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Infrastructures of Taste: Rethinking Local Food Histories in Lithuania

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Infrastructures of taste: Rethinking local food histories in Lithuania

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ABSTRACT

Lithuania hosts a diversity of places that offer consumers a taste of local food, which appear to mirror the recent popularity of local and alternative food initiatives globally. In this paper we show that the proliferation of local foods in the region is not a novel phenomenon, nor is it solely a manifestation of taste preferences or identities associated with food. Drawing on the growing scholarly work on the role of infrastructures in mediating social, economic and political relations, we conceptualize the taste for local food as embedded in broader networks and reproduced through material facilities. To advance this argument, our empirical analysis shows how the infrastructure for local food has been fostered, transformed, threatened, but never eradicated during: the Soviet policies that supported subsidiary agriculture and market infrastructures; neoliberal market reforms in the 1990s that made public markets into mainstays for farmers and consumers; and EU accession that brought more stringent regulations and subsidies. Our research demonstrates that today's taste for local foods in Lithuania is neither a local nor global phenomenon, but an outcome of historical processes that foregrounded the formation of smallholder agriculture, direct sales, and self-provisioning practices in the region. More broadly, our research shows how local food persists as an integral part of a broader agro-food infrastructure.

In February of 2017 a new market hall opened up on a busy thoroughfare in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania (Činga, 2018). This market billed itself as a new and modern destination, similar to markets in Western Europe, where shoppers could do their weekly shopping but also participate in tastings and special events. On offer were local foods sold directly from farms, but also prepared foods, labeled as gourmet.

What is striking is that Vilnius already hosts several markets that cater to the Lithuanian consumers' appetite for local food. Multiple weekly farmers markets serve Lithuania's major cities, offering residents a taste of foods produced just a few miles away. Lithuanians are also eager to visit farms and buy food directly from their farmers. Unlike in Western Europe and other parts in the Global North where farmers markets are largely considered to be exclusive spaces marked by racial, ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries (Kato, 2013), the clientele in local or alternative food networks come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition to farmers markets serving health-conscious elites, there are also less glamorous and significantly less expensive food markets operating next to bazaars tucked away from gentrified areas. Moreover, many Lithuanians living in Soviet style living districts shop for local produce at mini markets built during socialist era. Yet another form of local food economy can be found in parking lots of large supermarkets where farmers sell their produce from vans and car trunks. Lithuanian supermarkets have, too, joined the local food band wagon, creating dedicated spaces within stores that replicate the architecture and feel of a farmers market offering a dizzying array of local products including smoked meats, cheeses, and produce.

Our goal in this article is to consider the proliferation of diverse forms and approaches to local foods in Lithuania that cuts across social, ethnic and class boundaries. In particular, we make two interrelated arguments. First, we argue that the popularity of local foods, like the aforementioned gourmet market mall, cannot be simply explained by examining consumer taste preferences alone. Instead, relying on the infrastructures approach (Frohlich, Jauho, Penders, & Schleifer, 2014) and practice theories (Reckwitz, 2002; Shove, 2003), we argue that the persistence of a taste for local food and the practices that sustain local producer-consumer connections are facilitated in a dynamic manner by material infrastructures that form and span from diverse marketplaces. These infrastructures consist of the material connections that link farms and consumers, including everything from the transportation linkages that enable both local and global trade, to the energy sources that fuel agricultural production and processing, to the physical buildings and technologies at use in the farms, processing facilities, marketplaces, and consumer homes. Building upon this understanding of infrastructures,

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in our second argument, we make a case for examining the embedded histories of local food infrastructures. We utilize a historical perspective to track and describe the formation of particular local food infrastructures that survived tumultuous political changes in the region in the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. This historical overview explains why recent attempts made by Lithuania's Europeanizing policy makers and ruling elites to shift taste and transform consumer choices and practices have been hampered, challenged, or transformed by the materiality of infrastructures. We conclude by arguing that this historical perspective helps explain regional variations in local food infrastructures that have emerged throughout Europe (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2018).

To advance these arguments, the next section will outline key scholarly debates that the paper engages and our methodological approach. The following sections highlight the dynamic interaction between taste, everyday practices, and food-related infrastructures, and the persisting significance of infrastructural arrangements in diverse political economic contexts. The first section details how Soviet planners sought to ameliorate food consumption and production in the formal state-controlled economic sector that spanned Soviet space, but infrastructural arrangements actually encouraged and supported household production and processing, and informal economies more broadly. The implementation of neoliberal economic policies in the 1990s that were designed to eradicate the state-controlled economy did not automatically spur the creation of Western-style food production and consumption infrastructures, as detailed in the second section. Subsequently, as we relate in the third section, political efforts to align national food-related policies and infrastructures with EU standards, ran up against infrastructures that linked Lithuania with post-Soviet markets, and marginalized producers and farmers.

In the penultimate section, we draw on ethnographic fieldwork by highlighting case studies of farmers and consumers to demonstrate how the persistence of a taste for local food has been facilitated in a dynamic manner by material infrastructures throughout history. We conclude by analyzing Lithuania's post-crisis economy, and how these infrastructures have been harnessed through the re-emergence of political support for local food.

1. Theorizing taste from an infrastructures perspective

Scholarship examining the appetite for local products in Eastern Europe has often engaged with the cultural and political dynamics of food preferences by focusing on national identities as the foundation for food preferences (cf. Kollegaeva, 2017; Metro-Roland, 2013). Writing about Russia, Caldwell (2002) has developed the concept of “nash” (Russian for “ours”) to move beyond nationalism as an explanation of culinary choices and show how a more generalized identity shapes Russian preferences for foods produced domestically over imported products (Jung, 2013; cf. Blumberg, 2015). Similarly, focusing on the affinity that the French have towards foie gras, Michaela DeSoucey (2010) developed the notion of gastronationalism to conceptualize connections between national identities and local foods preferences. DeSoucey makes the case that food consumption is an important site for performing national identities (for an alternative reading that calls for the replacement of gastronationalism with gastroregionalism, see Lelieveldt, 2017).

In contrast to the emphasis on cultural aspects of national tastes, however, there is growing attention to the materiality of food systems and practices. As recent work at the intersection of infrastructure studies (Bowker & Star, 2000; Jackson, 2017) and practice theory (Shove, 2003; Hui, Schatzki, & Shove, 2017) shows, consumer choices cannot be understood only in terms of mental processes such as rationalization or identity construction, but are grounded in daily routines, conventions, and material infrastructures that make certain foods available. Therefore, in the context of food studies, an infrastructures approach relates individual choices to their broader connective spaces and socio-material arrangements (Frohlich et al., 2014), which enable or constrain both consumer and producer choices in food supply chains. For example, without global networks of refrigeration connecting producers and distant markets, consumers in the Global North would not be able to choose between food products that are sourced from both close and distant locales (Barrett, Ilbery, Brown, & Binns, 2004). These cold chains are just one of the many socio-material arrangements that not only enable consumer choice, but shape food production in complex ways; cold chains may open up opportunities for food producers, but they may also enhance competition between disadvantaged food producers (Barrett et al., 2004), and they may promote the unsustainable use of natural resources (Garnett, 2011). An infrastructures approach focuses on how production and distribution systems shape consumer choices, and because infrastructures are products of particular economic and political contexts, it requires attention to historical developments.

Most research on infrastructures has focused on energy, water usage, and waste management (Van Vliet, Chappells, & Shove, 2005; Shove, 2015, but see Stahlbrand, 2017 for an exception). In this article, we expand this area of research by focusing on food production and distribution systems in their historical contexts. In addition, we integrate geographical perspectives that reveal how sociospatialities and difference articulate and produce multiple historical trajectories (Hart, 2002; Massey, 2005). For example, the concept of positionality delineates how places are unevenly constituted by power relations, which influence local development possibilities (Sheppard, 2002). The social and economic relations constituting local food infrastructures today are not free-flowing and random, but exhibit path-dependent characteristics that affect possible development pathways. Infrastructures are reinforced and produced by power relations between people and places, but that does not mean that they are invulnerable or not subject to appropriation. Indeed, in our examination of the relationship between infrastructures and taste collectivities, we demonstrate that infrastructures have enabled the persistence of a taste for local food in predictable but also unanticipated ways.

Consistent with our approach focusing on the production and distribution infrastructures from the producer to the consumer, our research is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted along local food networks in Lithuania at different time periods. This research has spanned a total of 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork by both authors separately in different years in the early 2000s, as well as a number of subsequent shorter visits over the last decade. To gain historical insights, one author conducted 20-year longitudinal livelihood studies with 20 farmers who utilize local food infrastructures. One author conducted archival research in Lithuania's Special Archive that houses documents from the socialist period. In addition, our fieldwork includes participant observations in seven villages and three cities, interviews with consumers, farmers, food industry representatives, academics, politicians, among others. Additional insights were developed from reading and engaging with secondary literature. All names used to identify specific individuals are pseudonyms.

2. The material infrastructure of food production and distribution: Soviet roots

Writing about Soviet architecture as an ideological infrastructure, Humphrey (2005) argues that physical infrastructures did not determine social and economic relations, but generated unpredictable socialities. Building on this insight, this section looks at the emergence of the intensely local food system in socialist Lithuania as an instance of such unforeseen sociospatial configurations.

The diversity of local food tastes and procurement practices in the Soviet Union was a byproduct of the socialist industrial food economy that included household self-provisioning schemes. While Soviet leaders funneled resources to build state-controlled infrastructure and to showcase the success of its industrial food economy, a variety of

infrastructures supported the informal and household economies of both rural and urban residents and actually ensured that Soviet citizens were fed. However, the formal, state-controlled economy and the multiple informal economies of the Soviet Union should not be viewed as working in opposition; rather they had a dynamic relationship that was influenced by the infrastructure of trade that spanned Soviet space.

In terms of the industrial food economy, Soviet policy makers created a redistributive trading infrastructure by implementing direct transfers between its wealthier and poorer member republics, organizing trade through preferential prices to facilitate indirect transfers, and promoting a policy of interdependency between republics within the Soviet Union (Orlowski, 1993). Remarking on the political implications of the Soviet food infrastructures, Wegren (2005) suggests that the Soviet leadership intended to use food infrastructures as a way of integrating its regions into a coherent and interdependent political unit.

Within the Soviet formal trading infrastructure, the Baltics specialized in milk and meat production, and their processed outputs were exported in exchange for grain from other republics. The Baltic states had the most productive agricultural sectors in the Soviet Union (Misiunas & Taagepera, 1983), but their agricultural and industrial sectors were still heavily buttressed by the strength of their infrastructural ties with other republics, which they relied on for both inputs (fertilizers, machinery, fuel) and export markets. In particular, the low price of fuel imported from other Soviet republics and the revenue generated from selling high cost food exports helped to spur economic development in Lithuania (Orlowski, 1993). This trading infrastructure forged Lithuania's positionality in the Soviet Union, and shaped the development of its high-capacity food industry.

Despite the efforts to build an integrated Soviet food infrastructure, the state-controlled economic sector was plagued with serious problems that often left the shelves bare in state shops and forced the Soviet Union to be a net importer of food (Ellman, 1988). Simple assessments of the situation blamed the collectivized agricultural sector, but more nuanced explanations point to a wide variety of factors. For example, in the Brezhnev era growth rates declined while consumer demands increased (Chernyshova, 2013). In this context, the collectivized agro-industrial sector not only had to keep people adequately fed, it had to produce the types of food people wanted to buy, such as meat, delicacies and high quality products. In fact, the now infamous Soviet grain imports of the 1970s were initiated in order to increase the amount of animal feed (Wegren, 2005), not to feed the population directly.

Both rural and urban dwellers dealt with food shortages and their own consumer demands by growing food in “individual” or “subsidiary” gardens, an often overlooked but critical part of the Soviet food system. Soviet food production consisted of a dual infrastructure of state-controlled industrialized collective farms and a multitude of household-controlled subsidiary gardens in both rural and urban areas. Multiple studies attempted to estimate the extent to which private producers contributed to total food production in the USSR (Wädekin, 1990). While most of these studies emphasized productivity of the small, semi-private or “individual production” sector, they largely overlooked one important dimension of subsidiary agriculture in the Soviet Union: it existed in rural space because of the dual infrastructure of socialist agriculture, not in spite of it. One of the earliest and most enduring Soviet agricultural reforms of the 1930s introduced subsidiary farming as a way of supplementing scarce food resources in the quickly industrializing socialist state. Although they did not hold formal ownership of their lots, agricultural workers produced food for their own households in their gardens. However, they were also required to keep livestock and sell it to collective farms or directly to the state (Mincyte, 2009). As a result, the socialist agricultural system became reliant on the infrastructures of small-scale production.

The trajectories that forged the private subsidiary farms and state controlled agriculture and the formal economy were relational and complexly intertwined. For example, collective farm workers made use of farm machinery on their own plots and they syphoned off inputs and feed to support their own food production. On a broader scale, the Soviet trading infrastructure that supported Lithuania's collectivized farms, indirectly upheld private subsidiary farming as well. For urban residents with *dachas*, generous social welfare policies and guaranteed employment provided the time and resources to devote to food production. Therefore, the “private” food production of city dwellers was also maintained in complex ways by the formal state sector and the infrastructure it supported.

Soviet distribution infrastructure also provided a space for the private trading of local foods. Despite ideological distaste for private trading and public proclamations of the successes of industrial agriculture in the Soviet Union, urbanites developed tastes for local foods by visiting their families living in the countryside or shopping at thriving public markets in socialist cities (Hessler, 2004; Litvin, 1987). These markets were key sites for ensuring a steady food supply to industrializing cities. They were where collective farms were allowed to sell a portion of their production, but individual trading was also allowed. Mini-public markets in newly-built residential districts also served as shelters for collective farm workers delivering vegetables such as potatoes, cabbages, and onions; urbanites selling surplus berries, lettuce, apples, and other produce; and foragers displaying berries and mushrooms from their day's pick (more on the history of Soviet trade, see Hessler, 2004).

While industrial agro-food infrastructures became a reality in Lithuania in the 1950s, this section shows how the logic of economic interdependencies and physical infrastructures tying Soviet republics into a centralized system as well as the reforms instituting subsidiary farming fueled the emergence of decisively local food infrastructures in the region. These infrastructures provided consumers with access to the tastes of local food, from homemade preserves to processed meat products. In the following section we highlight the processes through which the Soviet collective farms crumbled and small-scale farms emerged as the dominant form of agriculture in Lithuania in the early 1990s. We also delve into the issues surrounding popular narratives of “backwardness” and “catching up” with the West that defined the trajectory of rural reforms, and influenced future food infrastructure developments.

3. Reorganizing political and economic infrastructures: post-socialist landscapes

As in other countries in the socialist bloc, the end of the Soviet era ushered in major political, economic and social changes to Lithuania, leading to the unmaking of the Soviet agricultural system. Surprisingly, however, the end of Soviet high-modernist industrial agriculture did not fundamentally transform what people consumed in their homes: refrigerators, cellars, and balconies continued to be filled with local, labor-intensive foods just as they were under socialism. If anything, post-socialist foods tasted even more like homemade, pre-industrial foods than their socialist counterparts.

Such intensification of local food production and consumption in Lithuania was primarily due to how sweeping political and economic changes in the region reinforced dependence on local food infrastructure. Advised by Western economists, policy makers of the newly-independent Lithuanian state imagined that the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms through the privatization of the state-owned economic sector would lead to the creation of a Western-style food system, with large and efficient individually-managed private farms creating a supply of food so abundant that self-provisioning would no longer be a necessity. Elites were anxious to implement economic and political reforms, what became known as “transition” policies, but also to firmly establish the credibility of the Baltic republics as independent nation-states (Bohle & Greskovits, 2007). For elites and policy-makers “catching up” with the West was necessary. Conveniently, this catching up narrative was also endorsed by the IMF

and World Bank, the institutions that oversaw neoliberal policy changes through the implementation of "shock therapy," which included rapid privatization of state assets. In comparison to other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltics adopted the most radical neoliberal market policies (Bohle & Greskovits, 2007).

To place these transformations in a broader context, the trading infrastructure that had linked the Baltic agricultural and food sector advantageously to other Soviet republics for decades, destabilized in the early 1990s as individual post-Soviet republics experienced political and economic change. Political instability caused disruptions in trading relationships between Soviet republics, leading regional authorities to withhold produce from the market, or to search for customers who could pay in hard currency. The agricultural sector experienced significant production declines as inputs from other Soviet republics became more expensive or were difficult to obtain, and other former-Soviet states introduced trade barriers to prevent dumping (Maddock, 1995). Significantly, Russia started charging the Baltic states higher prices for fuel, while the existing energy infrastructure allowed for few other fuel sources (see Grigas, 2013).

At the same time, consistent with neoliberal economic policies, state support that had existed for the agricultural sector was reduced, prices were liberalized, and trade barriers were reduced. The result was an influx of subsidized imports from the European Union, which further crippled the agricultural sector. In contrast, the European Union was already contending with agricultural surpluses and it protected its markets from Eastern European imports. Moreover, Eastern European exports to the European Union did not meet EU standards for food hygiene. International organizations, such as the OECD, also warned the Baltic governments against establishing similar protectionist measures (O'Reilly, 1995). Rather than protecting their agricultural producers, these international institutions encouraged Lithuanian governments to foster competitiveness by directing state resources to help the agro-industrial sector meet EU standards.

Although certain exports to the EU like natural resources and textiles grew throughout the 1990s, Lithuania's energy and transportation infrastructure remained integrated with the rest of post-Soviet space. Political efforts to reorient the trading infrastructures ran up against these persistent interdependencies with post-Soviet space and the difficulties of exporting food products to the EU. As a result, exports of agricultural products remained oriented towards markets in post-Soviet states, especially Russia. Despite efforts by elites and policy-makers to "catch-up" with Western Europe by increasing ties with the West, the trading infrastructure that established Lithuania's positionality in the Soviet Union endured.

While policy-makers and elites were not successful in immediately reorienting trading relationships towards the West, they were successful in implementing radical changes to Soviet collective farm infrastructure, but with unanticipated results. Highlighting the productivity of subsidiary farms in the Soviet system, they sought to dismantle collective farms and place all agricultural resources in the hands of private farmers. However, the restitution of land to pre-World War II owners, the privatization of collective farms, the titling of land and the embrace of neoliberal policies more broadly opened a path towards a "wild" (see Harper, 2005) capitalist economy. Privatization and decollectivization produced tensions that have been documented elsewhere in post-Soviet space (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999; Creed, 1998; Leonard & Kaneff, 2002; Verdery, 2003). In Lithuania, decollectivization followed a top-down approach and was informed by a radical policy of family farm fundamentalism (Juska, 2007) and largely without considering the perspectives of the rural population (Alanen, 1995, 2002, 2004; O'Reilly, 1995).

The immediate result of decollectivization was an agricultural infrastructure dominated by a large number of small-scale, semi-subsistence oriented family farms, which possessed few assets, received little state support, and could not compete with the imports entering the market through the liberalization of trade. As a result, agricultural production plummeted, and rural poverty increased (Alanen, 2004). In their haste to implement privatization and decollectivization, policy-makers had neglected to consider the dual nature of Soviet food production infrastructure: the productive potential of individual, subsidiary farms was based on their complex connections with formal food infrastructure, including collective farms.

Newly formed farms used existing local food infrastructure to engage in direct trading activities that the economic transition both allowed and even compelled. The use of the public market infrastructures for local food distribution was a continuation of Soviet era practices. However, even as social practices may have born resemblance to older traditions, in post-socialism, their causes were actually novel (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999). In Lithuania, both commodified and non-commodified local food economies gained a renewed importance for rural livelihoods. In contrast to the Soviet era when direct sales were bolstered by deficiencies in state-controlled distribution, in the 1990s, local food economies flourished because of the impoverishing effects of neoliberal transition policies and due to the existence of robust local food infrastructures. They were part of the informal economy, which extended from the household to include large enterprises that traded through barter across national borders (Seabright, 2000). Farmers seeking to sell their produce to processors or wholesalers using a nascent conventional food infrastructure were faced with unreliable and shifting market outlets in the early to mid-1990s. For example, early in the decade, recently established private processing companies faced bankruptcies and other processors paid late, not at all, or very little. Later in the decade, the restructuring of supply chains and increasing degrees of vertical coordination, both favoring larger farms, marginalized small-scale producers in certain sectors like meat, vegetable and fruit production. Newly established retail networks sourced their products at a global scale.

However, the large food processing infrastructure that independent Lithuania was bequeathed (due to the large export volumes to other Soviet states) also meant that newly privatized processing companies had an interest in procuring the maximum amount of inputs, especially in the dairy sector. With high numbers of small-scale farmers in such sectors like milk production, large-scale processors continued to purchase milk from these farms, but at a lower price. These processors fostered new market outlets in other post-Soviet countries using the established trading infrastructure and linkages. As a result, small-scale dairy farmers were integrated into conventional food infrastructures, but largely as price-takers who had little choice in determining to which company they would sell their production.

This section shows how locally existing Soviet food infrastructures shaped the path of neoliberalization in the 1990s. Soviet food infrastructures had integrated both self-provisioning and subsidiary farming, and large-scale, industrialized food production on collective farms, thereby producing a dualistic food infrastructure. Once the collective farm sector was dismantled and privatized, agricultural production plummeted, and self-provisioning through newly privatized small-scale farms and allotment gardens became a greater necessity. In these times of tumultuous economic change, the population relied on practices that had been fostered earlier using Soviet food infrastructure, such as subsidiary farming and urban allotment gardening. These infrastructures provided consumers with a taste of local food. In addition, public markets that had functioned as an integral part of local food infrastructure in the Soviet period continued to provide small-scale farmers with a distribution outlet. Similarly, the linkages established through Soviet trading infrastructures did not disappear overnight; Lithuania continued to import fuel and export processed food products to other post-Soviet states. However, these markets were unreliable because they were experiencing the same kind of political and economic turmoil. Lithuania's policy makers therefore attempted to deepen integration with Western Europe, and to shift trading infrastructures.

4. New legal infrastructures: Europeanization

Over the 1990s, the persistence of a taste for local food and the practices that sustain local producer-consumer connections were facilitated in a dynamic manner by Soviet and then post-Soviet food infrastructures. After the economic turmoil of the early 1990s, policymakers sought to encourage economic development by increasing ties with the European Union. The influence of the European Union on Baltic politics grew after the signing of the Europe Agreements in 1995, eventually leading to EU accession in 2004. Preparations for EU accession made way for shifts in food-related infrastructures, but the accession process was also marked by tension and an unequal power dynamic due to Lithuania's positionality. Like other states in Central and Eastern Europe, Lithuania was provided with terms of accession that were less favorable than they were for previously accepted applicants. While applicant states were subject to censure on a wide variety of topics, from human rights to agriculture, critics pointed out how the old EU member states themselves fell short of EU ideals (Clark & Jones, 2011). Underpinning the accession negotiations was an assumption of Eastern European inferiority, an assumption that has long figured in Western European representations of the East (see Wolff, 1994). Hierarchies of power and wealth were reinforced with the production of hierarchies of knowledge (Böröcz & Kovács, 2001).

This dynamic was also present in the evaluations done on the agricultural sectors of candidate countries, including their production and distribution infrastructures. In Lithuania as in the rest of post-socialist Europe, there was a widespread consensus that small-scale farmers would not be able to compete in the internal EU market or abide by hygiene practices that conform to EU guidelines (Sajdik & Schwarzinger, 2008; Aistara, 2015), and that measures should be devised to either help them modernize or ease them out of agriculture. The high proportion of small-scale farmers also presented a problem for the EU's farm subsidy system, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). While at the time of accession negotiations EU subsidies were quite generous, existing member states did not favor the extension of the CAP to the acceding states, but they also failed to agree on how to proceed with accession without it (Sajdik & Schwarzinger, 2008). The final decision that the European Commission came to was to phase-in the CAP's direct payments over several years: the accession states would be accepted into membership, their farmers would be competing within the internal market, but they would receive substantially less financial support from the EU. The power relations that shaped accession negotiations were clearly evident (Swain, 2004), and they materialized through the creation and enforcement of new legal infrastructures.

While the Lithuanian government prepared for EU accession by adopting the required legislation and implementing the negotiated reforms, Lithuania's agricultural sector began to recover. Boosted by national economic growth, agricultural production also increased. However, this growth was still based on an economy that was tied to a trading infrastructure connected to Russian and other former-Soviet economies. Therefore, when the Russian financial crisis hit in 1998, the Lithuanian economy experienced a severe contraction, which was felt especially hard in the agro-food sector. However, even after EU accession, the trading infrastructures, including a dependence on Russian fuel and gas, remained. Despite the efforts to conform to EU standards, farmers and processors struggled to gain entry into the wealthier markets of old EU member states. But at least for a time, EU accession brought an influx of financial capital, as growth rates spiked and consumer spending increased. Farmers and processors found new markets, and agricultural production grew.

This recovery was not universally felt among all farmers. The implementation of the CAP in Lithuania advantaged large-scale farmers who were intent on modernization and expanding their operations. For instance, subsidy payments were made by the hectare, thereby incentivizing economies of scale. Small-scale farmers also received subsidies, and some qualified for extra subsidies for farming organically, but others avoided applying for subsidies altogether. In fact, since EU accession and CAP implementation, Lithuania's agricultural system had become bifurcated: on one side a small percentage of farms are growing larger and operating on most of the agricultural land, but on the other side, the majority of farms are operating at 5 ha or less. The explanation for this bifurcation rests with the impact of EU accession. The farming sector, as a whole, benefited from progressively increasing subsidies and rural development funding. However, EU accession also led to the adoption of stringent regulations on issues like animal health and food hygiene. The accompanying paperwork on everything from animal registration to milk quota usage inflated the bureaucracy.

Confronted with the sheer complexity of bureaucratic paperwork and their inability to meet all or some of the requirements, many farmers in Lithuania opted to sell their produce on an informal basis using or expanding upon existing local food infrastructure (Mincyte, 2011). This is particularly true for the agricultural sectors most prominent on small-scale farms: dairy, vegetable and fruit production. For example, farmers who sell raw milk directly to consumers may meet the requirements for animal health, but they may not afford to equip their cars with refrigeration to guarantee the correct temperature during delivery. Farmers who sell some of their milk and processed dairy products directly to consumers may have had a quota for direct sales in addition to selling some of their milk to a processor, but they may not be able or willing to abide by all the other rules required for direct sales. Although state officials hoped that imposing stringent regulations would encourage the consolidation of small-scale dairy farms into larger, more efficient farms, farmers who could not meet some or all of the requirements could still rely on local food infrastructure, which supported informal dairy markets (Blumberg, 2015).

Public markets, one prominent component of local food infrastructure, also had to undergo expensive renovations to meet new regulations on food safety and hygiene. Faced with the combined pressure to compete with new supermarkets and to meet new standards, many predicted the demise of public markets. However, EU integration did not eradicate public markets. Despite the animosity that various public officials expressed towards public markets (Aidis, 2003), they remained an important source of livelihood for small-scale farmers. As we show in the following ethnographic section, markets persisted as part of an increasingly bifurcated food infrastructure. Despite their marginalization, sellers at these markets helped consumers maintain a taste for local food, even as supermarkets flourished with globally-sourced products.

5. Ethnographic encounters: local experiences of changing food infrastructures

In this section we present ethnographic examples of how changes in late socialist and post-socialist food infrastructures impacted the lives of Lithuania's farmers and urbanites by tying them to the production and consumption of local foods. We also analyze contemporary changes in local food infrastructures following the global financial crisis in 2008 and subsequent years. In particular, we describe a case study of a farmer, Urtė, who is currently in her 70s and farms in Northern Lithuania, in a small town where she has resided since the Soviet era. To provide an urban perspective, we also introduce Virga and Dovilė, both urban mothers who maintain rural connections to provide themselves and others with local foods.

Urtė was one of the first to take advantage of the late socialist reforms that introduced land-lease agreements and created opportunities for privately-owned family farms in the late 1980s. Her family left the collective farm to start an individual family farm on land allotted from the collective farm, and she was able to sell her production back to state-owned enterprises at favorable prices. Remembering this time period, Urtė now realizes that this early experience managing an individual farm on a semi-commercial basis gave her important knowledge and skills. At the same time, her operation was sheltered and

supported by the formal state economy: she was able to secure the inputs such as fertilizers as well as tractors and other agricultural technology she needed. Most importantly, she had a steady buyer for her products. Therefore, even though she farmed on an independent basis, her farm was still supported by the Soviet's dual food infrastructure. Just like the smaller subsidiary and allotment gardens that provided local food infrastructure, her farm was complexly intertwined with the state-controlled food sector.

This experience contrasted with the upheaval of the early 1990s. Urtė describes the process of decollectivization as "painful and difficult," and marked with a high degree of uncertainty. While some collective farm workers wanted to divide up the farm, the sooner the better, others pointed out the recklessness of dividing a functioning farm into inoperable parts. Some people privatized a tractor together, but then no one could afford to pay for the other person's share. Urtė relays that her family was lucky; because of its size they received a lot of investment checks and were able to privatize what they needed to continue farming. Because her farm had a supportive beginning during the Soviet period, she was also more fortunate than other farmers who had to create working farms in a much more chaotic economic environment in the 1990s.

While Urtė's family farm was relatively established while Lithuania was still in the Soviet Union, the end of socialism and dissolution of the Soviet agricultural infrastructure brought widespread unemployment and market collapse. She explains: "At the moment, no one needed milk, meat … no one bought anything. No one needed anything." The surge in self-provisioning that was an economic necessity for urban and rural households meant that few customers were willing or able to purchase food from full-time farmers. Urtė remembers numerous food processing companies that also started and became bankrupt and still owe her farm money for her agricultural products. Dairy production has been one stable income source, but prices fluctuated as well, making it difficult to plan, expand her farm, or specialize. Ironically, the conditions affecting food infrastructure in post-Soviet Lithuania encouraged many farmers like Urtė not to grow, specialize, or invest capital to become more efficient, as advocated by Western advisors, but to stay small, flexible, and diversified. As a result, Urtė grew diverse vegetables for sale to local markets and she kept cows for milk for her household as well as for sale to conventional processors.

Following EU accession, Urtė joined scores of other dairy farmers in Lithuania who participated in an informal milk economy by delivering milk directly to consumers who waited in the courtyards of high-rise apartment buildings. Urtė stated that in her case, her consumers found her and asked her if she could deliver the milk. Although EU accession brought economic growth, it also brought inflation that had a particularly negative effect on those with fixed incomes. Through direct marketing, consumers were able to pay a little bit less than they would for milk in the store, and they received fresh milk direct from the farm. Urtė received a better price for her milk, cash on hand, and a stable market consisting of eight to ten households. But because her cows produced too much milk for her small clientele, she needed to continue to sell most of her milk to a large-scale processor. These informal dairy networks should not be necessarily seen as in opposition to conventional food networks or the formal economy. For example, like Urtė, many small-scale dairy farmers sold some of their milk to the processor and some directly to consumers, tying their livelihoods to fluctuations in the dairy export market and the local market for raw milk. EU accession therefore fostered new food infrastructures: one globally connected, expanding but volatile, and deeply rooted in the region's positionality; and another more locally immersed food infrastructure. In a similar way as in the Soviet agricultural infrastructures that combined industrial production and subsidiary farming, these became complexly intertwined.

Although the conventional food infrastructure experienced rapid growth following EU accession in 2004, this quickly came to a halt with the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008. The crisis wreaked havoc on the Lithuanian economy, and caused a slump in consumer demand. Many farmers had modernized their farms by taking on debt, which became increasingly more difficult to repay. The financial crisis brought a decline in producer purchasing prices and it also affected consumer purchasing power. Unemployment spiked, and public sector workers were forced to accept significant wage cuts. Despite protests, the government implemented severe austerity measures (see Lazutka, Juška, & Navickė, 2018; Juska & Woolfson, 2013, Woolfson & Sommers, 2016). Support for local food became increasingly important, not only for farmers themselves, but also for the economy more broadly. Farmers faced difficulties from falling prices, but also diminishing export opportunities, particularly in Russia. Faced with protesting farmers, many of whom had built large-scale farms that mirrored the EU's image of agricultural development and competitiveness, the government started to widely support the creation of local food infrastructure and to revise legislation to make it easier to market food products directly to consumers. As a result of these changes, Lithuanian cities now host multiple farmers markets, which feature produce that is exclusively of local origin (Blumberg, 2015).

New farmers markets helped ensure that more farmers had outlets to market their products directly to consumers. But the increasing use of local food infrastructure by large-scale farmers also meant that farmers faced heightened competition (Blumberg, 2018). Urtė, for instance, noticed that multiple farmers started delivering milk to the same area where she sold her milk directly to consumers. Although she was still farming in 2009, she knew that with age she would have to scale back production. None of her children were interested in taking over the farm, beyond using it to provide food for themselves. Seeing the impacts of the financial crisis further cemented this viewpoint.

Although the number of farmers markets has only increased as farmers and entrepreneurs took advantage of new food infrastructures, not all consumers could afford to frequent these new farmers markets. One consumer, Virga, was in her early 30s, married and raising two preschool-age children. Although she had a job before having children, she had difficulty finding a new job now that her children were in a full-day preschool program. The financial crisis in particular made it harder for mothers of young children to find work. More recently, she started selling the surplus vegetables she grew on family land in the countryside. When she had children, she began to think more about trying to consume healthful food and food of good quality. She considered it important to provide healthy, natural produce for her family, but noted that it was incredibly difficult given that she already spent a large portion of her monthly household income on food. Shopping for her family involved a creative search for the best quality food for a reasonable price; this search involved navigating food infrastructures, from her countryside vegetable garden to the open-air markets and supermarkets of the city.

Although Virga had a garden and preserved produce when she was a child, the desire to provide her family with fresh and healthy produce led her to intensify her efforts to grow, procure and preserve food herself. She had access to land as a result of new post-socialist food infrastructure: her land was restituted to family members after Lithuania gained independence. As is the case for other urban households, land restitution in the 1990s created a food infrastructure that could support self-provisioning by urban residents at times of need. Although her land does not have a house, she felt comfortable living in a trailer and utilizing the knowledge she had accumulated by growing food as a child in her family's garden. The food infrastructure of her past facilitated her adaptation to start farming when she needed an income. She started to supply six families with vegetables throughout the summer and early autumn months. While Virga admitted that her generation is less likely to engage in self-provisioning, her customers did rely on her produce deliveries and valued them because they trusted her and appreciated the taste of fresh local food.

More commonly, middle-aged and older urban residents engage in self-provisioning if they have access to land, and provide younger

generations with local food. Dovilė, a woman in her fifties, grows much of her household's vegetables in an allotment garden she maintained since the Soviet era. Although she does not sell her vegetables, she does sell eggs and the berries and mushrooms she picks in Lithuania's abundant state-owned forests, another part of the food infrastructure that facilitates access to local tastes. Like other young people (Park, 2015), Dovilė's older children have left Lithuania in search of better jobs and livelihoods abroad. But the taste for local food even intensifies in its absence. Every few months, Dovilė carefully packs about ten 5-L jars of pickled vegetables and other items to send via bus to her daughter's family in Western Europe. She claims that the food "in Europe" is not as good and healthy as it is in Lithuania. Indirectly, her actions continue to encourage a taste for local food, but even this generous practice of care would not have been possible without the more sophisticated transportation infrastructure that has made it easier for both immigrants to leave the country and for local food to transgress borders.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we have sought to show that local consumer choices should be understood as part of larger socio-material infrastructures rooted deeply in local history and tied to regional and global processes. From this perspective, the diversity and popularity of local food tastes in Lithuania is an outcome of the continued reliance on and reinvention of decidedly local food infrastructures over several decades. Our broader approach resonates with the arguments Gille (2016) developed in her recent book about the far reaching political implications of the use of seemingly neutral European quality and safety standards and technologies in Hungary's food and environmental sectors. Gille (2016) argues that these developments mark the formation of a new modality of European power relations built on the materialization of politics through which European Union's (EU) post-socialist member states are further marginalized. These power relations constitute their positionality and influence local development possibilities.

Rather than considering tastes for local foods as an outcome of global food fashions on one hand or poverty on the other, our analysis suggests that they have been shaped by Soviet policies, post-socialist economic shock therapies implemented by Western experts, and EU food and agricultural policies. The ultimate insight of our analysis is that the taste for local foods in Lithuania is neither a local nor global phenomenon, but an outcome of historical processes that foregrounded the formation of smallholder agriculture, direct sales, and self-provisioning practices as foundational aspects of food infrastructure in Lithuania. Paradoxically, none of these practices easily fit in the developmental visions of Soviet rulers, national elites or European experts, yet at every turn, they emerged as an integral part of modern food infrastructures in the region. For example, when EU regulations were being put in place in Lithuania, consumers rallied in support of small-scale farmers and processors when news circulated that only stamped (i.e., regulated) eggs would be allowed to be sold at public markets (Lukas, 2004) or that small-scale farmers who make sauerkraut from their own cabbage would be required to meet the same requirements as large-scale processors (Beniušytė, 2004). As a result of the dynamic interplay between consumer taste and food infrastructures, local food systems have been sustained in Lithuania and have even diversified in recent years.

To take a long view of these insights, increasing attention is being paid to food infrastructures in response to the negative effects of climate change and the need to transform food consumption practices to support sustainable development. Although most research on infrastructures has focused on energy, water usage, and waste management (Van Vliet et al., 2005; Shove, 2015), recent scholarship on local food has called for greater attention to infrastructural arrangements that could further local and sustainable food supply chains (Myers & Caruso, 2016; Stahlbrand, 2017). In places where local food infrastructure is lacking, farmers and local food advocates are facing obstacles in furthering food system localization (Cleveland, Müller, Tranovich, Mazaroli, & Hinson, 2014). In this article, we expand this area of research by focusing on food production and distribution systems in their historical contexts. A historical perspective helps explain regional variations in local food infrastructures that have emerged throughout Europe, and differentiate Central and Eastern Europe from other European regions (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2018). Further building on the burgeoning literature on local and alternative food networks in Central and Eastern Europe (Benedek & Balázs, 2016; Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2018; Grivins & Tisenkopfs, 2015; Spilková, Fendrychová, & Syrovátková, 2013; Spilková & Perlín, 2013; Syrovátková, 2016; Syrovátková, Hrabák, & Spilková, 2015; Zagata, 2012), we suggest that attention to the dynamic and historically embedded relationships between consumption practices, infrastructures and taste, new development trajectories could be fashioned that promote sustainability in diverse geographic contexts across Europe (Smith & Jehlička, 2013). More broadly, our research shows how local food persists as an integral part of a broader agro-food infrastructure. This suggests that it might be hard to cultivate tastes for local foods once their supporting infrastructures have been eradicated or transformed.

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