THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF LOCAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION

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Abstract
Purchasing local products has become a popular trend both in Latvia and in the world; yet, no single definition is available regarding what may be regarded as local products. The term local product is interpreted based on the distance between the producer and the consumer, administrative and political theories, social factors and personal opinions.
Food systems refer to a full cycle from production to sales, whereas local food systems, which are regarded as an alternative to the global food system, are characterised by a short distance between the producer and the consumer, which increases mutual trust between the parties engaged. Besides, it has been found that local food systems are considered sustainable and local communities benefit from them economically, environmentally and socially.
Local products are sold through traditional channels – food products are marketed through wholesale and retail networks – and through those popularising local products – short supply chains and direct sale channels –when products are purchased directly from the producer. The present research gives a summary and a short description of such sale channels.
An essential role in increasing the sales of local products is also played by the public sector, as local products are purchased through municipal public food procurements. Even though the EU legislation stipulates that municipal public procurements may not require bidders to supply only local products because it contradicts the principles of free trade in the EU, yet, food products produced in the local region are preferred if sustainability criteria are integrated in procurement requirements.
Key words: local food, food systems, food distribution, public procurement.

Introduction

Food as well as the food industry plays a vitally essential role in meeting the needs of consumers. The food industry comprises only 2% of the EU gross domestic product (GDP) and employs 13.5% of the workforce in the EU manufacturing sector. Europe's largest revenues are gained from food manufacturing. In Europe, about 310 000 enterprises are engaged in the food industry, of which 99% are small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and its contribution to the EU economy totals EUR 600 billion (Manzini and Accorsi, 2012). The food industry as one of the largest economic sectors in Latvia is of great importance to economic growth as well.

Campaigns that popularise the consumption of local products become increasingly popular, especially owing to Russia's food embargo. The trends in the society indicate that residents consider purchasing food products produced in Latvia because they care about the health of themselves and their family as well as are interested in supporting Latvia's rural areas and local food producers.

The trend to buy local food has increased in recent years. Previous research studies by foreign authors also indicate that the demand for local products increases and the demand shows that expressing belonging to a local area is one of the latest trends in the global food market (Knight, 2011).

However, according to surveys, most residents of Latvia still often buy food in supermarkets (70%). Only 16% of them go shopping mostly to small stores, 7% to a market place, 2% produce food themselves, while 1% buy directly from farmers (SKDS, 2010).

Given the fact that the share of local food available in supermarket chains is relatively low in Latvia, one can conclude that consumer shopping habits regarding local food are little researched and this domain's potential is not fully realised in the entire food distribution system.

So far, in Latvia no studies have been conducted to gather information on local food systems and local food distribution channels. The research aim is to describe the theoretical aspects of local food distribution. Research tasks are to describe the nature and role of local food systems as well as to classify and characterise the local food distribution channels and to analyse their theoretical framework.

Materials and Methods

The following research methods were employed to carry out the present research: analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, the monographic method and the graphic method.

The paper employed theoretical findings of scientists, the legal frameworks of Latvia and the EU that set the standards on purchasing food and data on population shopping habits regarding local food in Latvia.

Results and Discussion

Local products

Many research studies on local food refer to the term local; yet, there is no single definition of it. Usually the term local food refers to the food produced in the vicinity of its consumers, however, there is no single opinion regarding the terms used to refer to the distance between producers and consumers; it varies by region and depends on enterprises, consumers and the specifics of local food markets. Foreign researchers have defined this distance within a range from one to 100 miles (Blake et al., 2010; Pearson et al., 2011; Adams and Adams, 2011; Khan and Prior, 2010) or the distance is expressed in terms of hours of travel (Khan and Prior, 2010; Zepeda and Leviten-Reid, 2004).

However, in accordance with the US Farm Act of 2008, the total distance within which products may be transported and regarded as 'locally or regionally produced agricultural products' is less than 400 km from the place of origin or within the state where the products are produced (Martinez et al., 2010). This distance is comparatively great and does not contribute to trust between the producer and the consumer, which is essential for local food systems; yet, the size and specifics of the producer country have to be taken into consideration.

Second, the term local relates to certain political boundaries, for instance, a community, a region or a country (Khan and Prior, 2010; Selfa and Qazi, 2005). Besides, the definitions of local food are created based on special criteria or brands relating to a region, for example, Pharma ham (Wilkins et al., 2000).

The third definition associates "local" with particular advantages, for instance, convenience, health, status and sustainability (Blake et al., 2010; Selfa and Qazi, 2005). Fourth, "local" is conceptually opposed to industrial or cooperative agriculture as an alternative social movement (Adams and Salois 2010; SELFA and Qazi 2005; Zepeda and Deal, 2009). And, finally, "local" may be defined as social relationships mostly between consumers and producers (Smithers et al. 2008).

Yet, since there is no general definition on what local food means, consumers themselves may define what the term local means to them (GRACE, 2015), and consumers usually accept one or several the above-mentioned concepts.

The reasons why consumers choose local products as well as their attitudes to local food are diverse. Some consumers criticise the increasing food imports in the national food market and view local food as an alternative friendly to the environment and climate, while other consumers view local food from the hedonistic perspective as fresher, safer and healthier than imported food (Feldmann and Hamm, 2014).

From the authors' point of view, in Latvia, too, there is no clear definition of local product; yet, it is related to the administrative and territorial division and also perceived as social relationships between consumers and producers. In different cases the understanding of it differs: 'local' may be defined as produced in Latvia as a country or as produced in a particular region/municipality. When choosing among products produced in Latvia, consumers define 'local' as the products produced in their municipality, but in the global market 'local' is understood as the food produced in Latvia.

Local food systems

Food systems encompass all food production aspects (the way food is grown, harvested, processed, packed or otherwise prepared for consumption) and food distribution (where and how food is sold to consumers and how food is transported).

In the food system in the industrialised world, large private companies prevail, and the production of food is concentrated spatially and structurally, which results in high-level production; yet, there are a lot of negative environmental and exogenous social factors (Cleveland, 2014). There is increasing interest in alternative food systems as a solution that would reduce these problems and increase the environmental and social sustainability of food systems.

Food systems may be classified into two major groups: the global industrial food system and sustainable/local (or regional) food systems. The global industrial food system features much greater geographic reach than a local or regional food system. The term local food system (or regional food system) is used to describe the geographically localised ways of the production and distribution of food (GRACE, 2015).

The localisation of food systems is extensively popularised both as "good" and as "progressive" (Hinrichs, 2003) by a discourse on closer relationships between food producers and consumers as well as by a commitment to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable food production, distribution and consumption (Jarosz, 2008).

It is asserted that localised food production can meet many of the diverse community needs more efficiently than a globalised food system because it can give priority to community and environmental integrity before corporate profit-making (Feagan, 2007). By doing so, the ability of communities and individuals to access food of adequate quality improves (Kirwan and Maye, 2013).

A local food system is often regarded as an alternative to the globalised food system. As a response to the globalisation pattern, since the 1970's

many local food initiatives have emerged in the world. Given the fact that the initiatives developed in social, economic and environmental contexts, these food systems, to a great extent, reflect their traditional cultures. (Lehtinen, 2012). Local food systems assume a more sustainable option – a means of getting biodiversity from farm to plate, of saving energy and reducing food miles, of providing social care and improving civic responsibility, and of retaining economic value in a local economy (Ilbery and Maye, 2005).

The Oklahoma Food Policy Council has defined a local food system as a "system with adequate opportunities and infrastructures for food producers to sell their goods to local residents and institutions" (Sharma, 2014).

Individuals have been engaged in the local food movement for various reasons: some due to concerns about the environmental impacts of conventional agriculture, some in reaction to the succession of food scares from the late 1980s, and some who see local food as challenging increasing consolidation and globalization within the agri-food sector (Kirwan and Maye, 2013).

Local food production systems are one of the means of fostering local potentials and of increasing the economic activity of less popular and often depressive territories. The interaction of local producers and consumers ensures that producers supply food to the local market. Working in a local market, producers, to a great extent, have individual contacts with consumers, based on mutual trust. Yet, in the local market, the local public can set certain standards for food producers, and compliance with these standards is a matter of honour for them. However, a commitment of consumers or the local public to invest is also a matter of trust, local patriotism and a wish to invest in the local economy. It is important to be aware that working in a local market takes place within the formal economy; therefore, engaging in these processes through taxes, producers and consumers invest in maintaining and developing the entire country's society, including the local society (Latvijas Lauku foruma…, 2012).

The value of local food systems lies in the short distance between growers/producers and consumers. Besides, local food systems often do not need such stages as packing, transportation, selling to intermediaries and even harvesting.

Local food systems support the local economy. For instance, farmers' markets positively affect local businesses, while at the same time generating considerable revenues for local framers, thus making many small local farms viable. Unlike large industrial farms, small family farms spend more of their money on local products (for instance, seeds, agricultural goods, etc.); besides, food grown, processed and supplied locally (for example, to local restaurants) creates jobs, thus stimulating the local economy (GRACE, 2015).

Sale channels for local products

Food supply chains, which involve production, processing and sales, become increasingly complicated and dynamic. Distances between food production and consumption sites have become greater, and global competition has increased (Agustina et al., 2014). Food supply chains are an important component of the global economy (Ghosh, 2010). Products are produced and consumed in every part of the world, and these processes are associated with the use of natural resources, employment and CO_2 emissions. Food supply chains distribute fast-transportable products in large quantities, which are available to consumers (Ala-Harja and Helo, 2015).

Figure 1 shows the main ways how local food reaches consumers – either directly from producers or through retail sales and institutional schemes, for example, municipal procurements – or through wholesale warehouses as intermediaries.

Most often, processing enterprises distribute their products to stores by supplying the products to logistics centres of retailer chains, to stores – small, regional ones or the ones owned by the processing enterprises, or to wholesalers. Small and medium enterprises need to cooperate with wholesalers, as their quantities produced are insufficient to access Latvia's large retail chains. However, wholesalers can offer them the assortments of several enterprises (use the method of "mixing"), thus facilitating their entry into supermarket chains (LLU, 2013). But further in the research this problem is not examined, given the fact that such a way of selling products is not in line with the nature and values of the local food system.

Purchasing food directly from producers becomes increasingly popular. The most widespread way is agricultural and home producer fairs that, in cooperation with local authorities, are regularly held in municipalities.

Since 2012, 15 direct sale interest groups have been established in Latvia, and during this period campaigns and training have been held to popularise this movement. Presently, more than 500 families and more than 70 farmers engaged in organic farming, as well as home producers, participate in the direct sale interest groups in Latvia (Kas ir tiešās …, 2015) (What Are Direct …, 2015).

Community-supported agriculture is popular in the world (Allen et al., 2003). Such a local food distribution system involves various ways of sales, but their key distinctive feature is personal contacts between producers and consumers, mutual trust and

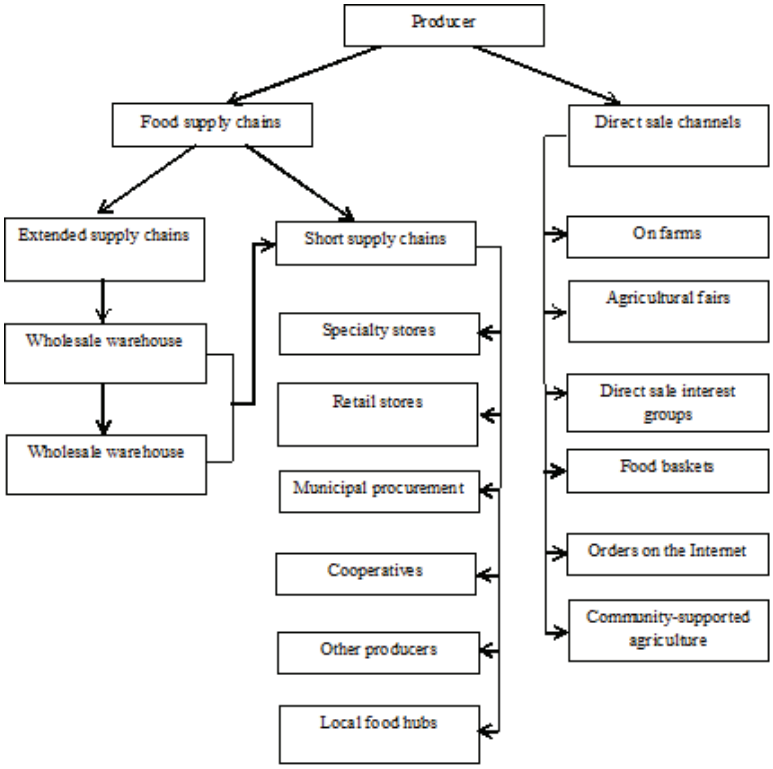

Figure 1. Local food sale channels (Source: authors' construction).

the consumers' wish to learn everything about the food they use in their diet.

However, direct marketing, for instance, in the USA comprises only 0.4% of the total quantity of sales of agricultural products (Cleveland, 2014). It may be explained by the fact that the localisation of food sales lacks an economic, organisational and physical structure of adequate scale in order to supply food from local producers to local consumers. To tackle this problem, food distribution hubs are recommended being established.

Local food hubs are a means of combining and selling food by collecting the food from a number of small farms and of supplying the food to grocery stores, schools, hospitals and restaurants (Cleveland, 2014).

An important way of selling local products, which is different from the other ways of supplying local food, is municipal public food procurements.

The role of the public sector in stimulating sustainable development has been in the spotlight of many researchers (Walker and Brammer, 2009; Rimmington et al., 2006). Sustainable procurement is one that is in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, for instance, it contributes to a strong, healthy and fair society, given the environmental limitations, as well as to good governance (Walker and Brammer, 2009). At EU level, public procurement involves a characteristic tension between a social ideal and environmental sustainability on the one hand, and competitiveness and free trade criteria on the other hand (Morgan and Sonnino, 2007).

Public procurement is important as one of the market instruments to be used to achieve the targets of the EU strategy Europe 2020 (Europe 2020, 2010). In particular, through public procurement, the strategy Europe 2020 encourages to:

- improve framework conditions for business to innovate and make full use of demand side policies,
- support transition to an economy that saves resources and produces low carbon dioxide emissions, for instance, by encouraging wider use of green public procurement,
- improve the entrepreneurship environment, especially for innovative small and medium enterprises (Zaļā grāmata, 2011) (Green Book, 2011).

According to research studies, price is the decisive factor in public catering. Financial pressure is the most important obstacle in implementing sustainable public procurement (Walker and Brammer, 2009). Local food producers are forced to compete with national or even multinational food companies. Local food, on the whole, is more expensive, as small production quantities and high supply cost are specific to it. For these reasons, local food producers have to be encouraged through various extra conditions, so that they remain competitive in procurement, for

instance, through setting economic benefit criteria for evaluating the offers of bidders.

The Treaty establishing the European Community in 1957 introduced the principle of a "single market" and a single Europe for the first time. The Treaty actually sought to ensure a European-scale commitment to free flows of goods among countries and a commitment to economic growth in all the Member States, based on trade among countries. In accordance with this principle regarding the single market, the Treaty, in fact, bans anti-competition in procurement, which would be beneficial to national or local suppliers (Jackson, 2010).

Europe 2020 stresses that public procurement policies have to guarantee as efficient use of public funds as possible as well as procurement markets have to be accessible at EU scale.

EU public procurement rules prohibit specifying 'local' in public catering contracts (Morgan, 2007), even though government institutions may refer to other rules related to sustainability in public food procurement.

In Latvia, public procurement is regulated by the Public Procurement Law of 2006. The purpose of public procurement is to guarantee the transparency of procurement procedures, free competition among suppliers as well as the efficient use of national and local government funding, maximally reducing the commissioning party's risks (Publisko iepirkumu…, 2006) (Public Procurement..., 2006).

The Public Procurement Law stipulates that in order to compare and evaluate bids, the commissioning party selects one of the following criteria:

1) bids at the lowest price;
2) the most economically beneficial bid, taking into consideration the terms of delivery of supplies or the contractual deadline; exploitational costs and other costs, their efficiency; quality of goods, services or construction works; esthetical and functional characteristics; compliance with the environmental standards; technical advantages, availability of spare parts, security of supplies; price and other contract-related factors.

Previous experience in Latvia shows that for the purpose of efficient use of funding, mostly the lowest price criterion is employed in evaluating bids in municipal public food procurement.

However, preference may be given to the food produced in Latvia if successfully employing the criteria of the most economically beneficial bid. Such criteria can involve, for instance, price, quality, terms of delivery, life cycle cost or environmental values. The Law allows taking into account environmental issues, which enables the purchaser, i.e. the municipality to require short supply chain products.

The Operational Strategy 2014-2016 of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Latvia aims to support agricultural industries producing higher value-added products being demanded in the domestic and foreign markets as one of the priorities in this period (including local food producer quality schemes and organic farming). In this context, one of the most important medium-term tasks is the promotion of production and consumption of local food through implementing measures aimed at increasing the market share of food products produced in Latvia in public procurement and consumption, continuing implementing informative and promotional food programmes and improving food quality schemes (Zemkopības ministrija (Ministry of Agriculture), 2014).

In 2012 in Latvia, the market size of public food procurement was equal to LVL 13.6 mln (EUR 19.35 mln), which comprised about 2% of the food and beverage market in Latvia (Lerhe, 2013).

In recent years, the principle of 'green procurement' has become increasingly important. It involves the systematic integration of environmental (and social) criteria into all procurement-related activities for goods and services. It is one of the environmental policy instruments aimed at reducing the effect on the environment, achieving social improvements as well as saving funding (Iepirkumu uzraudzības…, 2015) (Procurement Monitoring .... 2015).

Green public procurement (GPP) has become an environmental policy cornerstone at EU and national levels (Tukker et al., 2008). Since the international conference on the environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the understanding of the role of GDP in sustainable consumption and production patterns has significantly improved, and now government institutions use it both as a policy instrument and as a technical tool (Testa et al., 2012).

Green public procurement is an instrument that directly stimulates and ensures increases in sales of local food. Making a public procurement contract in accordance with the GPP principles means that one can be sure that the goods or services purchased make the smallest effect on the environment and a positive social impact. Therefore, the choice of food products plays a significant role in reducing the effect on the environment and maintaining human health.

GPP as one of the national priorities is also addressed in other government policy documents and legal acts, which sets high quality standards for food supplies, stating that priority has to be given to the food products complying with the quality standards set in legal acts concerning the national food quality scheme or the organic farming scheme (Cabinet of Ministers, 2012).

Conclusions

Purchasing local products has become a popular trend both in Latvia and in the world; yet, no single definition is available regarding what may be regarded as local products. The term local product is interpreted based on one's geographic affiliation, personal opinions and other factors.

Food systems refer to a full cycle from production to sales, whereas local food systems, which are characterised by a short distance between the producer and the consumer and mutual trust. The research has found that food systems may be regarded as sustainable and provide economic benefits to the local community.

Local products are sold through traditional channels – food products are marketed through wholesale and retail networks – and through those popularising local products – short supply chains and direct sale channels, when products are purchased directly from the producer.

An essential role in increasing the sales of local products is also played by the public sector, as local products are purchased through municipal public food procurements. Even though the EU legislation stipulates that municipal public procurements may not require bidders to supply only local products because it contradicts the principles of free trade in the EU, yet, food products produced in the local region are preferred if sustainability criteria are integrated in procurement requirements.

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