

European Society for Rural Sociology Conference
Trondheim, Norway.

June 25-28, 2019

Working Group Proposal at ESRS 2019

Title:

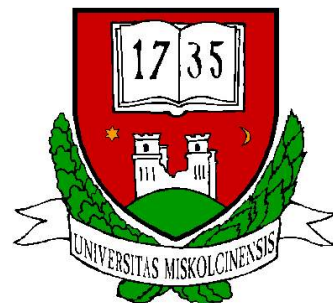
*Benefits, challenges, social learning and controversies
around Local Food Systems*

Convenors:

Gusztáv Nemes PhD, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies
nemes23@gmail.com, 0036 20 397 3953 <http://www.krtk.mta.hu/>

Veronika Lajos PhD, University of Miskolc
lajosvera@yahoo.co.uk, 0036 20 342 7236, <http://kvat.uni-miskolc.hu/stuff.php#lajos>

Rachel Reckinger PhD, University of Luxembourg
rachel.reckinger@uni.lu, 00352 46 66 44 66 26, <https://food.uni.lu>



Objectives:

Our WG touches upon three main elements among the themes of the conference: (1) innovation, (2) social justice and (3) knowledge production.

Innovative local food systems and alternative food networks, approached from a collaborative and participatory angle, bring about a cultural shift by associating prosumers through a renewed form of trust, reciprocity and community, thus reinforcing social and ecological justice. At the same time, such heterodox actors in the transition to more sustainable food systems create new forms of knowledge, that are contested, co-constructed and potentially conflictual – along with enabling or disabling policymaking and, often, in dialogue with research.

Our main objective is in this topic to start the process of creating an **edited special issue** of a peer reviewed journal (Sociologia Ruralis, Studies of Agricultural Economics or similar) should raise from this WG. We invite researchers working in the area of (local) food systems, alternative food networks, short food supply chains and related topics (rural tourism, community supported agriculture, etc.). We consider both the benefits and possible conflicts/problems in the connected socio-economic, cultural and environmental processes and welcome theoretical papers and case studies, too.

After 6-7 short presentations we plan a **facilitated workshop** that will lay out the approach and the most important questions of the planned special issue. **For this, beyond the presenters, we invite and welcome all interested audience.**

Topic:

By welcoming case studies from all geographical areas, in a comparative manner, this Working Group's aim is to address different understandings and dynamics happening within and around different types of Local Food Systems (LFS).

Alternative food networks, local food systems and short food supply chains have long been viewed as a sustainable, green way of raising the value added and creating opportunities for sur/re-vival of rural economy and society. They induce many benefits in terms of environmental impact, cultural exemplification, ethical entrepreneurship, social justice or rural development.

Conceptually, LFS can be understood as 'local food for local people', as for example in the Slow Food or the community supported agriculture (CSA) movements. They are then associated with low food miles, environmental protection (Jones 2002), enhanced social networks and revitalised local communities (Fenster 1997). From a local economic development perspective, in particular when LFS produce high quality products, they can equally be considered as 'local food for non-local people', either transported to urban centres, or attracting flows of tourists into rural areas. Here LFS can still enhance local businesses, economic and rural development, yet social and environmental benefits (Guthman 2004) of such foodstuffs, marketed with the added value of environmental and social responsibility, are more difficult to trace.

Therefore, besides benefits, we would also like to analyse potential dissonances, that the distinction between local or extra-local target groups help to identify – for instance:

- established, certified organic producers might criticize non-certified yet organically producing CSAs as fragmenting an already minority market or showing a lack of solidarity by not contributing to organic labels;
- when LFS end up producing high quality, expensive products, a dynamic of social exclusion might occur, favoring the wealthy;

- enhanced local production, tourism, and visitor pressure can cause social, economic, and environmental degradation, multiplier effects do not always occur to build more businesses and sustain social and economic capital;
- innovative alternative food networks tend to struggle with territorial competition over land and resources, but if they rely on external investments, they might additionally be confronted – more insidiously – with the risk of co-option by neoliberal corporate agendas.

We welcome analyses focusing on negotiations and struggles among actors in a multifaceted foodscape, where some block and some enhance transitions. Viewing the relationships, interconnectedness and agency of niche innovations, local and non-local appropriations as well regime hegemonies opens up the theoretical perspective of contested knowledge claims.

We look for questions and answers including:

- How are dynamics of “knowing and growing food in a contested arena” (Goodman, DuPuis, Goodman, 2014) negotiated – sometimes in a mutually enhancing and locally beneficial way, sometimes in more conflictual ways?
- What are the local and extra-local stakeholders’ (producers, intermediaries, customers, tourists) different and often conflicting interests and responsibilities in LFS?
- What can we learn from the tensions and local problems of LFS in order to support relevant policies to solve current controversies within the sector?
- How can rural sociologists use their knowledge and influence to support local rural stakeholders of LFS?

Format:

Combination of Lightning Talks and facilitated workshop

Some 6 to 7 very short presentations (7 minutes each) are made by presenters before moving on to a facilitated workshop involving the audience, in order to prepare the ground for the planned special issue on: **Benefits, challenges, social learning and controversies around Local Food Systems**