworth & Keil 1997: 150–160).

Hunger and the risk of contaminated food, of course, continue to exist to this day, even in western countries, but other risk elements or dilemmas have joined these two components. Such things are addressed in the new findings appearing in nutrition research, which pose a challenge to traditional eating habits (for example, traditional dishes proven to be unhealthy). On the other hand, ethical issues arising with regard to food, such as animal rights, sustainability, working conditions and the livelihoods of farmers, use of bio- and nano-technology, research ethics, and so forth are also posing real dilemmas (Coff, Korthals, and Barling 2008: 9).

Many of these questions initially belonged within the 'scope' of alternative social and lifestyle movements. This in turn gave rise to ethical, alternative, and organic alternative food networks (ALFs). Among the nutrition concerns of the second half of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century, quality and quantity concerns are specially emphasized, including the chemical content of raw materials, preservation and storage chemicals, genetically modified raw materials, and so on. While the concern had remained partly a concern for human health, the same risk elements led many people to the exploration and understanding of the relationship between food and environmental problems, and thus to the incorporation of another risk element in the discourse. These movements formulate themselves against the food industry dictated by global capitalism and they connect the concern for health with the value systems and struggles for security, autonomy, and equal accessibility (see Klein, Jung, and Caldwell 2014: 2).

Clarification of the concepts in contemporary ALFs is also an important theme of social science texts dealing with them including the studies that can be found here as well. From the concepts to be clarified, the term *local food* especially stands out since it seems that the locality of food is gaining increasing importance alongside (and often as opposed to) the organic aspect. Gianluca Brunori in his article (Brunori 2007) proposes that we consider the 'local turn' in the light of the 'quality turn'. (See the post-organic local food concept in Cucco and Fonte's article.) The term *local food* has many interpretations – looking at 'local' from a narrower or a broader aspect –, in addition to which "the 'local' refers not only to the dimension of distance, but also to the time, tradition and history that form the concept of territory" (Bilewicz & Śpiewak 147). That is why the majority of authors agree that "the local food is a social construct, as its meaning is socially negotiated" (Bilewicz & Śpiewak 147).

As I have already indicated above, this issue of *Socio.hu* includes a mixture of theoretical works and case studies. It begins with two review articles: Karl Bruckmeier's text of the philosophical aspect of food and the study of Ivan Cucco and Maria Fonte, *Local Food and Civic Food Networks as a Real Utopias Project*.

Bruckmeier convincingly shows the relevance of philosophy on the subject, and his brief discussion of food history shows potential themes of a philosophy of food in the sense of an interdisciplinary science. The aim of his paper is to understand the global changes of food systems and the transcultural consequences of these changes and also to renew the philosophy of food to analyse and reflect the wider social, cultural, and ecological problems of food production and consumption. We can agree with the author that such critical analyses require, beyond empirical research and its assessment, knowledge syntheses, theoretical reflection, and normative judgements. Moreover, contemporary food cultures being in close connection with environmental discourses (traditional food, local food, slow food, vegetarian food, organic food, etc.) are discussed in ethical or moral terms. To understand the significance of such alternatives for solving nutrition problems requires comparison, theoretical reflection, and knowledge synthesis. He emphasizes that the philosophy of food has practical significance: it develops in an open discourse, in multi-dimensional analyses of food processes with cultural, social, political, economic, and ecological knowledge components, and it can search for and suggest solutions to food and resource problems.[2]

The second review article is the work of Ivan Cucco and Maria Fonte, who deal with political and transformative dimensions of different local food projects. They

2 Similarly to environment philosophy. Environmental philosophers believe that modern European thought and practice – in addition to science – is determined by philosophy, and among other things today's environmentally destructive practices are due to that (see, for example, the Cartesian mechanical philosophy). Therefore, the task of philosophy is to reverse this process by creating a new philosophy which radically rethinks the relationship between man and nature. For its summary in Hungarian, see Tóth I., János 2013, Preface: 7–19.

look at local food as a diagnosis and critique of the present and the mainstream food system, and they propose that one should "read local food as a 'real utopia' project whose aim is the transformation of the food economy in the direction of sustainability, social emancipation and social justice" (Cucco & Fonte 2015: 22). They think that local food and civic food networks provide a prefiguration of the desirable future food economy and proposals of strategies for getting there. In this frame of reference, local food, the *place-embeddedness* of food, may thus be conceived of as local society's resistance strategy against globalization and neoliberalism. They consider local food movements to be capable of establishing new economic and social relations at the margins of the neoliberal food economy or partner with local institutions to consolidate new experiences with food democracy and food justice (22). They believe that the fragmented pursuits, the AFNs should cooperate more, which can eventually lead to (or force) a reflexive, more democratic, socially empowering system of governance.

The list of research articles starts with Carla D. Martin and Kathryn E. Sampeck's study on chocolate. This paper examines the changing role of chocolate in European society, focusing on the food movement's turn to slow, small-batch, craft chocolate, as a way to critically analysing relationships of labour and race, gender, and class inequality. The authors provide a brief description of the history of chocolate, its origin and spread around the world, and the parallel changes in both its consumption and interpretation. They present different aspects of chocolate and their changes: as a flavour, as a luxury, as a social rank indicator, and they also outline the social aspects of growing cocoa, such as the issue of slavery or the process of genderization, and how chocolate consumption became a woman-thing. They interpret contemporary industrial chocolate and the fine and craft chocolate industry along the above lines, pointing out contemporary forms of social inequalities like junk food chocolate or child labour in the chocolate industry. They think one of the goals of the study is that: "examining food access and food justice in the light of ways people produce and consume chocolate can challenge assumptions about social inequalities, race, health, and identity and offer insights into long-term sustainability" (Martin & Sampeck 2015: 37).

The next paper studies the traditional cuisine of the Dalmatian Islands as a kind of potential for the development of gastro-tourism. The authors Neven Duvnjak and Đeni Macan have explored the islands' nutrition and the traditional elements that are still available and that function or can function as gastronomic specialities for tourists with the help of informal conversations and content analysis of Dalmatian cook books. Their result shows that the cuisine of the rural villages is strongly linked to tradition. The modern approach appears sporadically and the postmodern approach does not appear at all. The authors see this food culture, the products from family production, the simple methods of food preparation and consumption as excellent opportunities as they are sustainable, can be linked to

the postmodern ecological world and because they are uniquely local can also be incorporated into the idea of diversity and the restoration of local knowledge.

Ildikó Asztalos Morell's case study sets the focus on innovative ways to combat food poverty in rural Hungary. Its starting point is that food poverty is associated with malnutrition, which can refer both to the lack of food and its dissatisfying quality, and that "food poverty in the post-socialist rural context does not emerge as a consequence of natural catastrophes or lacking accessibility to food. Rather, it is the outcome of the unequal distribution of incomes and resources" (83). Asztalos Morell traces food poverty, marginalities, and the disembedment of rural communities following the post-socialist transition to capitalism, she displays the causes of marginalization (de-industrialization, a neoliberal welfare state, and enhanced ethnic/social marginalization), and examines the forms of struggles against food poverty. In this paper, she focuses on municipalities that have developed collaborations with a civil-society-initiated project: PROLECSO (initiated in Hejőkeresztúr), an example of community-development-based social agriculture. The dilemma "between giving a fish or the net" (also) prevails in connection with the struggles against food-poverty. Governmental and donor agencies are often criticized for focusing on needs assessments, reproducing the image of marginalized groups as needy, and reinforcing their status as clients. Instead of this, the author advocates empowerment, agency and asset-based community development becoming more and more dominant in civil projects, and she assesses the initiations in question from their theoretical frame and practice. Bearing all this in mind, her paper – through the example of PROLECSO – explores the differences and potential synergies between municipality and civil-organization-based social agriculture projects aiming to combat marginalization welfare dependency.

The next case study (*Feeding Roma Families: From Hunger to Inequalitie*s) deals with the Roma communities in Croatia, a social group in a similarly difficult situation. During her ethnographic fieldwork carried out in five Roma settlements, Lynette Šikić-Mićanović explored how Roma households experience severe material deprivation, feed their families, and describes their everyday experiences of food insecurity and hunger. The author places this present situation in a historical context (as Asztalos Morell did): she points out how the marginalization of Roma groups has been sped up by the disappearance of the benefits of socialism, the transition to capitalism, and the Yugoslav war. She also points out the way in which the Roma have become (not only in Croatia but all over Europe) over-represented in all categories in need of social protection. This paper explores the consumption levels at home and at school and the quality of this food, as well as the difficulties of feeding large families and the gendered aspects of the topic. An especially valuable feature of the study is that the fieldwork material collected by the author is also a source of data showing how gender and other social categories, such as ethnicity, age, and class, intersect.

Laura Nistor's paper also examines the meaning of local food and the discourses about it in Romanian urban contexts. The author collected deeper narratives with the help of focus-group interviews in order to know what local food meant to the people interviewed, how they perceived the different features of local foods (e.g. tradition, organic, taste, ingredients, etc.), and what their motivations and limitations were in connection with local food consumption. As I have mentioned above, the dominant question of present-day nutrition research is the meaning of local food and associated ideas and practices. Laura Nistor's research contributes greatly to the refinement of the meaning of local food and its interpretation. She goes through the main motivations of alternative food consumption practices and its individual forms in general (values centred around health and safety) as well as broader moral issues, e.g. the ethical treatment of animals, the morality of genetically modified foods, hunger and other forms of exclusion, the role of food in constructing gender and personal identity, etc. Then, she locates the consumption of local food among alternative food consumption movements and motivations. Her study shows that urban consumers primarily look for the intrinsic characteristics of food such as taste and ingredients. On the other hand, local food consumption seems to be much more motivated by health concerns and status assignment than by ethical and ecological matters. She found two definitions of local food during the examination of the discourses: 1) place-centred, geographical and 2) production-centred, 'how it is made'.

Aleksandra Bilewicz and Ruta Śpiewak's study undertakes the task of examining one form of Alternative Food Network (AFN), the Polish consumer cooperatives. The authors start by reviewing the AFN types, their diversity and history, and motivations and key concepts of their development, and then they put the consumer cooperatives, relatively new in Poland, into this context. The authors describe the specific character of this type of AFN, both from the consumers' and producers' point of view, and reflect on the issue of how specific social and historical background influence their development. They introduce the Polish context (agricultural model, the economic factor, food self-provisioning, postmodern patterns of food purchase) and submit a short history of cooperatives (from 2010 to 2015). They found that there were two types in Poland: activist and consumer-oriented. Finally, they show the cooperative's enclave feature, namely that the groups are a kind of elitist enclaves based on distinction from people buying in "conventional stores". The authors look at them as a kind of *lifestyle enclave* that has a specific lifestyle and the relevant cultural and social capital. At the same time, this enclave-character has many disadvantages: it creates "exclusive niches" both on the side of the consumers and among the farming community. In their studies, Aleksandra Bilewicz and Ruta Śpiewak present the historical roots and the present-day consequences of all this (lack of trust, general weaknesses of the civic activity in Poland, etc.) very convincingly. I believe that

the Polish example shows many similarities with the situation in Hungary, and that this is no accident.

With Bernadett Csurgó and Boldizsár Megyesi's case study, we return to Hungary. The authors study another aspect of local food: the potential identity-forming impact and the role in self-promotion of rural communities. It is well known from the rural development literature (see, inter alia, Csurgó & Szatmári 2014) that the European rural development system looks at exploration and use of the local economic, social, and cultural resources as the main tool to eliminate regional inequalities. Due to this development, strategies based on the use and value creating of local resources are becoming more emphasized in Hungarian rural development. The endogenous rural development replacing the exogenous development policy (based on modernization, external resources) in the 1990s relied on local natural and human resources. In this development, local identity is just as important; it is "a key in external representation and promotion of the given rural area and the development of the local community as well" (Csurgó & Szatmári 2014: 34). The authors have been carrying out qualitative and anthropological research on agricultural restructuring in Hungary for two decades. In this study, they analyse the role of short food supply chains (SFSC) and local food in three Hungarian micro-regions (Zalaszentgrót, Derecske–Létavértes, and Őrség), and they try to answer the question "how a local community presents itself through local food production, and how local communities can be built by revitalizing a part of the local cultural heritage: a local food product" (Csurgó & Megyesi 2015: 167). Their results suggest that "local food products and relating local events can hardly be a base of the local image outside the region, but it can help to build and strengthen the local community and local identity" (Csurgó & Megyesi 2015: 167).

Johan Pottier, a prominent researcher in nutritional anthropology, says in relation to literature dealing with food security that many current studies draw attention to the dynamic relations between globalizing and localizing processes and to the need to understand them. He points out that changing global (economic, political, cultural, environmental) conditions constantly re-localize in the national, regional, or local knowledge and organizational framework (Pottier 1999: 6–7).

As we have seen, the thematic edition of *socio.hu* explores the contemporary food culture of our region from many aspects. The choice of topic of the edition and the studies it contains show that concerns regarding the social issues of nutrition and nutrition-related movements generate increasing interests among Central and Eastern European social scientists, who can both see perfectly the features resulting from the region's specific historical and social situation and make them visible as well. In this, they can contribute to sporadic existing research results as well as confirm the above mentioned thesis, which says global issues and questions are constantly re-localizing in the local context.

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Laura Nistor: The Puzzles of Local Food Consumption. Empirical Insights regarding Profiles, Motivations, and Discourses

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This monographic book is a synthesis of sociologist Laura Nistor's post-doctoral research on sustainable food consumption in Romania. Theoretical and empirical inquiries contextualize alternative ways of consumption, as reflected in social movements tagged *slow food*, *local food*, or *organic food*. The theoretical background deals both with macro- and micro-levels of sociological analysis, well rooted in relevant literature, whereas empirical research is based on a secondary quantitative analysis and a qualitative inquiry using focus-group interviews across Romanian urban areas. When it comes to local food consumption, on a macro-level, we are dealing with environmental principles and practices motivated both by energy efficiency and community development outcomes. On a micro-sociological level of analysis, if we take the consumers' perspective, the issue of local food choice is concerned with trust and health benefits. Transparency and traceability of food sources are benefits that are hard to compete by global mass production.

The book has three main chapters dealing both with theoretical and empirical issues of sustainable consumption in general, and local food choice in particular. A thorough literature review scanning 166 titles digs deeper into the issues of sustainable agriculture and value systems related to local food choice: Is it affordable? Is it desirable from a generic social, economic, and environmental perspective? Are local producers ready to provide quality?

The first chapter – *Food Consumption as a Specific Form of Consumption* – redefines the taken-for-granted term of consumption from a critical perspective: from a mere health-related, biologist view to a sociological approach on practices, risks, and alternative ways of relating to food. Social movements coagulated around specific ideologies and practices of food consumption divide opinions and unite individuals into communities at the same time. Food option becomes

more than a mere practical issue: it defines individual and group choices from an ethical point of view, for certain socio-demographic categories. The analysis of socio-demographic profiles, motivations, and impediments of alternative consumption led to the conclusion that food system localization creates direct relationships between producers and consumers, while information on the origins of food, freshness and authenticity, and re-personalization of commercial relations are key benefits of local food choice.

The second chapter presents the results of a secondary analysis based on Eurobarometer data related to Romanians' food choices in terms of their preference for extrinsic and intrinsic product cues. The author concludes that Romanians' alternative food consumption is double-rooted in price and quality, as a confirmation of Bourdieu's theory on the relationship between social status and taste. "In Romania, similarly to Europe, price preferences are entrenched in the respondents' precarious socio-economic status, while the preference for quality seems to be a habitus specific for higher social status" (Introduction, p. 7.).

The third chapter summarizes the results of a thorough qualitative analysis and focuses on discourses about local food. A total of ten focus-group interviews have been conducted in five Romanian urban locations, two in each location: six in large cities (Bucharest, Braşov, and Cluj-Napoca) and four in small towns (Miercurea Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe), with an additional online group interview via Skype, connecting respondents from all locations. The key issue was how respondents conceptualized local food, which were the strengths and weaknesses of such products, and which were their types of consumer involvement. While the meaning of locally produced food was defined around geographies and manufacturing practices, its strengths and weaknesses were related to price, quality, and reliability: "When I come to such markets, I usually come for the natural products. (…) It happened to me that I bought products which later on proved to be not so natural. But, I still like the atmosphere of these markets, the fact that I can meet the producers, I like to taste the products, to explore… In any case, these are more natural than all those foods sold in the supermarket… Unfortunately, we cannot afford to buy everything from here… (woman, Braşov)" (Chapter 3, p. 108). The recurrent positive attributes of local food defined by focus-group respondents include properties like: "healthy", "tasty", "traditional", "natural", or "organic", whereas negative traits were conceptualized as "greasy", "sugary", "fattening", "expensive", and "unsafe". Positive and negative qualities of local food are not mutually exclusive in respondents' discourses: they are often mentioned together: healthy but expensive, natural but greasy, etc.

Laura Nistor concludes that although social and environmental benefits of local food are mentioned as positive components, they are not conceptualized as outcomes of consumption but rather as inherent qualities. They are seen as constitutive elements of local food only to the extent of mass consumption. "The

difference is that while a good taste, a natural ingredient, etc. can be experienced also in the form of sampling, i.e. without a concrete, long-term attachment to the product, the environmental and ethical benefits are seen as components which imply long-term attachment to the process. (…) the naturalness of the local food overwrites the attribute of healthiness" (Chapter 3, pp. 114–115).

Amidst scarce to non-existent empirical research on sustainable food consumption in Romania, Laura Nistor's book is a valuable contribution. It invites sociologists and decision-makers to deepen reflection on what sustainable food production and consumption means for a country with an ageing population striving with poverty, social inequality, and a low level of environmental awareness.

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