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*Sara Svensson**, *Péter Balogh***, *Andrew Cartwright****

Unexpected Counter-Movements to Nationalism: the Hidden Potential of Local Food Communities****

Abstract

This article identifies a hitherto understudied element of local food communities, namely their potential as counter-movements to nationalist discourses, practices and policies. This potential should be particularly valuable in Eastern Europe, where European integration has been severely contested over the past years by political elites. We support our argument by a closer qualitative inquiry into two cases; one with urban-rural dimensions in the metropolitan area of Budapest and one in a more sparsely populated cross-border region at the Slovak-Hungarian border. Based on 18 interviews with coordinators, producers and consumers,

* Halmstad University, Sweden; Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, Hungary

** Institute for Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), Budapest, Hungary

*** Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, Hungary

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numerous visits to both sites, and studying the organisations' documents we conclude that the growth of local food communities contributes to strengthened solidarity in local communities. Although nationalist discourses on buying domestic are rarely contested explicitly, the lack of any reference to national movements and discourses testifies to the primary importance of the local.

Keywords: local food; food citizenship; economic nationalism, economic internationalism, national branding, cross-border cooperation, rural development

Introduction

The aim of this article is to search for and explore pockets of 'hidden' solidarity manifestations in a policy sector where nationalist sentiments and policies are abundant, namely the production, delivery and consumption of food. We use case studies from a country – Hungary – where the national government has paid particular attention to local food production (Balázs 2012).

The study is embedded in a larger European context, in which policy and academic discourses often refer to the notion of 'solidarity' as integral for furthering European integration. A lack of solidarity between nations is perceived as an impending factor. In the Euro-crisis appearing in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the call for solidarity appears especially common. As a typical example of how it is used, Medrano (Medrano 2012: 201) states that "a vision of the European integration process predicated on the normative value of a European community (existent or in-process) requires a demonstration of *solidarity* between its member states" <emphasis added>. Beyond this discussion, which revolves around the extent to which solidarity is felt and/or expressed between member states, practices of solidarity in European societies are associated with citizens' initiatives directed towards particularly vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities or disabled, or with the redistributive and supporting mechanisms embedded in the welfare state. Another common association is with trade unionism, built around solidarity within and across professions. However, pockets, pillars and fragments of solidarity can also be found in other, more unexpected contexts, with or without ramifications for European integration.

Thus, using two cases from Hungary, the research question to be answered is *whether and how the local food movement can provide a counter-movement to nationalism through local solidarity actions embedded in trans-national networks.* The first case study is on a micro-regional local food initiative in the Hungarian-Slovak borderland around the towns of Esztergom and Štúrovo, and the second is an urban local food initiative in the Hungarian capital of Budapest. The case studies draw on eighteen semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders within and external to these movements, as well as on analysis of organisational documents. While the findings from these cases cannot be generalised in terms of the strength of this phenomenon elsewhere, Hungary (representative for Eastern Europe) constitutes 'least likely' cases for a relationship between local food activism and counter-nationalism in that the region is known for weak civil society in general, and environmental civil activism in particular, combined with strong nationalist movements. The empirical material also enables the generation of hypotheses to be tested elsewhere. We argue that even in a general nationalist political climate where policymakers perhaps even more than elsewhere promote food as a national good, there is space for local movements to resist this narrative. The article engages with various strands of literatures around local food production, but we also relate to research on economic nationalism and, to some extent, European integration.

The following section reviews the literature on the local food movement, and places this in relation to the literature on economic nationalism within Europe. Sections 3 and 4 present the empirical material on the two cases, whereas section 5 analyses and discusses the presented data.

Local versus global, or national versus global

There is a large literature around local food, much of which is closely interrelated with two of the largest policy debates of our times, namely those of sustainability (e.g. climate change) and globalisation. A number of authors have tried to ascertain whether local food *really* can save the environment and the climate (Edwards-Jones et al. 2008; Coley, Howard and Winter 2009; Mundler and Rumpus 2012) or to assess the extent to which it can be linked with rural development (Lobley, Butler and Reed

2009; Ilbery and Maye 2006; Ilbery et al. 2004). This article, however, is more related to another strand of research that seeks to define or problematise what 'local' means (Feagan 2007; Connelly, Markey and Roseland 2011; Hinrichs 2000; Selfa and Qazi 2005), and to the empirical debate around the motivation and behaviour of the consumers of local food (Thilmany, Bond and Bond 2008; Pearson et al. 2011; Blake, Mellor and Crane 2010). For instance, the 2005 study by Selfa and Quazi on the perceptions of 'local' in Washington State, US, showed that both consumers and producers put varying meaning into the word 'local', and that it often has more to do with emotional and social connections than with geographic proximity (Selfa and Quazi 2005:463). The research by Blake, Mellor and Crane 2010 found more elasticity in the understanding of local among consumers than among producers in a UK setting. Among consumers, the notion of locality was closely intertwined with, for instance, issues of status, health, and convenience (Blake, Mellor and Crane 2010: 422). An economic approach to the same issue in the US expressed it as a close linkage between private goods and public goods features of the food, and sees it as paramount for a functioning market supply to enhance the understanding of consumers' motivations (Thilmany, Bond and Bond 2008: 1308). While rich in scope and conceptual contributions, we argue that the literature suffers from three gaps that we seek to address through our contribution. First, these debates have been insufficiently linked to the literature on economic nationalism. What happens when consumers are simultaneously exposed to campaigns to buy 'local' and campaigns to buy 'national'? Are these complementary or divergent? Second, while agriculture was, and still is, a cornerstone of the European project, the tension between economic nationalism and the potential transformative aspect of economic internationalism appears underexplored in mainstream policy, political science and Europeanist journals. Third, the reviewed literature is, as much of social science research, heavily Anglo-Saxon/West European dominated, and from the perspective of European integration, there is therefore a need for studies that draw on empirical material from the Union's eastern or southern parts. We briefly review each of these three aspects below before continuing to the empirical cases.

Economic nationalism can be defined as centred around the idea "that economic activities are and should be subordinate to the goal of state-building and the interests of the state" (Gilpin and Gilpin 1987: 31) and

was a highly debated topic in the inter-war period (Helleiner 2002). In fact, an entire book on economic nationalism in the states along the Danube, including Hungary, was authored by a centrally placed American official in the 1920s (Pasvolsky 1928). During and after the war, the topic receded from academic, and to some extent political, attention, only to be revived in the 1990s and 2000s with particular focus on new American protectionism including 'Buy American' campaigns (Frank 2000; Gerth 2004). In Europe, campaigns to buy national exist in a number of countries, including Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the Czech Republic. The European Union has several times cracked down on such campaigns if they involve any role for the state (Hojnik 2012, 2015), but they often continue to be pursued within the private/civil sphere or in grey zones between the public and the private. Drawing on empirical material from Australia, Prideaux has highlighted how the role that companies – both domestic and multinational – play in relation to nationalism has frequently been neglected in the literature (Prideaux 2009).

Even though agriculture has many aspects, a key purpose of this activity is to produce food for humans. For European integration, it has been important both in terms of financial and regulatory activity. The share of EU funds dedicated to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has decreased over recent funding cycles, but direct support accounts for 30% of overall allocation 2014-2020; a further 9% are earmarked for rural development (European Commission Inforegio 2017); and food production, delivery, and consumption also benefit from various schemes within the EU structural funds. Food safety has been recognized as an important European public good, resulting in the establishment of the European Food Safety Authority in 2002 (Klintman and Kronsell 2010; Paul 2012). The regulatory activity around this has also been examined in relation to the role of food crises and 'scandals' (Lezaun and Groenleer 2006) as well as to various other governance aspects such as transparency (Rentrop 2001), the limited global outreach of European regulation (Young 2014) or the influence of interest groups (Kurzer and Cooper 2013). However, with the exception of one article in the Journal of European Public Policy (Grant 2012), in which it is argued that the Common Agricultural Policy constitutes a return to economic nationalism (or economic patriotism), we have not been able to find articles that deal with this in the area of European integration.

National food branding in Hungary

Balázs (2012) describes how supporting local (but also national) food production and distribution has become an increasingly important policy area for the current Hungarian government. This reflects wider debates on the direction that European subsidies for farming should take, ‚such as the phasing out of support for the export of food and the increasing concern with agro-environmental and animal welfare issues. Since taking office in 2010, the Hungarian government stressed the importance of supporting employment intensive, small scaled family farming, introducing more generous tax exemptions for small-scale producers and vendors, easier licensing for selling produce as well as encouraging so called green markets in urban areas (Balázs 2012). It should be noted that the characteristics of food production in Eastern Europe are different from other parts of the continent. One of the main distinctive features is the widespread involvement of the general population in growing food. Whether as full-time or more often as part-time growers, significant numbers of rural and non-rural people grow food. Although there are no precise statistics, various proxies may be used. For example, the number of private holdings in the country is 485,000, out of which over 225,000 are exclusively for own consumption. (Hungarian Statistical Office 2013). The remaining holdings are either mixed or solely for commercial production. Even during the days of collective farming, production was characterised by a dual organisational structure, with large, sometimes gigantic farms on the one hand and millions of small, but no less productive family farms, on the other. In those days, private small-scale production was not only widespread but was an important source of extra food and income. Whereas the main trend in Europe is for farms to get larger and the numbers of full-time farmers to be fewer, the agricultural sector in the Eastern Europe sector still retains an important place in the formal and informal labour market and its contribution to annual GDP in the region. (Cartwright 2013).

The structure of agriculture and favourable geographic conditions made it possible for Hungary to quickly develop an organic produce market in the 1990s. The seeds for this had been sown in the 1980s with the establishment of the Biokultúra Klub, which combined small-scale farming with opposition to the state socialist regime. It was the first of its kind in Eastern Europe. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, this basis was

capitalised on to develop organic products for export to Western Europe. This established a pattern where almost all organic products produced in Hungary were exported, primarily to Austria and Germany (Strenchock 2012, citing Torjusen et al. 2004; Kőszegi 2014).

Table 1. Organic production profile, Hungary, 1998–2013

Year	Nr of farms	Organically farmed hectares	%total HU agricultural land
1998	401	22,501	0.363
2000	762	53,649	0.916
2002	1517	103,700	1.76
2004	1842	133,009	2.27
2006	1974	122,766	2.09
2008	2066	122,817	2.09
2010	2062	130,717	2.1
2011	n/a	124,402	n/a
2013	n/a	ca 124,000	n/a

Source: Strenchock 2012, Solti 2012, Research Institute of Organic Farming 2016.

Thus, the paradoxical situation developed that organic farm grew rapidly, but was entirely oriented towards supplying external markets. The development of an internal demand culture only came later, and partly coincided with the international financial crisis (see table 1).

Concurrently, however, both EU and national policy had focused on developing the competitiveness and quality of farming, which translates into support for medium-size and large farms and related businesses[1]. Despite abundant rhetoric around the role of family farms and 'small farmers' (*kisgazdák*), in most countries in Europe this sector was neglected by policy-makers and, in this sense, the changes introduced by the Hungarian government after 2010 to favour shorter distribution distances and farms

[1] For example, see the list of beneficiaries of the CAP that have annual incomes in excess of one million – farmsubsidy.org.

that employed more people should be seen in that context as marginal, but trend-breaking, interventions. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, this has been coupled with some attention and funding to local food or short-supply chain activities labelled, for instance, as *community supported agriculture* (similar initiatives to those analysed in this article that have started in, for instance, Poland and Romania, see Volz et al. 2017), often tied to urban centres. In Hungary, the period after 2010 has also seen a growth in auxiliary NGOs devoting effort to public advocacy in the area, with the organization *Kislépték* (Small-scale)[2] being one of the most influential in terms of influencing policy.

The promotion of specifically Hungarian/national products is not as pronounced as that of local products, which may be due to cautiousness given EU rules and norms. However, government documents dealing with 'local' products also occasionally equals these with domestic (*hazai*) such as indicated in the heading of a government press release on the topic of local markets in 2016, entitled "More local markets, more domestic products on offer for the shoppers" (Government of Hungary 2016). Another press release cites the speech of a state secretary emphasising that "When we buy from Hungarian small-scale producers, this is in reality patriotism revealed through a small-scale act." (Government of Hungary 2014). The association "Hungarian Products" was founded in 2006 as a branding (certifying) and advocacy organisation. (It has its official seat in the small town of Lábatlan, which is within catchment area of the Small Basket Shopping Community, one of the case studies in this article.) According to survey research commissioned by the organisation and undertaken at the Budapest Business School, 94% recognise its "Hungarian Product" label, and 87% sometimes or often check the origin of the product they buy (Hungarian Products 2007). The offer of not only labelled, but products designed in Hungarian colours, have notably increased in Hungarian shops over the last years, sometimes combined with slogans such as that depicted in Image 1, "Hungarian butter for Hungarian buyers" (if foreigners residing in Hungary should abstain from buying is not clear).

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[2] Active advocacy and results of it are demonstrated on their website: see for instance an article on information exchange with authorities regarding regulations for home-produced bakery http://www.kisleptek.hu/kistermeloi_sutemeny/ (in Hungarian)

Image 1. Butter. Hungarian butter for Hungarian buyers! Photo: The authors

In what follows, we review two organisations that have developed within the last ten years within this policy landscape, in each case trying to establish whether and how the organisations have provided a counter-movement to nationalism through the support of trans-national networks. Both organisations can be characterised as forms of alternative agro-food networks (Goszczyński and Knieć 2011) or regional agro-food networks (Burandt et al. 2013), but not consisting mainly of producers but of policy entrepreneurs connecting consumers to producers.

Rural and transnational connections in the city: the Shopping Bag movement

The Food Bag Organisation (in Hungarian *Szatyorbolt*) was initiated by a group of like-minded friends in Budapest, Hungary, in 2008. The name of the group derives from its original key activity, namely, to supply a pre-ordered weekly bag of locally produced and/or organic food to subscribed members. The organisation has two parts, a general shop selling fruit, vegetables, dairy produce and some meat, and a non-governmental organization seeking to raise awareness about the importance of organic and locally produced food, and to set examples on how to live by these principles. The shop operates as a limited responsibility company with two owners, one of the founders who is also very active in and around the enterprise, and an external investor. It employs four persons on a full-time or part-time basis and distributes food from more than 80 producers. The business part has an invested capital of ten million HUF, and the turn-over in 2015 was 21,798, 000 HUF, equalling appr. 70,000 EUR (Credit Reform 2016). This number has been steadily increasing, albeit not dramatically, over the past years. The facilities are centrally located and there are several collection points around the city. The shop and the association are closely interlinked, but because of the different regulatory frameworks for companies and non-profits, there needs to be clear operational boundaries. For example, any work in the shop should be paid work and not undertaken by volunteers, who should be attending the various activities of the association. In practice, our observations showed that sometimes these boundaries are crossed.

The participants come from Budapest and the surrounding countryside. They have different professions and income levels, with those in their 20s and 30s being overrepresented among the group of activists. Amongst the client/customer supporters, females with small children are the largest group. While in Western Europe such initiatives are often associated with the middle class, the Shopping Bag cannot be described as a middle class phenomenon, partly because Hungary, as other Eastern European countries, has a small and shrinking middle-class (Keller 2011). Many of these shoppers would struggle to pay for a summer holiday or afternoon school activities. Concurrently, those on lowest incomes, the large part of Hungarian society living in poverty, would not be found as customers or activists. Compared with supermarkets, the cost of local and organically

produced food is higher, even if the Food Bag Shop constantly tries to minimize the difference as far as possible. There is some diversity amongst the different groups, for example, there is notable presence of foreigners, especially other European Union citizens. This is notable in a country with low immigration rates. A review of all the suppliers (excluding cosmetics) as displayed in presentations of themselves on the Shopping Bag's website, showed a mix of family farms, often inherited or formed in the early 1990s during the de-collectivization process, and 'urbanites' moving out of the city to try something new.

Solidarity features in relation to two out of three interweaved rationales for involvement, namely health, environment and social impact. The main initial motivation among shoppers comes from a concern with the *quality* of the food, closely linked to the expected benefits for one's own (or one's family's) health and sense of well-being. For example, mothers of young children were frequent shoppers, and interviewees explained that they shopped at the Food Bag Shop due to its food being 'of quality' or 'credible'. This was expressed in terms like: "It is important for me to get good quality food for me and my family. That's all, really." (Food Bag Shop shopper, Interviewee14). "We can buy high-quality items for a very good price, and very often we get our hands on such things that you cannot even get from the small-scale producers at the local market. (Food Bag Shop shopper, Interviewee 12). Secondly, environmental impact was frequently mentioned, even though it generally came as a second stage rationale, something learnt following an increase in intake of locally and/or organically produced food. Unlike health, environmental motivations are related to solidarity, in that it has to do with concerns for future generations, i.e. intra-generational solidarity. Social motivations to be involved as activist or shopper are the most multi-faceted expressions of solidarity. 'Community' is an important term for the founders and, as derived from interviews and observations, its Hungarian translation (közösség) is frequently used by both activists and shoppers. According to their website, a "shopping community" is "a group of people <who> come together and cooperate on the same goals and values". The ultimate aim is that "those who buy from Szatyorbolt know who and how that food was produced, and know that everyone in the chain from the farmers' land to the shopping bag, did it with care and *respect for others* and himself as well" (emphasis added). However, amongst the small numbers of those shoppers questioned, an explicit solidarity aspect

with local producers did not materialise unless prompted. One example of 'bad' multi-nationals versus 'good' small-scale farmers, can be seen in the following quote.

> *It is of course also important that we don't use our money to support the multi-nationals, but that we even know the name of those who produce what we shop and that I recognise his/her work, that is the work that he/she does instead of me <…> : yeah... because we also of course were thinking about moving out to the 'province' <a common and not necessarily pejorative expression for all places outside the capital Budapest> and we do everything, but it would be a huge work if we should keep animals, make our own butter, cook our soaps, and grow our vegetables and fruits, and make stewed fruit of all that, so I really respect the work of the person who does that. Because it means that I can do other things instead of that*. (Shopper at the Food Bag Shop, EMP 12)

Finally, the social dimensions of food production, distribution and consumption concern shoppers and those at the margins of the movement the least, though it was valued by the core activists. It was mentioned in speeches made by event organisers in the presence of rural farmers as observed by the authors. The founder described solidarity in these terms.

> *... it is also solidarity with the employees who work here. We always see, we try to be socially sensitive, how we can help them, to give them a job, but at the same time being able to employ so ... there is also this level. We don't only choose people only based on their skills, capacities, <…> we try to be as flexible as possible, so she can come and work for us for money. And by giving more, sometimes, it is not the easiest way, but we choose this and then we want to do the business in this way*. (Food Bag Shop Founder, Interviewee 10)

Thus, the rationales for solidarity expression through participation in the movement operate within a hierarchy. One divide is between the 'core', consisting of funders, owners, employees, association drivers and association members and those more peripheral supporters who 'just' shop. Another is between the demand-side (mainly urban) and the supply-side (rural), where the latter may be empowered by initiatives such as the Food Bag Shop. This finding of a hierarchical relationship among

motivational factors reflects the general policy and political map in Eastern Europe, where environmental concerns tend to be less of a public priority, as demonstrated, for instance, by the relative absence of successful green parties.

Moving to the key concern of this article, the relation of the initiative to nationalism and trans-nationalism, the qualitative research revealed silence on the first dimension, and some linkage with the second. First and foremost, the prevailing and intensifying nationalist streaks of public policy and public life, was not in any way manifested in the display of products and other objects observed in the shop, the association and related activities, and could not be traced in any of the interviews conducted. This was so although it could be readily imagined that current Hungarian policy and politics could create ideological dilemmas. Supporting small-scale farmers and eating locally produced food may well fit within nationalist discourses, and some farmers selling to the Food Bag Shop would support nationalist or right-wing parties. Nevertheless, a review of producer profiles on the website showed very little emphasis on the 'Hungarian' dimension of the produce. Would such an emphasis to be made, there is the potential for a value clash with the internationally minded urbanites who make up an important part of the clientele. However, we found no such examples, and it would require more qualitative research to establish if, when, and how such clashes would occur. In response to a question regarding whether the Food Bag Shop would refrain from buying from a farmer with far-right right-wing views, the founder replied no, claiming that as long as the farmer produced food according to their principles, they would buy that.

Thus, the shared desire to buy things that are 'authentic' and 'credible' in a way that multi-national companies' products are not appeared, at least in this context, as de-linked from nationalist discourses. Anthropologist András Czeglédy coined the term 'urban peasants' for people who liked to grow their own food not necessarily because they had to, but more from the belief that it was better and that it gave a strong, culturally based satisfaction (Czeglédy 2002). Although the number of people directly involved in food production is declining, support for the local food movement gives another opportunity for people to remain close to ideas of authenticity and self-provisioning, and at least with respect to the Shopping Bag movement, the possibility to do so without supporting the abstract notion of 'Hungarianness'.

While multi-national companies were openly rejected, the research found that these ideas about 'authenticity' that have been prevalent in the global discourse were clearly present both among the initiative's core (activists) and peripheral (shoppers) actors. Moreover, European influence could be seen in the composition of activists and volunteers, both in the structured form of exchange programs and in the form of contact between temporarily residing Europeans with the Food Bag movement. Core activists have repeatedly participated in European events around social entrepreneurship and local food, and from there brought back, for instance, the ideas around social impact on marginalised groups mentioned above. Likewise, the review of the agricultural suppliers as described on the Food Bag website revealed that many of them highlighted having spent time abroad as a source of inspiration for organic farming practices.

Concurrently, the importance of this should not be over-stated. As evidenced by the interviews and observations of this case, promoting social solidarity through local shopping needs greater promotion and learning in order to strengthen this as a motivation for shoppers.

A transnational local food community: the Small Basket association in the Hungarian-Slovak borderland

Since the end of WWI, the border between Hungary and Slovakia follows the Danube River 150 kilometres in West-East direction, before the river turns southward. Shortly before the bend of the river, there is a so called 'twin town'. The Mária Valéria Bridge connects Hungarian Esztergom with Slovak Štúrovo (known to Hungarians as 'Párkány'). Štúrovo is an ethnically mixed town of Hungarians and Slovak, surrounded by largely Hungarian-speaking villages. Esztergom, with 28,000 inhabitants, is the home of the Small Basket Shopping Community (in Hungarian *Kiskosár Bevásárló Közösség*, in this article as well as in daily speech referred to as Kiskosár), created in 2011 by a local civil society entrepreneur with a long history of involvement in an organisation called Esztergom Sustainability and Culture Association (Esztergomi Környezetkultúra Egyesület). Kiskosár is built on the resources of, and serves, both the Hungarian and Slovak towns and their surrounding rural areas. This area is the site for numerous cross-

border activities (Balogh and Pete 2018; Svensson and Nordlund 2015), often initiated by, or with the involvement of, the Ister-Granum EGTC (an acronym for 'European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation', a legal form introduced by the European Union for cross-border cooperation), which since 2012 has made the production of local food production one of its main priorities (Interviewee 3). (Notably, development of rural areas through cross-border programs is not unique to this border. The Hungarian border area with the newer EU member state Croatia has also with some success utilised such funds, see Tésits and Alpek 2014 for a positive evaluation on the pages of this journal.) Kiskosár is not one of the EGTC's own initiatives however but has received its support as it grew from the enthusiasm of individuals devoted to local food with connections on both sides.

In formal terms, Kiskosár is not an independent entity but operates under the auspices of this larger organisation. In the region around Esztergom, it is the only significant shopping community and it is important for the leaders of Kiskosár to emphasise that they see themselves as part of a larger shopping community movement. They view the regular 'local product markets' such as the one in Esztergom on Sundays as impersonal and with no capacity for community-building. What distinguishes Kiskosár even from other shopping communities is that they insist on direct contact between the producer and buyer. They deliberately reject the approach of the well-known supermarket system whereby the buyer receives a box with his/her ordered items and has no face to face contact with the producer. In the ethos of Kiskosár it is important for community-building that members meet both the producers and the buyers. As the Manager for Producer contacts and Products says: "They [buyers] stand in a queue, talk to each other, and become acquainted with each other" (Interviewee 1).

In 2016, Kiskosár worked together with thirty producers and had 500 members (shoppers). From this group, two thirds come from Hungary and one-third from Slovakia. They are based in a territory that roughly overlaps with that of the Ister-Granum EGTC, which consists of 82 local governments around the Danube, Ipoly, and Hron rivers. Most producers are located within a 40 kilometre distance, which is the condition to be called local, but when the managers were not able to find a specific product in the vicinity they sometimes increase the distance so that they have some producers who come from as far away as 70 kilometres. Produce is collected by consumers bi-weekly on Thursday evenings. The working procedure

is that the Manager for Produce calls the producers eight days ahead to hear what they will offer; the available produce is announced a week in advance and community members can order until Monday midnight. On Thursday between 5.30–8pm community members and customers ought to come and pick up their orders. The crucial part of community-building has so far been with producers, with whom contact is regularly maintained through phone calls by the Manager for Produce Contact (Interviewee 1), described by the managers as follows:

> *When I began working here I also started to call the producers <regarding the weekly orders> but it turned out to be very important that they speak to Zoltán <the Manager for Producer Contacts>. He calls them and asks about their personal lives, they tell him and he listens. For instance, one of our producers has got a very bad lumbago, so we called him last week and said we're sorry about that…>* (Interviewee 2) *We called him without a reason. So it was not to ask 'when can we expect you back?' But really, 'how are you? We haven't heard from you for a long time'*. (Interviewee 1)

The quote demonstrates how the organisers value and nurture the human relationship next to the professional one. Concurrently, they are aware that such relationships are time-consuming and are difficult to maintain as the organisation grows. Therefore, they feature producers on the website, but also plan the same for consumers, to make clear that both producers and consumers are equally important for genuine community-building. By becoming a member of the Community, there is an expectation that customers will not only come to get their produce but should show a real interest in the life conditions of the producers and be willing to create links. For that reason, they strongly discourage appearing at the bi-weekly hand-over without pre-orders just to shop. During a meeting with producers at which the research team took place, they discussed introducing different prices to try to further prevent this practice.

This attitude towards transactions seemed to be present among producers and consumers as well, at least among those interviewed for this research. A producer explained why he chose this as one of his channels for selling his product (honey).

> *I don't like to do it via shops but prefer to sell directly to customers. And here at Small Basket I thought I would find such a community [of buyers] that knows what they want to buy, and I don't have to explain from scratch why honey is healthy, etc. This is such a shopping community that has a conscious attitude to their eating habits.* (Interviewee 4)

Interviewed shoppers emphasised the community-building as a value in itself, but also as something that would create trust in the quality of the product.

> *[Why do you come here?] The answer is very simple. Here there is contact between the seller and the buyer. It is not just that you take down an item from the shelf that's non-personal, but here you know everyone.* (Interviewee 6)

We found no 'hard data' on the composition of these groups, but our interviewees and observations of the produce hand-over generally supported an image of the Community having diversity in terms of age, but with an over-emphasis on the 30–50 age bracket both among producers and consumers and families with at least two children are typical. Whereas producers come from both sides of the border (with a 2/3 to 1/3 ratio to Hungary), most of the consumers are from Hungary[3]. There are registered shoppers in seven towns and villages in Hungary, whereas on the Slovak side only Štúrovo is represented.

There are marked differences between Hungary and Slovakia when it comes to support for local food production. In Slovakia, this is not taken as seriously in national policy-making as in Hungary, says a representative of the cross-border cooperation organisation Ister-Granum EGTC (EMP 3). This means that there are more events in Hungary in general related to local food production, which means that Hungarian customers may be prompted to seek this to a larger extent. This also has consequences for the possibilities to market the initiative and grow.

Representatives for the key interest organisation for large-scale farmers (MOSZ) emphasised in an interview for the project that they saw little

[3] It should be noted that the Hungarian side of the border is somewhat richer, with the Slovak side being characterized by high unemployment, out-migration, etc. (Balogh and Pete 2018).

significance for the overall market of such local markets or shopping communities, and argued that in the general debate, it is more important that a product is national than local because "this creates employment, growth, etc." (Interviewee 7).

The Small Basket Shopping Community is an organisation that is part of a global movement promoting local food production, but that 'buy local' has generally been manifested at only two different scales. The first is the local as in 'rural', 'the local village/town' or a specific region, all tied to sub-units of the national state. The second would be approaches in which efforts are made to make customers buy products produced in their own country ('Buy Hungarian!' or 'Buy Austrian!'). This is something that large interest organisations in Hungary, such as MOSZ, stand behind and promote.

However, the Small Basket Shopping Community differs from these two scales in that it deliberately markets a territory that spans a national border (the Hungarian-Slovak border) and therefore comprises citizens of two countries. This has often been on an ethno-linguistic basis – all Slovakian producers we met were Hungarian-speakers[4] – and an added value of the Community can then be seen as a way of strengthening Hungarian-Hungarian links in general, but also as a way of supporting the poorer Slovak side. The success of this has not been unqualified. Most of the buyers still come from Hungary, or even from the town where the organisation is based, but on the producer side it has managed to achieve a true cross-border dimension.

Key findings and concluding remarks

In a world where nationalism is on the rise, there is substantial risk that local food movements in Europe may become hijacked by nationalist sentiments and promoted within nationalist discourses, which ultimately may serve traditional large industrial agricultural production units of the involved country.

[4] On the Slovak side, people involved in food production are overwhelmingly ethnic Hungarians, which can explain their predominance among those coming from the Slovak side of the border.

Based on our investigation of two initiatives in Hungary operating in a political environment that in the period from 2010 has become increasingly marked by nationalist rhetoric, we argue that local food can indeed provide a counter-movement to nationalism through local solidarity actions embedded in trans-national networks.

Both organisations draw on solidarity that is different from usual manifestations of this kind. Solidarity is an important dimension in the growth of the local and organic food movement in Hungary, even though shoppers are primarily driven by the belief that local food is healthier than conventionally produced and distributed food (this is similar to results in studies on consumers in local food movements in Romania, see Bîrhală and Möllers 2014). However, this solidarity is unevenly distributed, and relates to distinct groups that are different from the motivations that are instrumental in other types of solidarity actions. For shoppers, environmental concerns towards future generations are a stronger motivation for involvement than outright solidarity towards local farmers or those pursuing sustainable employment practices. However, support for small-scale farmers struggling against the dominance of multi-national companies is clearly evident. Core activists are aware of and committed to environmental and social principles, but they concede that they have not been able to convey the importance of the latter to consumers who are primarily interested in healthy food. On the supply-side, the farmers describe themselves as committed to environmental solidarity, and at least some of them endorse the importance of supporting disadvantaged groups through employment.

However, and importantly, the data derived from the qualitative research on these two initiatives did not find expressions of solidarity as 'patriotism', as expressed by a government spokesman cited in the section on the Hungarian policy landscape (Government of Hungary 2014.). The Kiskosár cross-border shopping community clearly utilised the fact that suppliers are ethnic kin but did not highlight this. Importantly, we did not find active resistance towards nationalistic discourses, but the very absence of such a discourse constitutes important acts in a national setting permeated by discussions on how 'Hungarianness' (encompassing broader Hungary) can and should be promoted.

Thus, the manifest solidarity resources have potential for exploitation for those seeking to counteract national discourses, if it is combined with distinctive uses of transnational networks. The initiative operating

in a cross-border region between two EU member states, showed the potential for policy-makers seeking to promote European integration to make more use of the fact that a third of the EU's citizens live in border areas. The initiative operating in an urban environment showed how international advocacy around environmental and social sustainability can be of lasting influence also in unexpected settings, leading initiatives to prioritise tackling challenges like access to what is perceived as healthy and fair food produced by disadvantaged groups rather than promoting distinct Hungarian features.

Since the start of the political-economic transformation nearly three decades ago, much hope for long-term democratic, economic and local development in what are now the Eastern members of the European Union has been vested in the strength of civil society, especially as expressed through acts that express solidarity across different groups. Concurrently, many worry about what (the return of) nationalism, which in Hungary is the result of actively pursued politics under the government elected in 2010 on a strongly national-conservative agenda, will mean for long-term European integration. Nationalism is on the rise in other parts of Eastern Europe as well, and while the results from Hungary cannot be automatically generalised to the entire region, it would be important to empirically investigate what is happening in this respect with the increasing numbers of local food movements that have been documented in, for instance, Poland (Sylla et al. 2017) and Romania (Bîrhală and Möllers 2014).

Worldwide, food is strongly related to identity and has often been used for nation-branding. The question if the local food movement to some extent can withstand these national discourses is, therefore, of interest for policy-makers that do not support this linkage, and for the academic research around local food and food citizenship.

List of interviewees

Interviewee 1: Manager for producer contacts and products, Kiskosár bevásárló közösség (Small Basket Shopping Community)

Interviewee 2: Manager for daily operations and the volunteer organization, Kiskosár bevásárló közösség (Small Basket Shopping Community)

Interviewee 3: Manager at the Ister-Granum EGTC and representative in the local council (Fidesz)

Interviewee 4: Producer at Kiskosár bevásárló közösség (Small Basket Shopping Community)
Interviewee 5: First-time shopper at Kiskosár bevásárló közösség (Small Basket Shopping Community)
Interviewee 6: Long-term member of the Kiskosár bevásárló közösség (Small Basket Shopping Community)
Interviewee 7: Senior representative Hungarian National Alliance of Agricultural Cooperatives and Producers, (MOSZ – Mezőgazdasági Szövetkezők és Termelők Országos Szövetsége)
Interviewee 8: Counselor, National Alliance of Agricultural Cooperatives and Producers (MOSZ – Mezőgazdasági Szövetkezők és Termelők Országos Szövetsége)
Interviewee 9: Counselor National Alliance of Agricultural Cooperatives and Producers (MOSZ – Mezőgazdasági Szövetkezők és Termelők Országos Szövetsége)
Interviewee 10: Founder and Manager, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 11: Volunteer, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 12: Shopper, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 13: Shopper, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 14: Shopper, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 15: Employee, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 16: Volunteer, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 17: Volunteer, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.
Interviewee 18: Volunteer, Szatyorbolt/ Food Bag Shop movement.

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