DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN LATVIA

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Abstract
Although there is no consensus among scholars and professionals regarding the definition of the local food system, nevertheless, the local food systems or alternative food networks are no less important and suitable tool for solving environmental, economical (farmers' and rural inhabitants' income increasing) and social issues, and encouraging the further sustainable development of rural areas and communities. The aim of study is to assess the state and recent characteristics of the local food systems and its development in Latvia. The paper presents results of a study of the typology and categorisation of both the producers and distribution channels, and development of the local food systems as a whole, especially in Latvia. Various sources of materials and data have been used: the academic literature, legislation, reports and recommendations, as well as web pages, the internet and data from Food and Veterinary Service (FVS). The typology and categories of local food systems as well as short food supply chains are characterised, and its existence in Latvia is given. Besides, it is essential that the different kind of its merging organizations and projects supporting distribution of local food is implemented. The development of consumer groups for local food purchasing is important. While the requirements for small farmers–food producers are the same as those for large producers, the results suggest that during the recent years an increasing number of home-made food producers is observed.
Key words: local food, chain, farms, home-made.

Introduction

Primary agricultural production plays a decreasing role in rural economy in terms of population and employment (Moreddu, 2013), especially in small farms (Melece, 2014); between 2005 and 2013 there was a reduction by almost one fifth in agricultural labour input in the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2015). These results demonstrate that the population living in rural areas is more likely to be exposed to poverty or social exclusion risk (Eurostat, 2014). Therefore, the diversification of farm activities, multifunctionality and pluriactivity become more significant solution for farms viability (Blad, 2010; Turtoi et al., 2013), especially for semi-subsistence farms (Davidova et al., 2013), where special attention is paid to diversification into non-agricultural activities; supporting the start up and growth of micro businesses. Some of them, which are recommended as a tool for income rising, are revitalizing food traditions and producing artisan or craft foods.

The development of local food systems (hereafter - LFSs), including short food supply chains (hereafter - SFSCs), as an innovation (Coudel et al., 2013; Kellou, 2014; eXtension, 2015), is a widely recognised tool for the further rural development via strengthening of small farm viability and rural population's business, and employment diversification (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Wisser et al., 2013; Melece, 2014; Schmid et al., 2014; eXtension, 2015). Furthermore, LFSs can create wider economic, environmental and social benefits such as transport cost savings, fewer emissions etc. (Wisser et al., 2013; European Network…, 2014). Moreover, the landscape value and quality of life in rural areas, the local food systems are the basis for other agricultural activity such as rural tourism (Sidali et al., 2013; Bessiere and Tibere, 2013) and recreation (e.g. agro-tourism, eco-tourism), supporting economic value for rural development (Schmid et al., 2012) offering opportunities for tourism and further positive associated economic impacts.

Consumers are increasingly interested in the food production/consumption system, which is aware of its individual, economic, social, cultural, environmental and geographical implications (Hernandez, 2009; Albisu, 2014). Recently, the relations between producers and consumers, so-called co-creation (Hoyer et al., 2010), has increased significantly (e.g. Borri et al., 2014), the products are largely determined by the consumers' wishes, the degree of awareness and preferences.

It is acknowledged on the European Union (EU) level, when the Committee of the Regions recognized that the LFSs can boost rural development and highlighted the benefits of LFSs, and proposed suggestions for improving local market access for farmers and food producers (European Network…, 2014). Local farming and direct sales are also supported by the European Parliament and the Council (2012), who stressed the necessity of EC report of new local farming and direct sales labelling scheme; and it is stressed in that stronger connections could be established between local agricultural, tourism and food supply sectors.

Taking into account the above mentioned considerations, the aim of the study was to assess the state and recent characteristics of the local food systems and its development in Latvia. The following tasks of study have been determined: to estimate the recent definitions, meanings and description of LFSs, AFN, SFSCs; to evaluate the typology and categorisation of

LFSs distribution channels and its existence in Latvia; to assess the number and activities (products) of small food producers such as home-made food producers, agricultural cooperatives and individual merchants.

Materials and Methods

This study is part of a broader research aiming at identifying development issues of local food systems in Latvia.

The study proceeds in three stages or phases:

- Firstly, to review the scientific literature, aimed at estimating the recent definitions, meanings and description of local food systems (LFSs), its relationship and differences with alternative food networks (AFNs) and short food supply chains (SFSCs);
- Secondly, to review literature and evaluate the state of typology and categorisation of the local food distribution or food chains, and characterise it in general, and particularly in Latvia by estimating web sites and information on the internet. In addition, it aims at describing new initiatives and activities, regarding local food system development;
- Thirdly, to investigate and analyse the data of Register of Food and Veterinary Service (FVS) for estimating the number and activities (by group of products) of small food producers (farmers), such as home-made food producers, agricultural service providing cooperatives and individual merchants.

Various sources of the materials and data have been used: the academic or scholar literature, legislation, reports and recommendations, as well as web pages, the internet and data from Food and Veterinary Service (FVS).

The appropriate research methods have been used in the study, mainly qualitative and also quantitative: monographic; analysis and synthesis, data grouping, logical and abstract constructive, expert, etc.

The food producers in this paper are both the producers of agricultural non-processed products and the processed food products.

Results and Discussion

The growing popularity of the local food and many studies and publications on it notwithstanding, there is still no academic or professional consensus on the term and definition of ‘local food’ (Johnson et al., 2013; Wuben et al., 2013). Moreover, there is no consensus what main factors or criteria are in need of defining either.

The scholars have different views, defining and describing the LFSs, Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) and SFSCs. Wuben et al. (2013) explain that the term of SFSC usually is associated with ‘local food’, alternative food networks and systems. However, Wuben et al. (2013) argue that the definitions of local food seem to emphasise geographical proximity, whereas definitions of SFSCs emphasise social relationships. These arguments are opposed by the opinion of number of scholars (e.g. Visser et al., 2013), who include the social interaction between the producers and consumers, and community, into the LFSs. Moreover, Porro et al. (2014) argue that geographical proximity is only one component of the definition of ‘local’; and there are several other features that consumers usually associate with the definition of LFSs, in particular methods of production. But in any case, the central idea of LFSs is a commitment to social co-operation, local economic development, and a close geographical and social relationship between producers and consumers (Karner, 2010). Nevertheless, the main idea of the local food systems is a commitment to social co-operation, local economic development, and close geographical and social relations between producers and consumers, which are the main basis for food re-localisation (Renting and Wiskerke, 2010).

We accept the opinion that the SFSCs is as part of LFSs and relates to the distribution of food products with a regional orientation, short-circuiting the long, anonymous supply chain characteristic of conventional supply chains, and has the intention to generate extra added value; and increase profit for producers.

Table 1

Different types for extending the short food supply chains (SFSCs)

Face-to-face or direct	Proximate	Extended
Farm shops; Farmers markets; Roadside sales; Pick-your-own; Box schemes; Home deliveries; Phone, e-mail order; E-commerce.	Farm shop groups; Regional hallmarks; Consumer cooperatives; Community supported agriculture; Special events, fairs (articulation in time); Local shops, restaurants, tourist enterprises; Retailers (e.g. food or speciality shops); Catering for institutions (canteens, schools).	Brands or labels (certification; approving); Public food procurement; Catering services for institutions; Reputations.

Source: based on Renting et al., 2003; Hernandez, 2009; Galli, Brunori, 2013; Becheva, 2014.

Table 2

Direct sales categories and their existence in Latvia

Category	Description	Latvia
Sales at farm	Point of sale where a producer or a group of producers sells his products to the final consumer on the farm site.	Yes
Pick-your-own	Picking in the farms by the buyers (payment of the amounts collected).	Yes
Sale on the roadside	Sales by the producer of its own products alongside a road.	Yes
Markets (e.g. farmers, “Green”)	Markets in which farmers and producers sell their products directly to consumer.	Yes
Ordered delivery	Deliveries of products ordered by phone, the internet at the customer’s home or relay points.	Yes
Boxes	Boxes or baskets (individual or collective), e.g. vegetables and fruits, regularly delivered to relay points.	Yes
Fests, fairs	Producer takes part in an event, where he presents and sells his products.	Yes
Collective sale outlet	Retail outlet, managed by several producers who jointly organize the sale of their products.	Not known*

* - authors did not find any information
Source: authors’ compilation based on their own research and Karner, 2010; Comps et al., 2011; Kneafsey et al., 2013; Moroney et al., 2013; Becheva, 2014; eXtension, 2015

The types and categories of distribution channels of LFSs and SFSCs

The types and categories of the LFSs and SFSCs (Table 1) are the following: 1) direct sale with several categories; 2) intermediate or proximate distribution, including different categories; and 3) extended territorially with only few categories (Treager, 2007; Renting et al., 2003; Hernandez, 2009; Becheva, 2014).

Apart from these types, there is also one option - self-security, where consumers are as producers, e.g. on allotments or community gardens.

The direct sale can be divided into: 1) sale on the production site; 2) sale outside the production site (e.g. farmers markets, roadside). The categories of the direct sale, its description and existence in Latvia presented in Table 2 demonstrate that practically all categories of the direct sale exist in Latvia.

Intermediate or proximate distribution or marketing channels generally include all marketing opportunities in the local supply chain that are not farmer-to-consumer transactions (Low et al., 2015), including consumers’ initiatives (Table 3). Consumers’ involvement or activities become apparent in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) that emphasises participation, civic responsibility, and volunteerism (Anderson et al., 2014). It is an alliance of concerned consumers and local farmers: the former agree to buy seasonal food from the latter, which are responsible of the delivery at the customers’ homes (Hernandez, 2009).

In recent years, particular new types of LFSs (AFN) have developed, i.e. initiatives in which citizens play an active role in the initiation and operation of new forms of consumer – producer relations. Examples of such initiatives are consumer cooperatives and consumer purchasing groups (CPG) of local and organic food, which buy food products directly from primary producers/farmers. These groups are operating in several countries, including Europe, for example: GAS in Italy (Borri et al., 2014), AMAP in France (Lagane, 2015), GASAP in Belgium (Comps et al., 2011), similar initiatives have arisen in other countries European countries (Balazs, 2012; Becheva, 2014); and are supported by governments, RDP and other public or private institutions. For example, “Making Local Food Work” (UK) from 2007-2012, utilising GBP 10 million, has supported over 1,200 community food enterprises, inter alia, CSA, farmers markets, food coops and buying groups as well as country markets (Soil Association, 2012). Renting et al. (2012) these CPG groups as a new type of food chain named as Civic Food Networks (CFN), which go beyond direct-selling and marketing activities operated and initiated by producers, since consumers are the main initiators.

However, several scholars (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Becheva, 2014) argue that CPG (e.g. AMAP, GAS) are equivalent of CSA; other researchers feel that those are only kind of the CAS (e.g. Soil Association, 2012). We distinguish CPG as a separate category of the distribution channels, because there is no any other type or category of CAS in Latvia. Table 3 presents different categories of intermediate or proximate distribution channels of local food and its existence in Latvia. The development of CPG in Latvia is successful; and at present there are more than 15 CPG, which include around 500 members providing approximately 2,000 consumers.

Table 3

Intermediate distribution channels and its existence in Latvia

Category	Description	Latvia
Shops, supermarkets or specialised shops	Selling products to shops.	Approved*
Catering services (e.g. restaurants, rural tourists)	Selling products to another producer who will use them in meals, farm traditional catering.	Yes
Wholesaler	Sales of products through a professional seller who works directly with consumers.	Approved*
Cooperatives	Cooperative purchases members' products and sells them directly to consumers or retail.	Yes
Networks to promote regional products	Associative or public structures gathering local products from producers and organize the sale to consumers.	Not known**
Interdependent networks	Associations of producers and consumers jointly managing sale of food commodities.	Yes
Consumers' purchasing groups	Groups of consumers purchasing local food directly from farmers.	Yes
CSA	Consumers share the risks and rewards of production.	Not known**

* - approved producers; ** - authors did not find any information
Source: authors' compilation based on own research, Comps et al., 2011; Kneafsey et al., 2013; Moroney et al., 2013; Becheva, 2014; Borri et al., 2014; eXtension, 2015.

In Latvia, the CPG or direct purchase groups (Tiešās pirkšanas pulciņi) have formed over the last three years, and more than 15 groups in Riga and other cities (Sigulda, Cēsis, Valmiera, Smiltene, Ikšķile, Ādaži and others) have been established. The total number of involved families is more than 500 with 2,000 consumers, who are now cooperating more with more than 70 organic farmers, including home-made food producers (Tiešā pirkšana, 2014). All activities regarding ordering and distribution of the food products are performed weekly on voluntary basis periodically for each member to guarantee the opportunity to buy organic food at affordable prices. The system operates on the basis of initiatives and does not require financial contributions - merely time. Each group establishes the most suitable arrangements; on average this duty takes about 4 hours once a month or two months.

Furthermore, even some fruitful initiatives and activities, which support local food systems' development in Latvia (Melece, 2014) have been realised. These are associated with: 1) combining the home-made or artisan food producers and craftsmen in the societies or projects at both national and local level, for example, Society „Artisan food producers", the project "Local Identity Product (LIP) – sustainable support systems for communities in Europe" with the brand "Local Identity Product (LIP)", the project created to represent all kinds of farms and companies in the countryside under the brand "Country Goodies"; 2) establishing the cooperatives for marketing and selling of local food, in which smaller food producers and farmers participate. For instance, Agricultural Services Cooperative Society (ASCS) „Saime" (Family) has launched a project for the retail chain „Maxima" (LPKS Saimes galds, 2014).

Producers of local food in Latvia

The producers of local food may be divided into several groups by ownership: farms, farmers' cooperatives and individual merchants (mainly fishermen in Latvia). However, the small food processing enterprises in the status of Limited Liability Company are also involved on SFSC; they are not included in this study, because the main accent of study is put on farmers as potential and aimed receivers of added value.

Latvia lacks national rules or regulations, and it has only guidelines that define and regulate the home-made production, and it falls under the same EU Regulations as large-scale producers. Moreover, the recommendations of Guidelines of Good Hygiene Practice are interpreted by FVS officials differently. It means that development of small local food producers, such as home-made producers, occurs contrary to the current regulatory framework. There is another practice in several EU countries and, moreover, the Latvian practice differs from EU recommendations. For example, in Hungary, in 2006 there were regulations for the small-scale producers adopted to ease food hygiene conditions for natural persons producing and selling products in small quantities; and in the 2010 amendment to the regulation increased the quantities for selling and allowed small-scale producers living in any part of the country to sell their products in the capital (Balazs, 2012). In spire of that,

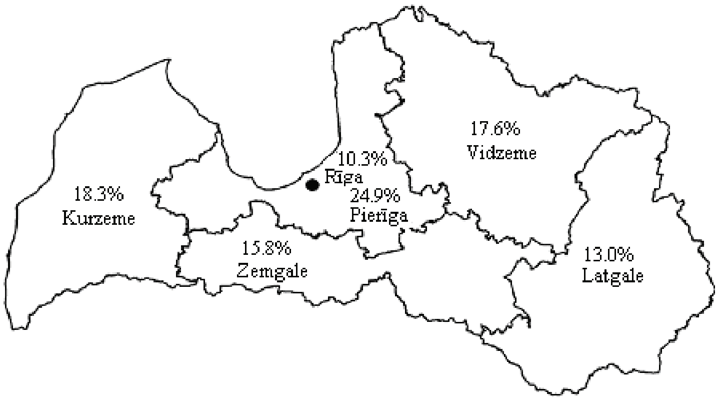

Figure 1. The share (%) of registered home-made food producers in the Latvia's regions.

Source: authors' compilation based on data of the Register of FVS, 2015.

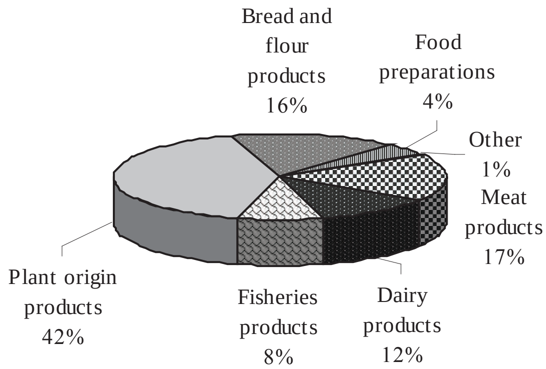

Figure 2. The share (%) of main home-made food producers by the product group.

Source: authors' compilation based on data of the Register of FVS, 2015.

the EU regulations hamper development of short food supply chains, in many cases it has been shown that it is possible to carry out an adaptation of regulations at the level of EU Member States within the same European regulatory framework (Galli and Brunori, 2013).

The total number of home-made food producers and processors (hereinafter – producers) was 1,287 in the beginning of 2015. Majority of them are located near the capital Riga (Pierīga region – 24.9%) and in Riga (10.3%) (Figure 1).

Even though this is due to the proximity to reach consumers, it generally does not contribute to the diversification and income generation of the small farmers in marginal regions, particularly Latgale. Therefore, it does not stimulate interaction between the producers and consumers and the involvement of communities and consumers into development LFSs and SFCSs, especially CAS. Besides, there is a very high proportion (about 70%) of unregistered home-made producers due to legislative requirements (Latvijas lauku..., 2009).

The main part of home-made producers is involved in production of plant origin products and bread and flour products, 42% and 16%, respectively, but the smaller part produces animal origin products (Figure 2).

In our opinion, the plant origin products are less regulated and it is easier to receive permission to sell products in the retail chain, including public catering.

The numbers of food producing farms, individual merchants and cooperatives have been approved by the FVS (Table 4). This allows receiving the permit to sell the products to retail (shops, supermarkets, restaurants and catering).

Table 4

Number of approved producers by producers' ownership and main products' group

Group of products	Farm	Cooperative	Merchant
Meat of domestic ungulates	18	2	0
Plant origin products	15	3	1
Milk and milk products	7	34	0
Packed honey	5	0	0
Meat products	3	1	1
Fisheries products	3	4	6

Source: authors' compilation based on data of Register of FVS, 2015.

Despite the high consumers' preference of local products (Melece, 2012; Bikernieks and Eglite, 2014), there is a lack of supporting policy or programming document for local food and SFSCs further development. It is especially true about supporting the CAS initiatives, including the consumers' groups and cooperatives.

Conclusions

1. The development of LFSs, including SFSCs, as an innovation, is a widely recognised tool for the further rural development via strengthening of small farm viability and diversification; creating income and diversifying employment. Furthermore, LFSs can create wider economic, environmental and social benefits such as transportation cost savings, fewer emissions; and are the basis for other agricultural activity such as rural tourism and recreation, supporting economic value for rural development.
2. The types with corresponding categories of the LFSs and SFSCs are the following: 1) direct sale with several categories; 2) intermediate or proximate distribution, including different categories; 3) extended territorially with only few categories. Practically all categories of distribution types exist in Latvia, except Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), in which consumers' active involvement is provided.
3. Some fruitful initiatives and activities, which support local food systems' development in Latvia, out of which the most significant are two: 1) branding, e.g. brand "Country Goodies", which promotes rural tourism and recreation, including farm visits, food and culinary services; 2) active and successful participation of consumers in the LFSs development, organising the consumer purchasing groups (CPG) have been realised. Some scholars single these groups out as a new type, named Civic Food Networks (CFN), in which consumers are the main initiators.
4. The development of local food producers, which are connected with agricultural production (e.g. farmers and agricultural cooperatives), shows that the total number of home-made food producers is 1,287. Majority of them are located in the capital Riga and its region (Pierīga), due to the proximity to reach consumers. In general, it does not contribute to the diversification and income generation of smaller farms in marginal regions, particularly Latgale; it does not stimulate interaction between the producers and consumers, including involvement of the communities and consumers into development of CAS.

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