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LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION AND LOCAL IDENTITY:  
INTERDEPENDENCY OF DEVELOPMENT TOOLS AND RESULTS<sup>2</sup>

DOI: 10.18030/SOCIO.HU.2015EN.167

#### ABSTRACT

Self-promotion and reinterpretation of local identity is becoming increasingly important in rural communities. Local identity building is achieved very differently by rural municipalities and regions. The paper analyses the role of local food production in local identity creation. It is based on two contemporary discussed phenomena of rural development: local cultural heritage and local food production, as a part of local cultural heritage. Using the example of three Hungarian rural micro-regions we analyse 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.

The paper is based on the literature about alternative food networks and on the role of cultural heritage in rural development. The case-studies were conducted as a part of a larger research project on agricultural restructuring in the last two decades in Hungary. It is based on qualitative and anthropological methods: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, transect walking and participatory observation. The paper analyses the role of short food supply chains (SFSC) and local food culture in the three micro-regions and the process of local community and identity building. It analyses the differences of the SFSCs; our results suggests 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.

**Keywords:** local food, cultural heritage, rural community, local image, rural development

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2 The paper is based on the case studies of the “Living from the land” (OTKA 100682) and “Cultural heritage and sustainable rural development” (OTKA 108628) projects supported by Hungarian Scientific Research Fund OTKA) the research on Cultural heritage and rural social integration supported by the European Union and the State of Hungary, co-financed by the European Social Fund in the framework of TÁMOP 4.2.4. A/2-11-1-2012-0001 ‘National Excellence Program’ The work on this study was supported by the Bolyai Postdoctoral Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-promotion and reinterpretation of local identity is becoming increasingly important in rural communities. Local identity building is achieved very differently by rural municipalities and regions. The paper analyses the role of local food production in local identity creation. It is based on two contemporary discussed phenomena of rural development: local cultural heritage and local food production, as a part of local development. Using the example of three Hungarian rural micro-regions we analyse 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 and artisan food products.

The paper is based on the role of cultural heritage in rural development (Bessi re 1998, Miele–Murdoch 2002, Ray 1998, Tellstrom et al. 2005) on the literature about alternative food networks (Fonte–Papadopoulos 2010, Lamine 2005, Renting et al. 2012), and to contextualize the research, on agricultural restructuring and on the role of local food in Central-Europe in the last decades (Benedek–Bal zs 2014, Tisenkopfs et al. 2011, Trenouth–Tisenkopfs 2015). Although there is a growing literature on food self-provisioning (Jehli ka–Smith 2011), on alternative food networks, on civic food networks (Zagata 2012), on the role of communities in developing PDO and PGI products (B rd s–Luksander–Megyesi–Mike 2012), on community supported agriculture in Central-Eastern-Europe (Dezs ny–R thy–Bal zs 2014, M llers–B rhal  2014), or in Hungary (Benedek–Bal zs 2014), the relationship between local food in rural image, local culture and rural community building is a less studied area.

The analysis is focusing on selected non-industrial foods produced locally. Thus, we excluded products produced by the food industry, or lack local specifiers; like the wheat produced by a mill in the Zalaszentgr t case study area (CSA), or a sausage produced in the L tav rtes CSA. Local identity is measured by the attachment to the local products. The case studies are parts of different research studies conducted in Hungarian rural communities: on agricultural restructuring in the last two decades in Hungary and on the role of cultural heritage in rural development. The paper aims at understanding the complex relationship between local food and local image. The analysis of the *first case* demonstrates the path-finding of a local community to create a local image through quality food production, the analysis of the *second case* demonstrates how existing traditional, local food and plant production (the horseradish with a PDO label) can contribute to image building and local community development, while the analysis of the *third case* study shows how a strong local micro-regional image can be the basis for different kinds of local food products. The paper analyses the role of local foods and

local food culture in the local community of the three micro-regions, in identity building inside, and local image building outside the micro-regions. The analyses of the three case-studies show that food products, local food culture and related local events can hardly strengthen either local community and the local image within the area or the micro-regional image outside the area; also a strong local image does not necessarily lead to the promotion of local food products.

In the case studies we analyse the relationship between local food production local identity and local image by focusing on the following elements of local food production:

- the characteristics of local food products;
- the institutional background of the main stakeholder, who produces local food, or initiated its production;
- the background of the typical consumers, and also of the main markets of the product.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Our paper analyses the role of local food in rural development, as a cultural phenomenon, as an image and identity marker. Theories on rural development emphasize the role of local cultural heritage in development processes (Ray 1998) for decades, and also the eminent role of farmers in rural development (Van Der Ploeg et al. 2000, van der Ploeg–Renting 2004). Since the early 2000s several papers were published on the role of food in transforming “the conventional intensive and productivist agriculture” (Renting–Marsden–Banks 2003, 395). The analysis of this paper is at the interface of these recent findings of rural studies: how the papers exploring the aesthetics of food (Bessi re 1998, Miele–Murdoch 2002) contribute to image creation and thus to local development.

Growing interest was found in rural sociology literature to consider culture as a fourth pillar of sustainable development (Kivitalo et al. 2015, Marsden 2006). The focus of these studies are foremost related to the cultural dimension in the context of rural restructuring and rural sustainability, more specifically the cultural meaning of food

Cultural aspects of place and place making are crucial in our approach to local food. Our understanding is rooted on the constructivist scope of rurality and rural place making, (Halfacree 2007). It is based on Lefebvre’s space triad theory to explain how place is socially produced. He analyses space in terms of social relations and identifies three types of activities that make up social space: (1) spatial practices (perception of space), (2) representations of practices (conceptualization of spaces) and (3) representational practice (experience of space). According to this approach rural space is regarded as triad space. In the case of relationships between local food and place the third aspect (representational practice) has crucial importance, it refers to local culture including the experience of lived place constructed through everyday life, perceptions, symbols and values and meanings related to places (Lefebvre, 1991). Applying Lefebvre’s theory Kivitalo et al. (2015) argue that culture is embedded in all aspects of rural space. Furthermore, they stated that “*the lived space emphasises the meaning and symbolism constructed through the everyday life of local people*” (Kivitalo et al. 2015, 97)

Places and even more the constructions of place are constituted by social and cultural struggles and practices (Escobar 2001). Place making and strategies of localization can be seen as cultural construction including the constitution of identities (Horlings 2015). Several scholars emphasise the constructivist notion of place and call attention to the importance of subjective perceptions, symbols, narrative constructions and place identities concerning local development, territorialization and localization (Horlings 2015, Kiss 2015, Kivitalo et al. 2015, Ray 1998, 2006) There are some studies in rural sociology literature which focus on local identity from the perspective of local culture and cultural heritage. Bessièrè (1998) identifies local food and gastronomy as an identity marker of a current geographic area through a French case study. There is a growing demand for rural nostalgia in Hungary and local food and gastronomy culture appeals as one of the main nostalgia based objects and identity markers. Consequently, more and more rural places promote themselves and present their identity through their local food and gastronomy (Csurgó 2014). All cases to examine food and gastronomy as cultural heritage objects show that this heritage construction has a central importance in the development of local identity included in local knowledge based endogenous development. (Bessièrè 1998, Csurgó 2014, Ray 2006)

There is also an increasing importance of the cultural components in rural development policy in Europe. According to the concept of a culture economy rural areas are increasingly adopting cultural markers as keys in the pursuit of development goals (Ray 1998). These cultural markers include food, crafts, folklore, visual arts, literary references, historical and prehistorical sites, landscapes and associated flora and fauna. The culture economy in rural areas replaces the primary production-based economy with the consumption based one. Culture economy works through a local cultural identity. Culture is regarded as key mechanism in development of local economy (Ray 1998). As Ray stated *“local cultures are characterized as forms of intellectual property that may allow local rural economies to impose some level of control over social and economic development”* (Ray 1998, 3). Applying Ray’s idea this paper focuses on the economic and social potentials of food as cultural heritage. We purpose to see local food as diversified to become, for example, networks of social or cultural positions which offer inspiring possibilities for revitalizing local identity, community building and even for business.

Van der Ploeg et al. (2000) argue that in most parts of Europe farmers possess the major part of local natural, human and social resources, thus this group could be the initiator and beneficiary of rural restructuring in the nineties. During these changes in the European agriculture horizontal networks of the farmers became important again, and as a part of that former relationship between the rural and the urban, the consumers and the producers were re-established. Farmers are interested in rural development as it helps them to find their way to multifunctional agriculture and to continue their farming activity and their way of life. Food production and new consumer-producer relationships are among the new services of multifunctional agriculture, and as the authors argue both rural and urban people benefit from participating in these networks.

Renting et al. (2003) differentiate several types of non-conventional food networks: alternative food networks, short food supply chains, localized food systems (SYAL), local food systems and civic food networks. Alternative food network is an umbrella term, and focuses mainly on producers (Renting et al. 2012, 394) while

the term short food-supply chains refers to all participating actors and their networks: “covers (the interrelations between) actors who are directly involved in the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of new food products” (Renting et al., 2012, p. 394); under the term civic food network the role of consumers and initiators of such activities are analysed (Renting et al., 2012, pp. 292–293). Our paper aims at shedding light on the role of local food in rural image making and local identity building, and on the actors influencing such initiatives, thus it can use insights from the concept of short-food supply chains and civic food networks.

Our analytical framework focuses on the characteristics of local food products (Bessièrè 1998, Ray 1998), and on the characteristics of the main stakeholder (Renting et al. 2012), and we also present how and more specifically through which channels the local food products are provided for consumers.

To understand the *main characteristics of local food products* we aim at exploring the role of local food in local image building and identity making. Local food products and artisan food products are defined here as local food and we exclude industrial products of local produce from our approach on local food. We focus on the interactions between food production and identity construction. The aim of the case studies is to present the process how local food product were selected and gained their symbolic meaning. We focus on local initiatives to highlight local food as part of place making which can increase the attraction of a place and the economic development. Our purpose is to present the symbolic and cultural meaning of local food rather than its economic characteristics.

The *main stakeholder* can be the producer of the local food, or the stakeholder, who initiated the production (collection) of the local food. Three characteristics of the main stakeholder are analysed: its institutional background, its earlier activities and the knowledge set used in his or her activity.

In our cases most of the stakeholders are producers, farmers from the private sector, who are usually active in rural development (Van Der Ploeg et al. 2000), but we can also find members of the civic sector and local governments among the stakeholders.

We base our analysis of the different knowledge forms used in farming and rural development on Tovey’s and her colleagues’ research. They differentiated three knowledge forms: local/traditional, scientific, and managerial knowledge (Tovey 2008). Local/traditional knowledge appears in agricultural methods, in the use of certain species, in the management of certain pieces of land; it is learned from the former generations and during farming activity.

Scientific knowledge provides overall concepts, scholarly methods (e.g. modern production methods, or organic farming practices) and previously gathered information which can be used by local and non-local actors in their agricultural practice.

Managerial knowledge is intermediate between the above two: it is neither scientific nor local. Though it is explicit, specialized and learned in public education and training, it can be informal, experiential and person bound (Bruckmeier–Tovey 2008). Managerial knowledge carries site specific elements, albeit it does not belong to certain localities but a wider institutional and economic environment. As argued in a previous article stakeholders use complex knowledge sets daily (Kelemen et al. 2008).

The main markets of the products differ significantly as the literature also shows (Mácsai et al. 2012); our analysis is not reduced to short-food supply chains or direct consumer-producer relationship: in the following case-studies we present examples of different kinds of markets: on-farm sales, farmers' market sales and contact with whole-sellers as well.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main aim of the paper is to analyse the role of local foods in identity building inside, and local image building outside the micro-regions. Our main research question deriving from it: what is the relationship between local food and local identity. To understand this relationship, we aim at answering the following research questions also: how local foods are presented in local identity, how local food(s) contribute to local image building.

### CASE STUDIES

In the following we present three case studies. The first was conducted in a micro-region, which has neither a well-known local food product, nor a characteristic image, but local identity is strong. The second case study was conducted in a micro-region which has a known and typical local food product, but it does not have a characteristic image. The third case study area has several a local, not well-known food products, a characteristic image and strong local identity.

The presented case studies are based on qualitative and anthropological methods: document-analysis, semi-structured interviews, transect walking and participatory observation (Kvale 1994). In each case study areas we conducted 25 semi-structured<sup>3</sup> interviews with producers, local decision-makers, and members of local civic associations. We used transect walking and participatory observation mainly as a triangulation method and to understand the possible contradictions emerging during the interviews; the case studies were conducted between January 2014 and August 2015.

#### The search for the typical local food product: the case of the Zalaszentgrót micro-region

The first case study was conducted in small Western-Hungarian micro-region which has agricultural traditions. Traditional products were fruits, vegetables, pork and dairy products. Now main products are arable crops, and poultry. During the last two decades former socialist-type cooperatives and the system of household-farming collapsed, then different types of private farms became main actors in agriculture. After a long decade of the pre-accession period, in the 2010s the former actors of the socialist agricultural companies established new agri-food networks, and nowadays: huge agricultural companies, integrated into the national and international food market define local agricultural activity. This picture is coloured by the presence of medium and small scale family farms selling their products at national and local markets, and former workers returning to the countryside and retired town's people starting household or subsistence farming (Váradí 2008).

The main food products of the case study area are the following: wheat and semolina made by a local

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<sup>3</sup> Interviews undertaken and/ or co-ordinated by the authors and by Viktória Bene, Petra Baluja, Orsolya Ditzendy, László Lipcsei, Ildikó Somogyi and Anita Szatmári.

mill which has a capacity of 70 tons per day, escargots (snails) collected by locals for a French company, which prepares and exports them, honey, goat cheese, wine, jams and pumpkin oil. Although the local mill uses the name of a local village as its trade mark ('wheat from Tüskeszentpéter') in marketing, because of the character of the product (that it is a mass-product) we do not regard it a local food product. Also, escargots are not local food products; these are also mass-products (although hand-made products). The case of the escargots could be worth further analysis, as there has been a Food-festival since 2011 about escargot. The programmes aim at promoting escargot consumption and link escargot production and escargot dishes to the area, thus to use it in local image building. The effects of the festival on local identity are weak; probably because escargot is a really untraditional dish in Hungary. Snail collection and the factory preparing escargot appear in the interviews as an employer of the under-class.

In our case study we focus on foods which are considered also by the interviewees as local foods. There are two main types: fresh vegetables and fruits, and different processed foods, like goat cheese, wine, jams, honey and pumpkin oil.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are produced by medium size farmers, subsistence farmers and local social farms. The production of fruits for commercial use has declined in the last decades (Bíró et al. 2012); most of the fresh fruits and vegetables are produced in small-scale, subsistence farms. The group of subsistence farmers is mixed: there are locals who always produced some vegetables, fruits, some animal products, and towns' people who moved to the area only recently, and started gardening in recent years. Despite this diversity they have some common characteristics: they farm on small plots, produce mainly, but not exclusively, for self-consumption, thus they have weak market relations. Their activity is labour-intensive, built on family networks and own labour force. Their farming activity is also a hobby, a part of their lifestyle. A minor part of fresh vegetables and fruits is produced by social farms. Social farms were initiated by local governments and subsidized by the Hungarian government since 2011. There were two social farms in the case study area operating in five settlements. The programmes employ around 10 locals; the wages, the purchase of the machinery and the input materials are financed by the state subsidies. Most of the products are sold at the local markets or donated to local poor people. The main aim of the activity is to provide employment for the local underclass, and to produce food locally for the locals. Fresh vegetables and fruits have few unique characteristics, thus those can hardly be used effectively in local image building, but these products are highly valued by the locals and local self-provisioning became part of the local image.

The other group of local products, honey, wine, herbs, pumpkin oil, and goat cheese are prepared by certain medium and small scale farms. The typical medium size farmer of the area has a diverse product range, his/her market relations are weak and uncertain, but has dense, informal cooperation with neighbouring farmers, and uses a mixed knowledge set (Kelemen et al. 2008). The producers of the foods form a special sub-group among the medium size farmers; the members of this sub-group seek new, niche markets for their products, and try to establish direct consumer relations. Most of the products are sold at the local farmers' market and on the farm. Most of them have a university degree, farm on around 15–50 hectares, sell processed products and are embedded in the local community. These food products are important in local image building and also

became important in local community building.

Local food production is encouraged by several initiatives of a rural-development civic association: they opened a local food shop and had several initiatives to promote and produce local foods. Earlier in the socialist times the local consumers' cooperative bought up locally produced vegetables and fruits, but in the last ten years that stopped, because of the lack of sufficient amount of products, and because at the wholesale market the prices were lower than the local prices. The local food shop had to be closed after one year. It was the result of local consumers going directly to the producers, and because of a lack of products and a poor assortment; thus the income of the shop was low. The food shop itself had almost no impact on local identity, and also did not contribute to local image building.

The initiative on promoting local food products seems to be more successful. It was financed by a LEADER project. The coordinators collected all possible food products from the case study area and published them on the Internet, in a hard-copy catalogue and promoted selected products at the local spa and other nearby tourist destinations. This initiative became important in local image making, and effected slightly local identity. The initiative had limitations in image building and identity formations: there were more than 60 producers in the catalogue, and there was no distinguished product which could become a symbol of local foods.

The result is that the micro-region does have some typical local food products, but the existing ones can contribute neither to local image building, nor to local identity formation. The first case study demonstrates the efforts of a community to build a local image by using local food products, and possible factors of failure.

### Shaping place identity through local food: the case of Derecske-Létavértes micro region

The second case study was conducted in the Eastern part of Hungary in Hajdú-Bihar County, in the historical region of Hajdúság. The surface of Hajdú-Bihar County is characterized by the Great Plain. Our sturdy area, the Derecske-Létavértes micro region consists of ten settlements including two small towns. A decrease in population characterizes the whole county, as well as the micro region. The most important sector of the economy is agriculture; it is quite stable and productive. However, the number of agricultural employees has dramatically dropped in the last two decades as a result of the collapse of former socialist-type cooperatives. After the political transformation in the 1990s the agricultural structure has transformed. Huge agricultural companies and several small and medium scale farms have developed in the last decades. Private firms and agricultural entrepreneurs became the main actors of local agriculture. The traditions of subsistence farming and food self-provisioning are very strong in the micro region, mostly in the small villages. Cereals and vegetables are the main products of local agriculture. However, there are more and more small farms providing local food products (fruits, vegetables) to the local community. The micro region is famous for the cultivation of horseradish, which became a PDO (protected designations of origin) in 2006. The main area of horseradish production inside the micro region is situated in Létavértes town and its surrounding villages and the centre is Bagamér a village where the main horseradish producer company is located. 80% of the Hungarian horseradish production comes from the micro-region, but it is also one of the largest areas of cultivation for horseradish in all of Europe. A big local firm and several medium and small scale farmers are involved in horseradish production.



Cooperation between horseradish producers is very strong both in formal and informal ways. Horseradish producers are the main actors on the local labour market, they are the main employers and also because of the demand for hand pickers in the cultivation they provide temporary jobs for the lower strata of local society.

Horseradish as the most characteristic and unique agricultural product of the micro region implies a symbolic meaning and symbolic interpretation of locality. Horseradish recently is regarded as the most important local tradition with several cultural aspects. In the beginning of the 2000s (in 2002) a local civic association, the Horseradish Tourist Route Association was established by eight local governments, four horseradish producer firms and a local restaurant. Several other local actors (cultural centres, schools, civic associations etc.) are involved in the activity of the Association. The main actor of the Horseradish Tourist Route Association is one of the biggest horseradish producer companies, the Hungarotorma Ltd. The local horseradish ('Horseradish from Hajdúság') proposed by the director of the Hungarotorma Ltd. is inscribed on the Hungarian Repository of Values.

The main purpose of the Association is to generate tourism activities rooted in the tradition of horseradish. They published a brochure for tourism presenting local horseradish culture and other cultural heritage of the joint settlements. They organize a Horseradish Day, a Horseradish Festival as cultural events every year, involving more and more settlements of the micro-region. In 2013 a seven day long festival had been organized with the participation of 6 settlements. The organizing team included employees of local governments, local cultural institutions, local tourism actors and cultural civic associations. The Horseradish Tourist Route Association also started an initiative to revitalize the horseradish based local gastronomy, they collected old recipes and invited local restaurant to provide horseradish based dishes. A Horseradish Round Table was organized to negotiate roles and opportunities of horseradish in local development.

Thus, the main target group of those events and activities are not only the tourists, but also the local enterprises and the local community. The Association also focuses on networking with local stakeholders and they intend to build (or rebuild) the local community on the basis of the redefinition of horseradish. Meet ups were organized to create a space where up and coming local creative people, horseradish producer entrepreneurs, and tourism makers come together to share stories, create networks and learn from each other. The most important goal of this local network was to give a new cultural meaning for horseradish. They negotiated how the cultural and traditional elements of horseradish production can be used for local development.

*"Well, many traditions link to horseradish... the cultivation itself is a tradition, for example, it is watered not in daylight but at night, that is a tradition, the traditional cultivation method itself (...) everybody can have old things, handmade implements related to horseradish, they had collected and brought them here and we exhibited them, we did it. Keep the horseradish traditions alive, this is the main goal". (a member of Association explained the role of local events and activities)*

Horseradish did not have a cultural meaning before the Association started its activities. Horseradish had been regarded as the main economic resource of the micro region; Horseradish products (mostly as fresh crop) are sold only on the international market. Thus, cultural redefinition of horseradish means not only the

cultural use of horseradish as an important element of local traditions but also it implies the appearance of horseradish products in the local market as a local food. Horseradish as a local economic resource is converted into heritage product including local food through interpretation. Horseradish as a heritage product has a very specific meaning and appearance. Horseradish heritage appears as symbol of local events, as part of local gastronomy, as traditional know-how on agricultural cultivation and as local food. Horseradish as local food means here the traditional horseradish based dishes. However, horseradish as an agricultural product keeps the mass production characteristic, it is sold in the international market and does not appear in local groceries. Horseradish is distributed through the informal market (among friends and relatives) in the local community.

Horseradish as a local heritage became the main determinant of the symbolic character of place. Horseradish is in the centre of local identity building process. The case of Derecske-Létavértes shows that negotiation process on touristic use of heritage is in practice a place identity planning, where the cultural meaning of local food became the driving force of identity making based community building. The use of horseradish as a local food in shaping local identity has significant importance.

### Tasting the place through local food: the case of Órség micro region

The third case study region is the Órség, located in the Western part of Hungary in the corner of the Austrian and Slovenian borders. Settlements of Órség region belong to two counties: Vas and Zala. The historical Órség region played a frontier-guarding role, and its name: 'defence region' reflects this historical role. The western frontier location resulted in a special status for the region with a higher degree of control and a lower degree of development during the socialist era. As a result of this disadvantaged status the Órség region keeps its traditional shape of landscapes with special traditional settlement structure and shape of houses and with an untouched nature.

From the late 1980s and most significantly after the change of the political system from 1990 onward, Órség became one of the main tourism destinations for the middle upper classes (mostly from Budapest) demanding rural idyll. The National Park of Órség was established in 2002 on the territory of the Protected Landscape of Órség created in 1976. The National Park became the leader of tourism activities of the region, and the protection of nature is also guaranteed by them. It provides events, services and products, publishes brochures etc. Órség National Park provides thematic routes and open-air museums. Most of the activities are strongly connected to nature protection and sustainability but local cultural heritage is also strongly emphasized.

Year by year more and more urban inhabitants (mostly from Budapest) bought second homes in the Órség region and many of them stay there from spring to autumn or settled down permanently. They were the pioneers and initiators of new tourism activities. In the first period their main service was accommodation in a rustic, idyllic rural milieu. The Órség has been regarded as an idyllic rural landscape ever since that time. As a result of that kind of tourism development several forms of local food and gastronomy appeared in tourism services. Landscape and food interconnected. First, local restaurants started to provide special local dishes and then more and more local food products appeared in tourist shops. The most traditional local food is

the pumpkin oil, it has the so called Órség label traditionally, but recently there are several other local food products from honey and mushroom through marmalade and pretzel to snaps provided in gift shops and local markets for tourists. Órség as a landscape has the meaning of rural idyll. The sense of place contents rural traditions, rural idyll, nostalgia for peasant culture and traditional know-how, and also traditional shapes of houses and settlement structures.

Local food conveys the essence of Órség. It means that food produced locally is strongly connected to the symbolic meaning of the place. However, we can find two ways of food use in place making. On the one hand the National Parks system in Hungary has an initiative to label the local food products based on traditional methods and know-how. In the case of Órség Nemzeti Park this Órség National Park product brand was given for local enterprises and husbandry operated within the National Park area and using special nature friendly or traditional methods for their productions. There is a strong emphasis on ecological sustainability in this branding process. This brand system classifies the producers very strictly. Brand is provided only for those who not only pay attention to avoid damaging the environment, but also to those who strive to preserve the valuable habitat and to contribute to the preservation of protected species. The key purpose of this branding process is that the selected products represent the natural and cultural specialities of the area.

*“And we are strict because of the quality, there is a line, we have created a system to classify the objects by several points of view, a total score is given to summarize the quality of the object (it can be food, handicraft, rural accommodation etc.). Of course one does not know what the other does. And then it’s a unified system we do the same classification method for each group of products. (...) I tell you, for example in the case of rural accommodation, there are 168 rural accommodations here in the region but only two received our brand, of course not all of them applied for it, but plenty did and there are only two having this brand.”* (A staff member of national Park presented their branding system)

Only a very limited number of local food products has this Órség National Park Brand, because of this strict system. There are several pumpkin oil producers using the label of Órség and they produce their oil based on a traditional, local know-how, but only one has got the National Park brand.

On the other hand, urban second home owners and accommodation providers discovered local food products as an object of rural idyll. They demanded to taste the place and the connections to local traditions and they found it to be significant in local food consumption and gastronomy. They started to produce food products and created relationships with local small scale producers and they also started to use traditional recipes. Resulting from this so called revitalized local food products are provided for visitors and tourists of the region as a part of their tourism services. A group of the newcomers with the participation of a local civic association established a local artisan market in Óriszentpéter which is the central town of the region. Local small scale farmers, artisans, handicrafts and home-made product producers are invited. Involvement and participation are based on local origin, short supply chain characteristics and a strong informal network. All producers who are able to provide a kind of local sense – it sometimes only means that the product is produced in a local garden – can be involved in this network.

*“I try to tell you why people who live here, and who number, not one, not two, but more, why they like to come here. Because it is actually a kind of club life, I can say. So there is a social scene to where we*

*go and talk about things. Most people wish to live close to the nature, or even produce something, or do things. And we exchange our experiences on what we do and like, and discuss what seeds are used now.”*  
(A member of local producer market talked about her community)

There is not a specified selection criteria system behind the participation in the local market even if the local embeddedness is strongly highlighted. A strong informal network was developed based on the local production-consumption relationship in which the local food producer has a central position. A special, personal bond is forming between local producers and local and non-local consumers. Several forms of local food are provided in local events and also in tourism services. Local food products became key symbolic goods of the ‘Őrség idyll’.

### COMPARISON OF THE CASES AND CONCLUSIONS

In the following we sum up our main results and compare the local food products of the three case studies, focusing on the role of the initiator, on the character of the products, on the main market, and finally on the mutual effects of local food product and local identity and image on each other.

In the case of Zalaszentgrót several types of local food products were found, none of them were really typical to the area; moreover one of them was a complete outsider in the local culture (namely the escargot). Local farmers and local governments are the key actors in local food based activities like local markets, gastronomy festivals etc. The main target group of their activities is the local community. Local image is very weak they did not find a good symbol to represent local characteristics even if they have several local products. There is no relationship between local food and the local image. However, local identity is very strong here, but this strong local community is not able to introduce their specialities elsewhere. In the case of Derecske-Létavértes one key local food product, the horseradish has been identified. This case provides a good example of local food product based image building and identity construction. The initiator of this process is a local horseradish firm, but local governments are also active actors. Horseradish based activities and events target both tourists and locals. Both local image and local identity were very weak and it seems that horseradish as a local food and local heritage has a growing impact on the development of both image and identity. The case of Őrség shows how local food products can be positioned in a very strong local landscape image where the local identity is also very strongly rooted on this strong landscape image. We found that local food and local image significantly enforce each other. There are several forms of local products that are provided for tourists and urban newcomers by locals and urban newcomers. Local food products include the sense of place and are regarded as an evident symbol of the local milieu.

The following table shows the above written in comparison. Different forms of interactions between local food production and local identity construction were presented in our three case studies.

The character of the foods is different: while in the Zalaszentgrót and Őrség case there is no key-product, in the Derecske-Létavértes case there is one. Comparing the stakeholders, we see three different groups in each case: local governments, farmers, local companies, local people and newcomers, the target groups are clearly different: tourists in the Őrség case, locals in Zalaszentgrót and a mixed group in the Derecske-Létavértes

case. Local image is strong only in the Órség case, while local identity is strong in the Órség and Zalaszentgrót cases.

Table 1. Comparison of the local foods, local identity and local image of the three cases.

Case-study area	Zalaszentgrót	Derecske-Létavértes	Órség
Character of the products	Mixed	One key	Mixed
Main stakeholders	Local governments and farmers	Local agricultural firms and local governments	Locals and urban newcomers
Main target groups	Locals	Tourists and locals	Tourists and newcomers
Local image	Weak	Weak	Strong
Local identity	Strong	Weak	Strong
Relationship: (local food & local image)	No	Growing impact	Significantly enforce each other

Finally, if we compare the relationship among local food products, local image and local identity, we see three different settings in the three cases: in the Zalaszentgrót case there is almost no relationship between local food product, local image and local identity, in the Derecske-Létavértes case a well-defined local actors group is building local image and local identity using the local food product, while in the case of the Órség, locals try to develop local food products, using the strong local identity and the strong local image. Also, the geographical coverage of the local food product is different: for example in the Derecske-Létavértes case, it is much more linked to Létavértes town and its surroundings, than to the other town Derecske.

All three cases can be interpreted as examples of the cultural economy, although the Órség case seems to be the best example of the presence of territory embodied in the food-product. In each case we found that mostly one or several local agricultural products were selected and processed using traditional local methods. We found exceptions only in the Zalaszentgrót case, where local image is the weakest. The difference is much stronger among the local identity and local image of the case study areas, it seems that if both the local image and local identity is strong, those can contribute to the development of local food products, and also a strong, and traditional, culturally embedded (Bessière 1998, Kivitalo et al. 2015) local food product can be used to build local identity and strengthen local image (Escobar 2001). Our cases also enforce the argumentation of the new paradigm of rural development (Van Der Ploeg et al. 2000); although the initiators of producing local foods are farmers only in two cases, but also in the third one, local small-scale farmers benefit from local food production.

Analysing the cases as alternative food networks (Renting et al. 2012), we find that the Zalaszentgrót case functions similarly to the descriptions provided in the literature (small distances, local farmers producing food for the locals, exchanging at local markets). In the case of horseradish, produced in Derecske-Létavértes almost all elements of alternative food networks are missing, while in the case of the Órség, the strong presence of the newcomers as initiators and of tourists as main target group challenges the building of local food networks. The speciality of the local products in this latter case, the strong local image make the case less proper to build

alternative food networks.

In the future the extension of the empirical base, by conducting further case studies would be important to deepen our knowledge on the factors influencing local food products, local identity and local image; it would also help us to better understand the links between them. It would also be interesting to analyse how the wider changes in Hungarian agriculture affect local food production, local identity and image building, whether such initiatives can contribute to the decrease of land-use concentration and the increase of small scale farming, thus improving rural livelihood.

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