

Reluctant pioneers : environmental NGOs and food self-provisioning in post-socialist Czech Republic

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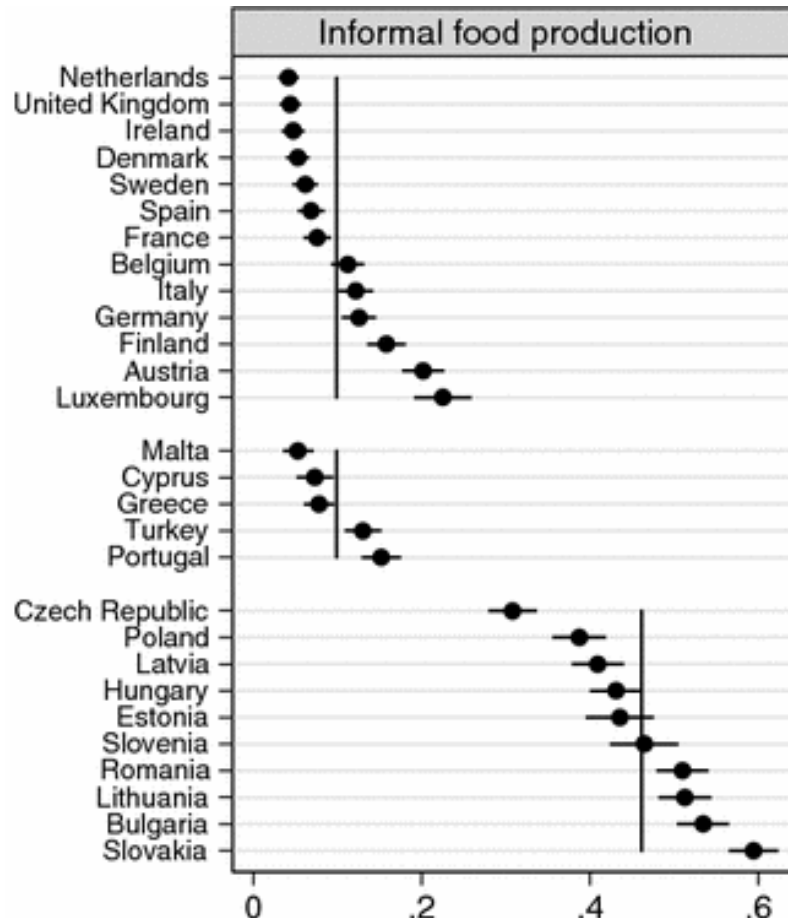


Reluctant Pioneers: Environmental NGOs and Food Self-Provisioning in Post-Socialist Czech Republic

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(Czech) FSP matters - quantitatively



Source: Alber and Kohler (2008)

- FSP accounts for
 - 34% of fresh fruits
 - 32% of eggs
 - 27% of potatoes
 - 24% of lard
 - 22% of vegetablesof the total household consumption of these commodities
- To contrast: in 2008, Czechs spent 6,5 euro per capita on organic certified food in 2008 (source: Green marketing, ZMP, FiBL, AgroMilagro)

(Czech) FSP matters – ecologically

In the Czech Republic,

69% of growers do not use artificial fertilizers

48% do not use any artificial pesticides and herbicides

only 15% travel to their garden by car or motorbike

packaging needs are minimal

produce is widely shared with family, friends and colleagues at work

Czech ENGOs barely engage with FSP

→ What literature is there on FSP, sustainability and ENGOs?

Alternative Food Networks Scholarship

Within the Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) and Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) frameworks, there is a large body of literature focusing on:

- re-localisation and re-embedding of food
- Socially and environmentally responsible forms of food production and consumption
- capacity of AFNs for sustainability transition of the food system
- ENGOs often act as promoters of AFNs and creators of ethical food consumers through the behavioural change model

Scholarship on food self-provisioning in “developed” societies

Literature on FSP in western context:

- relative importance of economic and other motivations for FSP
- labour and gendered constraints on FSP
- food security and source of nutritious food

Literature on FSP in post-socialist context:

- FSP as a survival strategy of the poor
- FSP – indicator of backwardness
- mutual help, culture, enjoyment

Regardless of the context, little attention to our focus:
the link between FSP and ENGOs



FSP in the Czech Republic

Czech Republic – convenient context for investigation of the link between ENGOs and FSP:

- highly developed and internationally connected ENGOs sector
- widespread FSP
- Previous work suggests that FSP here is a sustainability-compliant practice

Preliminary observations:

- ENGOs' outward engagement with FSP is minimal
 - FSP forms an important part among activists of their environmentally-friendly lifestyles.
- How do representatives of Czech ENGOs engage with FSP?



Multiple enactments

- Reality is 'made' through practice
- Practice by materials, humans, non-humans, ideas etc...
- Collective action: enactment



Materials

- 10 semi-structured interviews with representatives from 3 major Czech ENGOs and of 2 environmental magazines
- Wider experience and long-standing observations



ENGOs & 'sustainable food'

- Sustainable food is food which is **bought**
 1. locally
 2. seasonally
 3. organic
 4. fair-trade
- Supermarkets contentious

ENGOS & FSP discourse

“So, as far as local [production] is concerned.....those vegetables growers, the gardeners’ union is very active [...] But they aren’t, obviously....it is nothing organic, they use sprays, pesticides and herbicides....[food growing] existed during the communist period, it was....it had been referred to at that time as escapes from communism, from the regime, people escaped to their countryside cabins and cottages, to allotments.”

(Interview with Veronica activist, 14-9-2011)

But FSP is local, seasonal, often organic, and does not come from supermarkets. So why this attitude? Is this really the dominant account of FSP among Czech environmental activists?



Enacting FSP through campaigning

- Protecting garden colonies in Brno municipality
 - Yet hesitant to describe this as pro-garden activities, rather as pro-democracy
- Natural garden project



Enacting FSP: own food cultivation

- Explicitly important pro-environmental practice
 - Health
 - In touch with 'nature'



Enacting FSP: eating

- Consumption of produce from parents/friends (often partially non-organic, certainly not certified)
 - Preference for FSP produce above any bought items
-

Doubt, uncertainty, uneasiness

FSP as possible campaigning topic?

“One [positive] feature [of FSP] is local production, which substitutes imports [of food] which are wrong....and another thing is that a lot of those allotments are centres of nature, or perhaps we can say centres of biodiversity in the municipality. That means that a lot organisms can be found there, small, large, invisible and microscopic. And obviously a lot of birds in allotments....and in addition [allotments] are nice....some of them are ugly, for sure...but [much better] in comparison with large boxes of trading and industrial hangars or some shopping malls....or golf courses, which is what is under preparation as well, or some sports centres, tennis courses, some inflatable halls which is what is supposed to be built in place of allotments.”

(Interview with Veronica activist; 18-9-2011)



FSP as possible campaigning topic?

- The environmental benefit is understood to be dubious
- Image of a 'habit from communism'
- FSP does not fit the behavioural change model of campaigning – changing people's behaviour by providing information



Some concluding remarks

- Each enactment of FSP comes about through a different set of associated materialities and meanings
- These exist in separate domains
- Discussing them together in one conversation brought out tensions and overlaps between them
 - FSP largely follows 'the hierarchy' but cannot easily be promoted using existing campaigning practices
 - FSP cannot be measured
 - FSP cannot be controlled