

Master's thesis

Alternative Food Networks: how artisan cheese reconnects producer,
consumer and nature



Source: Creamery "Varinis puodas"

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November 2017

Abstract

The conventional agro-food system is a great achievement of the 21st century, involving industrialization and globalization of the food sector and complex food supply chains. On the one hand, it provides a great variety of food emerging from different parts of the world; on the other hand, it disconnects people from the places where food is grown. The industrial food system is also connected with climate change processes through unsustainable agricultural practices, long transportation distances and other factors. Different production processes and artificial additives in the food as well as in animal feed are connected with outbreaks of food scares such as BSE and the contamination of eggs with the insecticide fipronil. This causes governments and consumers alike to question the safety of the food system. Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) emerged as a response to negative economic, social and ecological effects in the conventional food system. The European Commission (EC) has also started to pay more attention to the importance of the agro-food sector relocalization by shortening supply chains. Short food supply chains (SFSCs) are seen as a means to reconnect production and consumption practices, and also as a way to increase food quality. In this master thesis, small-scale farming is analyzed in a rural Lithuanian context, taking the example of local artisan cheese producers. These small-scale cheesemakers form alternatives to the conventional modes of food provisioning by producing cheese from the raw milk of their own animals kept in their farms and then selling it directly to the consumers or through a single intermediary. The theoretical lens of this thesis is post-structuralism, which sees all actors as relational. The Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) is a tool used to research relationality among humans and non-humans. This paper aims at discovering how different actors interlink in AFNs through the lens of the ANT and how this relationality shapes the Lithuanian as well as the European food system.

Keywords: Alternative Food Networks, Short Food Supply Chain, Actor-Network-Theory, small-scale farming, re-localization of agri-food, artisan cheese, Lithuania

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank *Gražina Auguvienė, Giedrius Tėvelis, Audrius Jokubauskas, Arūnas Degutis, Valdas Kavaliauskas, Rasa Ilinauskaitė, Kotryna Malikėnaitė and Šarūnas Večerkauskas* for their participation in the research and for sharing their time, knowledge and ideas. These people show a great example of how small-scale farming can help to find an eco-equilibrium between land, animals and human-beings.

I am also very grateful to my supervisor *Henrik Plaschke* for accepting various proposals for this thesis, as well as for his encouragement and support during the entire writing process.

Quotations

“Mass extinctions could threaten the world’s food supplies as key species of plants and animals come under threat from climate change, disease and pests, scientists have warned. Three-quarters of humankind’s food today comes from just 12 crops and five animal species, and this lack of “agrobiodiversity” leaves our food chain vulnerable to a repeat of events like the Irish potato famine in which a million people starved to death.”

(Murray, 2017)

“Good food is a cornerstone of good health, and this fundamental relationship is widely understood. Yet profound changes in global food systems over the last decades have resulted in significant negative impacts on health and well-being that range from food insecurity to chronic disease, and from environmental degradation to diminished economic opportunity and the erosion of culture. These impacts are experienced unequally across the globe and between different groups of people in different places.”

(Rocha et al., 2017)

“So what is the future for 21st-century insects? It will be worse still, as we struggle to feed the nine billion people expected to be inhabiting the world by 2050, and the possible 12 billion by 2100, and agriculture intensifies even further to let us do so. You think there will be fewer insecticides sprayed on farmlands around the globe in the years to come? Think again. It is the most uncomfortable of truths, but one which stares us in the face: that even the most successful organisms that have ever existed on earth are now being overwhelmed by the titanic scale of the human enterprise, as indeed, is the whole natural world.”

(McCarthy, 2017)

“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

Hippocrates

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List of Abbreviations

AFN - Alternative Food Network

AMAP - *Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne*

ANT - Actor-Network Theory

BSE - Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

CAP - Common Agricultural Policy

CSA - Community Supported Agriculture

EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

EC - European Commission

EU - European Union

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GMO - Genetically Modified Organism

IMF - International Monetary Fund

LEADER - *Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale*

LFS - Local Food System

PDO - Protected Designation of Origin

PGI - Protected Geographical Identification

RDP – Rural Development Programme

SFSC - Short Food Supply Chain

SO - Standard Output

STS - Science and Technology Studies

UAA - Utilized Agricultural Area

1.Introduction

“There are no humans in the world. Or rather, humans are fabricated – in language, through discursive formations, in their various liaisons with technological or natural actors, across networks that are heterogeneously comprised of humans and nonhumans who are themselves so comprised. Instead of humans and nonhumans we are beginning to think of flows, movements, arrangements, relations. It is through such dynamics that the human (and the nonhuman) emerges.”

(Mike Michael, 2000: 1)

Globalised food systems¹ provide a great variety and quantity of food in different parts of the developed world; however, at the same time it disconnects consumers from the places where the food is grown. The conventional food system can be characterized as anonymous, homogenized and standardized, and is connected with mass-production and overconsumption (O’Kane, 2016: 218). Sustainable consumption and production have attracted a great deal of attention in recent years by policy makers, scholars, producers and consumers. More attention is being paid to alternative food networks (AFNs) that seek to replace unsustainable industrial food systems connected with ecological and livelihood crises, food insecurity, health issues and additional problems. AFNs can be considered as farmers’ markets, vegetable boxes, local foods, organic production, Fair Trade goods and others. Different food activists are trying to create new cultural and economic places where one can trade organic, local, “slow” and good quality food (Goodman et al., 2012: 4).

Within the EU itself, there is an increasing interest in reorganizing food supply chains and reconnecting producers and consumers by re-localizing agricultural and food production. The European Commission (EC) has launched several programs that support sustainable agriculture and place emphasis on short food supply chains (SFSCs). Recent research attempts to define SFSCs where the number of intermediaries between producer and final consumer are minimized and Local Food Systems (LFS) where activities ranging from production, processing, trade to consumption of food occur in a defined geographical area. Support of SFSCs and LFS helps to protect small-scale farming, the development of local communities as well as encouraging the interaction between farmers and consumers, building trust and promoting sustainable development (Kneafsey et al., 2013: 19).

¹ Food system is a set of activities ranging from production, processing, packaging, distribution to retailing and consumption (Ericksen et al., 2009:374)

In order to understand the turbulent changes in contemporary food systems, many scholars have relied either on political economy perspective or on cultural studies. For example, the outbreak of mad cow disease (BSE) in Western Europe led political economist to focus on the system that is producing certain risks and cultural studies scholars to analyze the emerging “anxiety” among consumers (Goodman et al., 2012: 33). However, scholars from these two disciplines rarely integrate the approaches of production and consumption symmetrically. In order to understand the progressive forms of food politics such as alternative modes of food provisioning, it is necessary to treat production and consumption more symmetrically. Some authors such as Lockie and Kitto (2000) suggest the use of the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which explores the relationality of production-consumption and helps to understand both the power and agency as relational effects (ibid). ANT is a post-structuralist social theory claiming that agency is located neither in individuals nor in social structures, but rather is ‘an emergent property of networks or collectives’ (Goodman, 1999; Trauger, 2008: 118). It is also known for more-than-human analyses where different forms of organisms and technology play significant roles.

In this master thesis, the main focus is on Lithuanian small-scale artisan² cheese-makers in rural areas. This research seeks to discover how different local cheese producers fit within alternative form of food provisioning such as SFSC and to understand how different actors interlink in AFNs through the lens of ANT. It is clear that many actors are participating in the process of the cheese production such as farmers, animals, microorganisms and technology, and that production and consumption practices are related to various human and institutional actors involved in the food networks. This leads to my main research question:

How do different actors shape the development of alternative food networks (AFNs) of Lithuanian small-scale cheese production?

Alternative food networks create a unique environment where consumers, producers and other actors can interact. Lithuanian AFNs development is seen as a process where various actors, including organic and in-organic beings, form heterogeneous relationships and shape each other. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the different alternative food spaces and places and to see how they evolve and change over time. According to David Goodman, alternative forms of social organization can co-evolve and co-exist with the contemporary capitalist system (Goodman et al., 2012: 3-4). Consumers

² Artisan cheese - is the cheese which is produced primarily by hand, using as little mechanisation as possible by a skilled craftsman (Caldwell, 2010:6)

also are seen as significant agents of change by incorporating different values into their everyday practices of food consumption. The Slow Food Movement³ conceptualizes consumers as “co-producers”, highlighting the idea that consumer choices have the ability to influence how food is cultivated, produced and distributed (Slow Food, 2017b). Alternative food spaces created by Lithuanian small-scale cheese-makers and the Slow Food Movement share many objectives such as strengthening of local food culture, promoting solidarity and creating trust-based producer-consumer relations.

AFNs are connected with a return to re-localized and re-embedded quality food production and consumption, turning away from globalized industrial food systems with their “placeless” supply chains (Goodman et al., 2012: 65). Hence, SFSCs and LFS are perceived as an integral part of the EUROPE 2020 strategy leading towards “*smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*” (European Commission, 2013: 15). This growth would not be possible without growers, producers, consumers, scientists, policy makers, politicians, activists, technologies and nature. Following Actor-Network Theory, the future of the European food system depends on the interaction between different actors involved in the heterogeneous network of food relations.

³ Slow Food Movement - is a global, grassroots organization which protects disappearing local food traditions and cultures, counteracts the emerging fast pace of life and promotes sustainable production and consumption practices. Slow food, formerly called ArciGola, was founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini. In 1989, the official Manifesto was signed and Slow Food became an international association. It has grown into a global movement that exists in over 160 countries. Its main goal is to ensure access to good, clean and fair food for everyone (Slow Food, 2017a).

2. Methodology

2.1. Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is presented in order to guide the reader through the paper. The thesis starts with an introduction where main ideas and research question are presented.

The second chapter introduces the main concepts which are used in the paper. The methodology chapter continues with an explanation of the theoretical and ontological background based on ANT. It follows the presentation of the methodological framework suggested by Holloway et al. to research relationality between production and consumption. Afterwards, the research method, which is semi-structured interviews, is elaborated by introducing an interview guide and the interviewees. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the various sources from which I have gathered my primary and secondary data as well as discussing the limitations of the research that are connected with certain methodological and theoretical choices.

The third chapter focuses on theory. Here, my chosen theories are presented in relation to my research. Post-structuralism is the theoretical lens of the paper, with ANT as a tool which helps to research relationality among humans and non-humans. Academic and political debates are used to illustrate the current position of the European Union towards the re-localization of agri-food system and re-organization of food supply chains that help to reconnect producer and consumer and improve the quality of food.

The fourth chapter is the main part of the thesis. It begins with a Lithuanian agro-food system analysis and finishes with the identification of the main actors participating in the heterogeneous network of food relations. The thesis ends with a discussion of main findings and a conclusion, which provides an answer to the main research question, as well as future research recommendations that stem from the paper.

2.2. Concepts definition

In this part, some of the concepts used in the paper are presented. The main emphasis is on the application of these terms to the Lithuanian rural context where small-scale artisan cheese-production is analyzed.

- *Alternative food spaces and places* refer to the spaces localized food production as well as to spaces of consumption in the local food networks (Goodman et al., 2010:191). Agnew defines “(...) place as location or a site in space where an activity or object is located and which relates to other sites or locations because of interaction and movement between them.” (Agnew, 2005: 80). The postmodern-feminist approach see places “(...) as constituted relationally, both by their internal relations and by relations that ‘run out from a place’” (Massey in Harris, 2010: 359). Places and spaces cannot be seen as closed but rather as open and engaged with other places and spaces (Murdoch, 2006: 18). Therefore, local food systems are not necessarily resistant to global capitalism, but rather mutually constitutive (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005: 369). There is great complexity concerning the construction of a place and of the politics that build upon it. For instance, food system relocalization implies that the concern is not only on localization process, but also on how “(...) ‘things used to be’” (Harris, 2010: 364). The construction of places reflects the way of seeing the world; hence, in my research, I will look at the various relations through which alternative food spaces and places are constructed.
- *Alternative vs. conventional food system.* The conventional mode of food provisioning is labelled as standardized, modern, rationalized, economic, manufactured, externalized and disembedded (Robinson, 2003: 84). The alternative mode of food provisioning, on the other hand, has labels such as post-modern, specialised, traditional, artisanal, natural, organic, internalized and embedded (ibid). Hence, the mode of food provisioning which is used by Lithuanian cheesemakers is conceptualized as alternative.
- *Agro-food system* - “The totality of actors involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of food, the relations between them, and the regulatory apparatus governing these arrangements” (Castree, et al., 2013). It can also be referred to as the agri-food system. Farming can be seen as a part of agro-food systems and analysed as linkages, patterns and connections among actors, involving power relations. Some authors use the term agro-food network which derives from Actor-Network Theory (ibid).

2.3. Theoretical approach

Alternative food networks (AFNs) have attracted a lot of attention not only from political scientists, but also from agro-ecologists, human-geographers and others. Therefore, it is an interdisciplinary research crosscutting the boundaries of consumption studies, agro-food studies, rural studies and sociology. Contemporary thinkers challenge the political theory which ascribes agency to humans alone. Posthumanism has been an influential philosophical direction that disrupts the binary between human/animal. It came from Science and Technology Studies (STS). Bruno Latour, for example, problematizes human-centric ways of looking at the social world. He is one of the theorists who developed ANT, which ascribes agency to human and non-human actors (Cudworth and Hobden, 2013: 15). Posthumanist studies are widely used to study progressive political projects such as feminism, political ecology and AFNs.

According to John Law, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) *is a material-semiotic tool as well as sensibilities and methods of analysis*. It is used to explore webs of relations, including human-beings, objects, subjects, machines, animals, nature, ideas, geographical arrangements and many other aspects (Law, 2007: 2). ANT pioneers include Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law, but its intellectual roots connect to sociologist Gabriel Tarde and his attempts to differentiate between macro and micro as well nature and society; philosopher Michel Serres and his focus on heterogeneous relations and associations; and semiotician Algirdas Greimas and his notion that “(...) signifiers only acquire meaning through relations with other signifiers (...)” (Müller, 2015: 30). In the ANT, all different actors stand on an equal ontological footing, only some associations between different actors can become more powerful than other ones (Ibid). ANT proposes that ontological categories of nature/society or structure/agency cannot be theorized as *a priori*, in other words, all categories are seen as the outcomes of processes of network-building (Goodman, 2001: 192). ANT claims that agency is a collective outcome where non-humans are also actively present. Analytically, it is important to understand that “(...) people are relational effects that include both the human and the non-human (...), while object-webs conversely include people (...)” (Law, 2007: 8). Here, social action is delegated to various actors which have ability to form different types of forces such as the way knife is used to cut a bread, a lock is used to close rooms from visitors, a hammer is used to hit nails and so on. As a result, in the case of ANT, any thing which has ability to modify the situation is seen as an actant or, more precisely, it can be perceived as a participant in the action (Latour, 2005: 71). According to Latour, this does not mean that these participants are determining the action. ANT is not claiming that objects do things instead of humans. Rather, it modifies the list of participants that have ability to act (Latour, 2005: 72). Latour

emphasizes that ANT is not trying to establish some absurd ‘symmetry between humans and non-humans’. In the case of ANT, symmetry means that you do not try impose *a priori* among human actions and material world (Latour, 2005: 76). A good example is the debate over the causes of foodborne illness. Typically, bacteria is blamed for the outbreaks, but it is also necessary to explore the context in which bacteria emerges. It is very often ignored how these organism are given the ability to act through certain food processing systems and new designs of industrial agriculture (Carolan, 2012: 218). According to Diana Stuart, the role of industrial food systems designed by humans is often overshadowed by post-outbreak attention and a closer look is needed to explore how human and non-human actors co-produce the outbreaks (Stuart, 2010: 158).

In agriculture, nature⁴ plays an active role and has the ability to shape production systems. At the same time, the agency of non-humans is clearly seen through the application of biotechnologies and the outbreaks of the certain diseases. “When human actors attempt to create networks they can be very disappointed when non-humans do not perform as anticipated (Callon 1986) or emerge when they are not wanted.” (Stuart, 2010: 159). Therefore, in ANT understanding, “To be human is thus to be hybrid” (Michel, 2000: 25). In recent years, we have many strange hybrids such as frozen embryos, gene synthesizers and others, which confirm that it is more and more complicated to see nature and society as divided categories (Michel, 2000: 25). Agency which is applied only to humans is rejected by ANT, which instead suggests a more symmetrical approach by considering the role of non-human actors. In ANT, an actor does not act individually, but rather is an entity which depends on many heterogeneous relations such alliances with words, opinions, neurons and others. As a result, the identity of the actor is also mutating and changing. Indeed, “It is the relations that matter not the actors in themselves” (Barry, 2013: 414).

ANT has also received some criticism for the fact that it does not distinguish *a priori* between materials and humans and ignores the fact that humans can pursue interests whereas things cannot. Also it does not explain the structures of power as not much attention is paid to the ethnicity, class or gender (Law and Singleton, 2012: 10). Hence, ANT fails at acknowledging unequal power relations such as who is able and who is not to form associations. Critics say, that while following different actors, ANT might risk describing endless chains of associations without providing an explanation of the reasons that form the networks. Also there is a risk of excluding some factors that remain outside the associations, but still shape them (Müller, 2015: 31).

⁴ Nature itself is a complex concept, as it can refer to different beings such as animals and weather, and have multiple meanings. Noel Castree provides three definitions of nature: external nature, intrinsic nature and universal nature (Castree, 2001:5)

ANT is challenging international relations by paying significance to non-humans. At the same, from political point of view, ANT is criticised for becoming too strangely agnostic, while trying to describe and explain the actors-networks. As a consequence, “(...) it is possible to conceive of a 'weaker' version of ANT (...)”, which is still critical towards binarist thinking (which divides nature and society), asymmetry, limited conceptions of agency and a centered understanding of power, but acknowledges that agents may vary in their ability to influence others, that more power can be directed to “social” actors, and “(...) that a politics of nature attuned to the needs and rights of both human and natural entities must ultimately be orchestrated through putatively 'social' actors.” (Castree and MacMillan, 2001: 222-223).

Therefore, ANT provides a significantly novel perspective on the world as performative, multiple and shaped through a variety of practices. In this case, politics becomes material, where different things, such as mobile phones, GMOs, new infrastructure etc., create diverse forms of knowledge and diverse forms of actions beyond political interests, ideologies, institutions and national borders. Such politics recognise a role of non-humans that needs to be integrated rather than silenced (Müller, 2015: 31-32)

2.4. Research methodology: Framework for exploring food production and consumption relationships

Alternative food networks (AFNs) are conceptualized in relational terms as a symbolic interaction between producer and consumer. It leads to the search for how this interaction happens and what holds it together (Goodman et al., 2012: 7). Holloway et al. developed a heuristic methodological device, which facilitates the exploration of consumption-production as a “(...) a heterogeneous set of interrelated arenas and processes (...)” (Holloway et al., 2007: 7). It demonstrated how a small food project can sustain itself, oppose dominating power relations and restructure producer-consumer relations.

According to the authors, the identification of analytical fields mainly emerges from the analysis of over 100 food projects, mainly based in the UK, paying attention to how these projects are defined and presented, for instance, in leaflets and websites, and how they work in practice (Holloway et al., 2007: 7). The table below characterizes a matrix of relationships and provides examples of what could be included in different food projects.

Table 1: Analytical fields for describing food projects

| Heuristic analytical field | Examples from sample food projects |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Site of food production</i> | Community garden, school grounds, urban brownfield sites, farm, rented field, allotments |
| <i>Food production methods</i> | Organic, biodynamic, consumer participation, horse ploughing |
| <i>Supply chain</i> | Local selling/procurement, Internet marketing |
| <i>Arena of exchange</i> | Farm shops, farmers markets, home delivery, mobile shops, pick-your-own |
| <i>Producer-consumer interaction</i> | Direct selling, e-mail, newsletters, cooking demonstrations, food growing work (such as weeding parties), farm walks, share/subscription membership schemes |
| <i>Motivations for participations</i> | Business success, making food accessible, social/environmental concerns, anxiety avoidance, sensory pleasure |

Source: Holloway et al. (2007:8)

The goal is to attempt to create closer and more connected relationships between producers and consumers through alternative modes of food provisioning. *Site of food production* refers to the place where food is grown and processed. It can be traditional places such as farms, or more ephemeral places such as ex-industrial sites or commercial land that becomes part of community-supported agriculture (CSA) and others (Holloway et al., 2007: 8). *Food production methods* examine the way food is grown and prepared. The emphasis is on organic production where producers react to consumers' negative opinion towards industrial production. In this case, the method which is chosen to grow food is seen as the result of producer-consumer interaction rather than just the farmer's individual decision making, especially in the case of CSA and food cooperatives. *Supply chain*, according to Holloway et al., should not be minimized just to the "food chain", but should also encompass supply chain mechanisms such as the Internet. Such food supply chains are constructed through producer-consumer relations and mediated by particular mechanisms. *Arena of exchange* refers to the actual place where the exchange occurs such as a market stall or a shop. It also refers to the exchange which is both material and nonmaterial. A product which is exchanged can signal a

particular place of production, a way of growing and preparing, and create a special relationship between the producer and the consumer. *Producer-consumer interaction* emphasises different forms of interaction: material and symbolic, formal and informal, face-to face or via distance. “The importance of this interaction is in the establishment of particular sorts of intersubjective and spatio-temporal relationship which influence the ways food projects emerge and change over time” (Holloway et al., 2007: 9). This interaction pays attention to social aspects of the exchange rather than on material as an arena of exchange. *Motivations for participation* reveals the reasons for participating in certain food networks and projects. It is clear that motivations can change over time and are shaped by consumer-producer relations. *Constitution of individual and group identities* attempts to see how particular food projects depend on identities and how it reproduces particular subjectivities.

While applying Holloway et al. framework, Lithuanian cheese producers are being analyzed, aiming at understanding the various motivations and concerns that lie behind the small-scale cheese making as well as attempts to create different food places for producer-consumer interaction. As Goodman says, AFNs can be conceptualized as reflexive communities of practice where consumers and producers create new symbolic and material spaces (Goodman et al., 2012: 7). The aim of the research is to explore different alternative food spaces and places developed by Lithuanian artisan cheesemakers and their ability to restructure producer-consumer relationships.

2.4.1 Application of the framework: interview guide

In my research, I am going to use the methodological framework suggested by Holloway et al. and to apply it while researching different AFNs formed by small-scale cheesemakers in Lithuania. Certain questions arise while following analytical fields identified by Holloway et al. The focus is not only on the producer-consumer interaction, but also on how non-human factors such as microclimate and technologies influence the production and consumption of cheese. Table 2 contains the interview guide which was used while conducting on-site interviews.

Table 2: Interview guide

| ANALYTICAL FIELDS | Artisan cheese-makers in rural Lithuania |
|--------------------------|--|
| Site of food production | <p>Farm</p> <p><i>Where is the place of cheese production?</i> <i>How many animals do you keep?</i> <i>Where do you keep the animals? Are they pasture-free?</i> <i>Could you describe the natural environment surrounding your farm?</i> <i>Are there big farmers that could use fertilizers in the nearby fields?</i></p> |
| Food production methods | <p>Non-pasteurized milk, “pasture-raised” animals</p> <p><i>Could you briefly describe your cheese production methods?</i> <i>Are they traditional or more modern methods?</i> <i>Where and how have you learned to make cheese?</i> <i>What are the main ingredients of cheese production and where do you get them from?</i> <i>What kind of fodder is given to the animals? How is it produced?</i> <i>What is the role played by microclimate in the cheese production?</i> <i>Does Lithuania have favorable conditions for cheese production?</i> <i>Could you claim that it is Lithuanian cheese even though it resembles the French type of cheese (talking about fermented and matured cheese)?</i> <i>What makes your cheese unique?</i> <i>How is cheese production and consumption affected by seasonality?</i> <i>Do you pay attention to packaging which is environmentally-friendly?</i></p> |
| Supply chain | <p>SFSC (face-to-face, spatially extended)</p> <p><i>Could you describe your cheese supply chain? (Face-to-face, direct sales, through intermediaries and so on)</i></p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p><i>Do you provide cheese for specialized shops, restaurants and other places?</i></p> <p><i>What means of communication are you using?</i></p> |
| Arena of exchange | <p>Farm shop, farmers' market</p> <p><i>In which locations do you sell your cheese?</i></p> <p><i>Are there other places and methods of exchange such as a box delivery scheme or food fairs?</i></p> |
| Producer-Consumer interaction | <p>Direct selling, farm walk, cheese making lessons, discussions</p> <p><i>What are the different forms of consumer-producer interactions such as events, education programs, agro-tourism and others?</i></p> <p><i>Can you notice a changing perception in the consumers about healthy, local and good quality production? Is there a greater demand for such cheese?</i></p> <p><i>Do you try to change this perception through creating a certain environment: slow, friendly, local...?</i></p> |
| Motivations for participation | <p>Quality, small-scale, environmentally friendly</p> <p><i>What are the reasons and motivations for why you started a small-scale cheese production business?</i></p> <p><i>Do you have future plans such as to expanding or to keep the small-scale production?</i></p> <p><i>Have you implemented some innovations?</i></p> <p><i>How have the products and services you provide changed over time?</i></p> <p><i>What is the role of consumer in these changes?</i></p> |
| Constitution of individual and group identities | <p><i>Who are the main customers: locals, urban people, others?</i></p> <p><i>Is your product accessible for everyone: higher, average or lower income people?</i></p> <p><i>Do you try to integrate different groups of people (for example, village people, foreigners, minorities, refugees and others)?</i></p> |

Holloway et al. acknowledge that it might be necessary to add further fields in order to gain a better understanding of other groups in producer-consumer networks such as the role played by government and other organizations (2007:7). During the interviews, I added additional questions that try to gain a better understanding about rural development and small-scale farming in Lithuania. The questions are the following:

- *Do small-scale farmers receive enough support from the state and the EU?*
- *What is the “reality” of the Lithuanian village? Is it “alive”?*
- *What are the main challenges for a small producer?*

- *Do you participate in international exchange programs or/and cooperate with international partners and organizations such as foreign cheesemakers and Slow Food?*

These questions are altered during the actual interview according to the situation and answers provided by an interviewee. Semi-structured interviews give flexibility to the researcher such as changing the order of questions, asking follow-up questions and reformulating questions in order to make them more suitable to the context (Bryman, 2012: 487). All interviews were conducted in Lithuanian language and recorded (Bryman, 2012: 473). The interviews are transcribed in English and can be found in the appendix.

2.5. Data Collection

2.5.1 Primary sources: Introducing interviewees

Interviews are taken from different artisan cheese-makers and people involved in SFSCs. Here is a brief introduction to each interviewee:

- *“Augų ūkis”* (in English “Augai farm”) - a family farm in Didžiasalis village, Druskininkai municipality. I interviewed the farmer *Gražina Auguvienė*. She is an active woman who is not only a cheesemaker, but also a chairwoman of village community.
- *“Varinis puodas”* (in English “Copper pot”) - the name of a creamery in Kabeliai village, Varėna district municipality. It is a business run by two cheesemakers *Giedrius Tėvelis* and *Audrius Jokubauskas*. I interviewed G. Tėvelis while he was working; hence, I could see the entire cheese-making process. A couple of questions were answered by A. Jokubauskas when he passed through the creamery. The interview can be described as informal and less-structured, but at the same time a very unique one.
- *“Paskui saulę ir ožkas”* (in English “Following the sun and goats”) - a farm in Norvydiškės, Varėna district municipality. It is a new and modernized farmstead that belongs to two cheesemakers *Valdas Kavaliauskas* and *Rasa Ilinauskaitė*. Most of the interview questions were answered by V. Kavaliauskas and some of them were complemented by R. Ilinauskaitė.
- *“Sūrininkų namai”* (in English “Cheesemakers’ home”) - a farm shop and cafe in Dargužiai village, Varėna district municipality. It is a place run by a young couple *Kotryna Malikėnaitė* and *Šarūnas Večerkauskas* who have recently moved to the village. They have rented out

“Sūrininkų namai” from cheesemakers V. Kavaliauskas and R. Ilinauskaitė who used to live there, but have moved to the new farmstead in Norvydiškės village. The interview was taken from both K. Malikėnaitė and Š. Večerkauskas.

- *Arūnas Degutis* - an economist, politician, farmer and a member of the board of “VivaSol”⁵ association. A. Degutis is a former member of the European Parliament. He possesses a wide range of knowledge concerning economic, political and social developments on both European and national levels. The interview focused mainly on the small-scale farming situation in Lithuania.

Each interviewee revealed different perspectives concerning cheese production, consumption and small-scale farming in Lithuania. For instance, the interview with G. Tėvelis highlighted the technological side of cheese production and confirmed the fact that artisan cheese-making is a work with microbes (Chapter 4.5). This is the ANT way of looking at the social world, where non-humans play a significant role. Cheesemaker G. Auguvienė illustrates an excellent example of how entrepreneurial thinking helps to find various rural business opportunities (Chapter 4.2). Another cheesemaker, V. Kavaliauskas, is a person who began alternative food initiatives in Lithuania (Chapter 4.2). His activities are based on a strong ideological background such as the reconnection of producer and consumer, and the promotion of solidarity and cooperation. A. Degutis revealed the Lithuanian rural “reality” from a political point of view (Chapter 4.1.). During the interview, most of the focus was on importance of alternative food spaces and small-scale farming. K. Malikėnaitė and Š. Večerkauskas represent a young couple who moved from the city to the village. They are an example of the important role of an intermediary between the producer and the consumer in the SFSC (Chapter 4.2.).

2.5.2 Sources of information

The empirical research of this paper is carried out using qualitative methodology, having the intention to unravel the relational dynamics in small-scale cheese production and consumption. Empirical data was collected through in-depth interviews and on-site observation. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted for 1-2 hours. The cheesemakers were interviewed at their own farms. This provided the

⁵ “VivaSol” is the association of cheese producers and eaters established in 2006. It aims at maintaining solidarity between the villagers and urban people, promoting small-scale farming and building trust among producer and consumer (more information can be found in Chapter 4.2.) (VivaSol, 2017)

opportunity to observe the natural environment surrounding the farm, the site of cheese production, “pasture-raised” animals as well as the environment created by the farmers for producer-consumer interaction such as a farm shop, farm walks and others (Chapter 4.2). I have also been following and participating in different events organized by Lithuanian cheesemakers. One of them is “Cheese Festival 2017” in Druskininkai, while another is the opening of the farm “Paskui saulę ir ožkas” (in English, “Following the sun and goats”) by cheesemakers V. Kavaliauskas and R. Ilinauskaitė.

The theoretical background is based on materials collected through academic databases, mainly The Aalborg University Online Library (AUB) and Google scholar search. I have used documents and research initiated and supported by the European Commission and European Parliament concerning SFSCs and LFS in Europe. The theoretical definitions and concepts used in this paper are built on the seminal work of scholars such as David Goodman (2001), Marsden et al. (2000), Renting et al. (2003), Bruno Latour (2005), Jonathan Murdoch (2006) and others. The analysis is based not only on the empirical data, but also on statistical information and various academic and political discussions regarding Lithuanian rural development and small-scale farming, gathered from different sources of information, including the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, The National Payment Agency, The Eurostat database and the European Commission.

2.6. Limitations of the research

There are a couple of limitations concerning the framework of Holloway et al. One is the under-theorization of consumers, even though production and consumption are treated symmetrically. This framework is criticized for a difficulty to see “(...) how consumers could be conceptualized as a political force within their framework, or how such a framework helps to explore the construction of these identities and the values and assumptions behind them” (Wilson, 2012: 725). Hence, the consumer perspective in the research is not well identified and the construction of alternative food spaces is seen from the producer’s side rather than from both producers and consumers.

Another limitation of the Holloway et al. framework is that it provides an analytical field in which you have to look for the answers, but it does not indicate what kind of questions should be asked. It leaves a lot of freedom for the researcher to decide which questions are the most suitable to “(...) uncover the nature of activities within each analytical field (...)” (Wilson, 2012: 724-725). It took some time for me to come up with the questions that could be asked in order to find the answers for each analytical field. Hence, I have prepared an interview guide to facilitate me while conducting on-site

interviews. However, it is important to be aware that different types and variously formulated questions could provide distinct outcomes in the research.

Moreover, qualitative research usually relies on the researcher's views, and can therefore be considered too subjective (Bryman, 2012: 405). Qualitative research has been criticised as not replicable, since every researcher pays attention to different aspects and issues and is influenced by their own subjective findings (ibid). Another issue comes with the generalization of the findings, as people who are interviewed are not meant to represent the whole population. In qualitative research, the aim is to understanding behaviour, beliefs and values of in specific context, rather than placing emphasis on the generalization of the findings (ibid: 408).

In addition, the interviews I have conducted are in-depth and extended, with some lasting for more than 2 hours. Such interviews are comprehensive and provide a lot of information, but at the same time they are exhausting for both the researcher and the interviewee. Ideally, the same interviewee should be met several times. Firstly, the interviews could then be shorter, and secondly, this would give more opportunities for on-site observation and the identification of various actors participating in the heterogeneous network of food relations.

Finally, Actor-Network-Theory is a fascinating and ultimately illuminating tool to work with, as it involves a variety of actors (both human and non-human) in the research. One must follow the actors in order to find out how they shape and are shaped by heterogeneous relations, and to see how they relate to each other (Law and Singleton, 2013: 491). As Law and Singleton mention, ANT "(...) cherishes the slow processes of knowing rather than immediately seeking results or closure" (2013: 485). Slow research does not always take the lead; rather, it follows and unfolds uncertainty. Research which attempts to identify all of the different actors participating in AFNs should take not months, but several years of observation. It is also very easy to get lost among the variety of actors and not to take certain ones into consideration, even though they may play a significant role.

3. Theory

3.1. Post-structuralism in agro-food studies

For much of the 20th century, capitalism was the main focus of theoretical research, while alternative economic and political spaces remained at the margin of most theoretical debates. Different types of alternative spaces existed during the history of capitalism; however, the Marxist tradition together with the hegemony of capitalism dominated theoretical debates. This was connected with various historical events such as wars, revolutions, the confrontation between capitalism and socialism and the dominant role of the state in the regulation of the economy (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016: 918). Only in the 1970s and in 1980s, did some critical analysis begin to appear concerning industrialized food systems and the newly emerging forms of food provisioning. Most scholars relied on the political economy perspective, while others found new ways to reveal the problematics of food, turning to postmodern and poststructuralist social science (ibid; Goodman et al., 2012: 33).

As Angela Tregear claims, there are a few perspectives that can be used in AFN research. One of them is political economy approach, inspired by a Marxian understanding of the social world, which explains micro-level human behaviour and choices as a reaction against the negative effects of global capitalism and neoliberalism politics. AFNs are studied as movements against these negative forces. A second perspective is rural sociology or development which sees global capitalism as having a marginalizing effect on rural areas and focuses on how AFNs are able to redress these negative effects. From the political economy perspective, the development of AFNs is understood as being shaped by political and economic forces, while in the rural sociology strand, AFNs are seen as social constructions, expressing the motivations, values and beliefs of rural communities. Typically, it is a micro-level investigation, interpreting concepts such as trust, embeddedness and quality, and explaining the positive socio-economic benefits delivered by alternative agri-food initiatives (Tregear, 2011: 420).

However, some political economists such as DuPuis and Goodman say that the wider economic and political forces that shape AFNs should be taken into consideration. They argue that while commercial farming can be seen as a linchpin for rural development, this overlooks the exploitation of certain groups of people, for example, women, immigrants and others (Tregear, 2011: 421). Therefore, it is suggested to analyze AFNs as networks of actors, where the development of the system is seen as an outcome of the interaction between actors, power, regulatory and institutional environments. This strand of analysis provides an explanatory dimension as to why some actors end up dominating and

why some actors with similar goals pursue different strategies (Tregear, 2011: 421). In general, political economy tends to ascribe an “(...) anti-capitalist socio-political status (...)” to local food systems, while rural sociology pays more attention to complex social relations. According to Tregear, however, these two AFN research perspectives might provide too straightforward narrative of the causal forces of AFNs’ development, not leaving enough place for other explanations to emerge.

Post-structuralist political economy rejects totalizing or essentialists explanations of the world. It views hegemonic systems such as capitalism or the conventional food system as incomplete in their totalizing effects. There are always internal contradictions within the system of capitalism, for example, that provide possibilities for constructing new relationships (Wilson, 2012: 725-726). From the post-structural political economy perspective, “(...) alternatives to capitalism can be seen not only as possible in the present, but already in existence” (ibid: 726). AFNs and new economic activities are embedded in the capitalist system rather than reflecting a “parallel universe” (Goodman et al., 2010: 189). According to post-structuralists, reality is constructed through cultural, historical and institutional practices; it therefore raises questions about how particular practices and knowledge came to be, and attempts to make visible what has previously been hidden by dominant “discourses” (Wilson, 2012: 726-727).

In the Marxian understanding of the sociology of agriculture, production is in the locus of power and consumers are interacting only “ (...) in the illusionary sphere of circulation - the market” (Goodman et al., 2012: 36). From this perspective, food chain analysis seeks to reveal this unequal relation of power, and to stimulate collective consumer actions directed at changing the food system. Political economy only partially recognises the importance of consumption in agro-food studies as “The power to shape society comes from control over the means of production, not consumption.” (Goodman et al., 2012: 36). The treatment of production and consumption is still asymmetric. There is an analytical challenge to move beyond the theoretical asymmetries of food production and consumption and acknowledge consumers along with producers and supermarkets as relational actors (Goodman et al., 2012: 34). Nowadays, agro-food studies have made a shift towards post-structuralism, emphasizing the relation between production and consumption, materiality and semiotics, power and agency (Holloway et al., 2007: 3; Goodman, 1999). Scholars suggest adopting Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) in order to “(...) theorize food provisioning and consumption as being co-determined (...)”. According to Lockie and Kitto, producer and consumer cultures are relational (Goodman et al., 2012: 39).

3.2. Actor-Network Theory and the agency of humans and non-humans

The Actor-Network Theory (ANT) offers a way to bridge the traditional ontological divide between society/nature and structure/agency. Well-established theories of agency – for example, the structuration theory developed by Anthony Giddens – explore the relationship between an agent and a structure, and understands human agency as being constrained by social, economic and cultural norms that exist within a given system. Feminist post-structuralists intervene in the theory of agency and suggest that actors have the ability to operate independently of structural constraints such as capitalism or patriarchy (Trauger, 2009: 118). According to post-structuralist social theory, agency is located neither in the structure nor in individuals, but rather in the network of heterogeneous relations.

Social structures can be understood as networks of actors with economic, social and cultural imperatives, and geographical as well as historical reach (Whatmore and Thorne in Trauger, 2009: 118). Agency can be exercised through resistance and disruption, leading to the change of imperatives of the network-structures (Trauger, 2009: 118). By freeing agency from structure-agency dualism, more attention is paid to the relationships between actors. Therefore, agency does not depend on the position of actor, but on the relationship with other humans and non-humans (ibid).

In social science, there is the distinction between society and nature, thus it is assumed that nature is outside and separated from the social domain. (Goodman 1999 in Carolan, 2012: 216). Social constructionist also does not allow to see nature and society as interrelated. Something that is only being socially constructed is seen as passive. ANT, on the other hand, does not divide nature and society, and sees the world as collective heterogeneous associations. (Carolan, 2012: 217). ANT, then, is a relational framework that helps one to understand the active materiality of nature (Goodman, 2001: 193). Here, agency is not only a human attribute, as it is seen as a collective and hybrid phenomenon resulting from the interaction between humans, natural entities and material entities. Finally, ANT allows one to analyze production and consumption in a more symmetrical way (Le Velly and Dufeu, 2016).

Sarah Whatmore provides an example of the “transfiguration” of milk in human and animal bodies through the use of chemicals, hormonal additives and biophysical places such as chemical runoff to rivers. This reveals the connectivity among people, milk production and consumption, modelled through animals, technologies and habitats. ANTs demand more equitable relations among producer and consumer, supporting fair, organic, environmentally friendly and sustainable farming practices (Whatmore, 1997: 49). In recently years, ANT has become a prominent theory to study the importance of non-human and hybridity within the social sciences. ANT is used in rural studies, as it

manages to reveal the “material complexity” of the countryside. According to Whatmore (1997), the countryside is more than human, while Murdoch claims that it is necessary to take non-humans seriously, since they are present in any rural phenomena (Jones, 2006: 2).

Including non-humans is the recognition that the world is driven not only by humans alone, but by a variety of things and organisms that are active players in the everyday life of rural spaces and places. It creates complex flows of economic, social, ecological and technological changes in the countryside and reshapes economic practices, rural social and cultural formations. The interconnectedness of human and nonhuman presences is constantly re-constructing the countryside (Jones, 2006: 3-4). New technologies contribute to building new practices and networks that reach far beyond the initial intentions of the producers, designers and user of the machines. Agency therefore seen as a relational achievement that involves organic beings, discursive codes, technological devices and people (Whatmore, 1999: 26). Application of ANT in alternative agro-food networks provides opportunities to include animals and other non-humans in various rural formations (Jones, 2006: 10) and to explore human-nature relations (Chapter 4.5).

3.3. The emergence of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs)

It is possible to identify two contesting dynamics: conventional agro-food industries that are detached from rural societies, apply new technologies and aim at scaling economies as well as alternative rural “countermovements” that try to build different food supply chains and enhance the role of rural society. “The latter are based upon the encouragement of diversity and specificity, while the former are based upon standardization and consumer and corporate retailer-led flexible specialization” (Marsden et. al, 2001: 76). The contemporary food supply chain provides different commodities emerging from different part of the world. However, industrialized foods challenge the notion of quality. Alternative food systems are turning away from industrial food production and rediscovering local, traditional and authentic methods of production (Murdoch and Miele, 2004: 157).

According to Jeffrey Pratt, the conventional food system is the result of the following processes. First of all, it is connected with the farming revolution, accelerated after 1945, which replaced rural labour with machinery, and increased the use of chemical fertilizers and biotechnologies. This led to mechanized, large-scale and energy-intensive food production processes. Secondly, the global foodstuffs market broke the link between local food diets and local agriculture. We can observe that transnational corporations’ and supermarkets’ domination in the food supply chain, especially in

North America and Europe. Finally, there is a great change in local consumption practices and diets. A lot of people nowadays shop at supermarkets, spend part of their food budget at restaurants and take-away places instead of cooking at home. These developments in the food system created several issues: environmental degradation, undermining the livelihood of small farmers, strengthening the role of corporations and decreasing food quality (Pratt, 2008: 55). Alternative food movements advocate a reconnection between production and consumption. This reconnection is related to returning to more personalised economic relations, opposing to “the impersonality of the market” and contrasting food which is mass-produced and artificial to organic, natural and local food (ibid: 56).

Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) is a term used to cover *emerging networks of producers, consumers and other actors that form alternatives to standardized industrial modes of food supply* (Renting et al, 2003; Goodman et al., 2012). Castree et al. define AFNs as “Associations of food producers, distributors, and retailers self-consciously positioned outside mainstream and commercial food systems.” (Castree et al., 2013). Examples are the exchange of organic farm products, niche market goods, Fair Trade, locally produced food and others. Such networks can operate through sites that are outside of the mainstream, for example: cooperatives and farmer’s markets (ibid). Since the 1990s, AFNs have been studied as an initiative to bring more sustainable ways of producing, processing and selling food and turning to “quality” in both production and consumption (Chiffoleau et al., 2016: 1). There are two traditions of AFNs research, North American and European. In the North American literature, “alternative” has a more politicised discourse related to food production-consumption, while in the European tradition, AFNs are connected with survival of small-scale farming and rural development (Holloway et al., 2007: 4). The emergence of alternative food networks is largely connected with increased public concern over issues such as health, animal welfare, ecology and the demand for better quality products in the market. Food scandals such as salmonella and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) decreased consumers’ trust in the conventional food production system (Renting et al., 2003: 3).

One of the key problem in AFNs’ research is the inconsistency of usage of the key concepts. Since AFN is a term used to emphasize a food system which is different from the mainstream dominated by supermarkets and huge food processing companies, the focus is on explaining what the phenomenon is not, rather than what it actually is (Tregear, 2011: 423). AFNs can have various shapes and forms and can be defined in many different ways. According to Kneafsey et al., the key aspect is understanding of the diversity of AFNs, which reflect different ethical, social and economic issues as well as serve different consumers groups (Kneafsey et al., 2008: 5-4). The term “alternative” can be conceptually problematic too, as alternative economic forms are not necessarily oppositional to capitalist market relations. In European academic literature, AFNs are characterised as re-localized

production linking producers and consumers and promoting quality products (Goodman et al., 2012: 68). Some empirical analyses show that the dichotomy between localized and standardized food does not always reflect the real situation of the food sector, as the conventional food sector can apply alternative food production practices, and vice versa (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006: 184). For example, the organic and local quality foods sold in mainstream supermarkets demonstrates how nowadays organic agriculture is being increasingly “conventionalized”. However, some producers choose to be disengaged from corporate retailer-led supply chains, instead searching for new forms of direct marketing such as farmers’ markets and on-farm sales (Goodman et al., 2012: 79). Some authors assert that alternative food initiatives can be seen as “hybrid spaces” that include both conventional and alternative characteristics (Watts et al, 2005; Le Velly and Dufeu, 2014).

Some authors (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Watts et al., 2005) compare conventional and alternative food networks and pay attention to the quality attributes that reflect various farming practices, traditions, organizational structures, policies and institutional support (Renting et al., 2003: 394). Conventional food production processes can be seen as unsustainable in economic, social and environmental terms. Industrial agriculture, for example, contributes to climate change through the pollution of water and air as well as the depletion of soil resources. For the past several decades, farming has experienced a shift towards specialization and monoculture rather than more traditional mixed farming. This is connected with an overall decline in the number of small farmers and the emergence of large-scale production (Harris, 2010: 357). Additionally, certain food scares have raised consumers’ awareness regarding food production processes. Some products have pesticide content, artificial additives, GMOs and dioxins in the animal feed. Processed food might be cheaper, but it is high in salt, sugar and trans fats, which have been linked to diet-related diseases and obesity (ibid: 358).

Alternative food networks, then, emerged in reaction to negative economic, social and ecological effects, and to the decreased quality of food in conventional food networks. The main idea is to reclaim some power over food production-consumption processes by maintaining quality, ethical, social, environmental and economic conditions (Holloway et al., 2007: 3). In Europe, AFNs are seen as a way to promote rural development, especially focusing on small businesses. It responds to consumers’ worries over the negative effects created by large industrial food supply chains. Hence, the focus is on food provision that can ensure good quality, localness, and the embeddedness and reconnection of consumers and producers through short food supply chains (SFSC) (Holloway et al., 2007: 4).

3.4. Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs)

An agricultural supply chain encompasses all the activities from the input, production, harvest, processing to marketing, distribution and consumption (Jaffee et al., 2010:6). Most food supply chains are dynamic and complex as well, as they connect diverse sectors of the EU economy. Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) have the potential to shift the industrial mode, breaking out of the complex, long industrial food chains, while at the same time creating or rediscovering links between agriculture and society, producer and consumer (Marsden et al., 2000: 424-425).

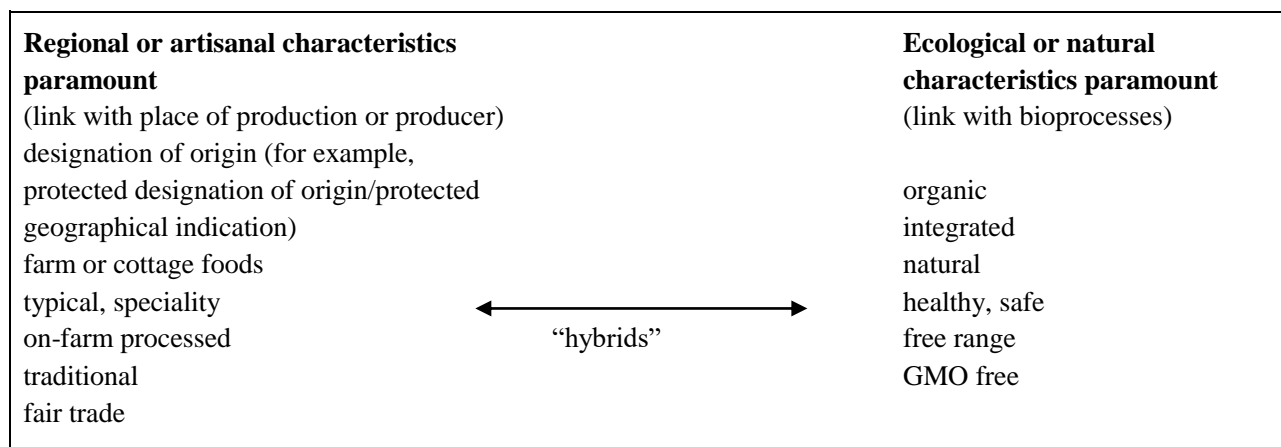
The current EU rural development policy for 2014-2020 pays more attention to SFSCs, defines the term for the first time (Augère-Granier, 2016). In Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which entered into force together with the reformed Common Agricultural Policy for 2014-2020, a short supply chain means: “(...) *a supply chain involving a limited number of economic operators, committed to cooperation, local economic development, and close geographical and social relations between producers, processors and consumers*“ (Regulation (EU), 2013: 347).

There is a great diversity of SFSCs such as farmers’ market, basket delivery systems, community supported agriculture (CSA) and others. The advantages of shorter supply chains include fairer prices for producers, access to seasonal and fresh products, a greater social cohesion and reduced environmental impact as well as benefits for local economies and new job creation. Short supply chains create a closer connection between producers and consumers and construct a different understanding of quality (Marsden et al., 2000: 425). Quality of products is perceived differently across Europe. In northern Europe, AFNs stress environmental sustainability and animal welfare, while in southern countries the focus tends to be on regionalized production that involves local small scale farmers as well as quality concerns. In central and eastern Europe, quality criteria emphasize rural traditions connected with traditional peasant culture (Barbera, et al., 2014; Kneafsey et al., 2013). The EU member states have gone through different food quality policies, reflecting different historical evolutions, and specific developments of food supply chains and industries as well as varying consumer interests and attitudes. Germany, Ireland and Belgium, for example, try to prevent the food sector from food scares, since their consumers are very sensitive to this issue (Becker, 2009: 126). Scandinavia has a high interest in organic agriculture, while Lithuania and Latvia have moderate shares of farmland used for organic production (Becker, 2009: 128). Countries such as France and Italy are

oriented toward traditional regional foods, where the context of production or *terroir*⁶ strongly shapes the understanding of the quality of food. In these countries, national and the EU legislation regarding the quality of products such as collective quality marks like PDO/PGI⁷ has provided a stimulus for AFNs consolidation (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006:186). Defence of local food networks, artisanal skills and knowledge, and regional culinary traditions are set by the agenda of the Slow Food Movement which emerged in Italy (Goodman, 2010: 194). It is possible to notice that in northern Europe, the understanding of quality is connected with food safety and hygiene, while in southern Europe it is linked with the region of origin and traditions (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006: 186)

According to Renting et al. (2003: 401), it is important to emphasize the link between the product and its producer/place of production. Characteristics of the place of production such as natural conditions and gastronomic traditions as well as artisanal and farm-based production processes are necessary criterias for defining quality. A second group of SFSC defines quality in terms of food production and bioprocesses. It raises concerns about aspects of ecology and environmentally friendly methods of production. The table below illustrates the different quality definitions employed within SFSCs.

Figure 1: Different quality definitions and conventions employed within short food supply chains



Source: Renting et al. (2003:401)

⁶ Terroir - in french means "earth" or "soil". From the 16th century, French people use this concept to refer to "the relationship between place and taste". It means that food contains certain flavour profile derived from the area's terrain, climate and water (Saltzman, 2015).

⁷ The Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)/The Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)

Hence, the understanding of food quality is closely related to production processes (such as producer's skills, artisanal and traditional foods) and ecological concerns that employ environmentally friendly production methods. In reality, there are no boundaries between these two categories, and most of the SFSCs contain "hybrid" quality attributes (Renting et al., 2003:402).

There are a great variety of SFSCs. Marsden et al. (2000) and Renting et al. (2003) identified three main types:

1. Face-to-face - the direct purchase of a product from the producer. It creates a trust through personal interactions. Examples of such SFSCs: farm shops, farmers' markets, farm gate sales, roadside, etc.
2. Spatial proximity - products are produced and sold within the specific region. Consumers can track the place of production at the point of sale. Examples are restaurants, groceries, hotels that sell local production.
3. Spatially extended - information about the place of production is communicated outside of the region of production through packaging, labelling and other means of identification.

One of the key feature of SFSCs is its ability to resocialise/respatialise food by bringing consumers closer to the origin of food. It helps consumers to make value judgments based on their experience and knowledge (Renting et al., 2003: 398). *"A common characteristic, however, is the emphasis upon the type of relationship between the producer and the consumer in these supply chains, and the role of this relationship in constructing value and meaning, rather than solely the type of product itself"* (Marsden et al., 2000: 425). The main idea of SFSCs is not the number of intermediaries in between, but the reach of the final consumer embedded with information connecting him or her with the place of production.

The definition of SFSCs, then, emphasizes the nature of relationships between different actors participating in the food system. The main idea is that shorter supply chains can benefit the society, the environment and the local economy; however, not all SFSCs bring all the aspired outcomes. It is necessary that relationships among actors be structured according to the principles of fairness and that production and distribution systems be designed in a sustainable and environmentally-friendly way. Hence, it is important not to have certain assumptions regarding the underlying relationships and motivations of actors involved in the food system (EIP-AGRI Focus Group, 2015: 5).

Finally, the EU commission acknowledges that despite low participation in the market and low profitability, small-scale farming plays an important role regarding the environment, climate, natural resources, local economy and social cohesion (European Commission, 2013: 9). According to the EC, "Short food supply chains and local food systems represent the diversity and richness of European

agriculture which must be preserved” (ibid: 12). Health and Food Safety Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis mentions that SFSCs lead to healthier diets, contribute to longer and better lives, lower the burden on health budgets and lower the negative environmental footprint (Andriukaitis, 2017). SFSCs and LFS are increasingly perceived as means to bring social, economic and environmental benefits to rural areas, farmers and consumers alike.

3.5. Local food systems in Europe

Local food systems have received a fair amount of attention from producers, consumers and policy makers; however, the concept of the “local” can be confusing and unclear. Most often it is defined considering the distance between point of production and point of sale, but it also can be related to a certain geographical area or to an entire country (Augère-Granier, 2016: 3). Local food systems, then, are systems where “(...) *the production, processing, trade and consumption of food occur in a defined reduced geographical area (depending on the sources and reflections, of about 20 to 100 km radius).*” (Kneafsey et al., 2013: 13). The food that is exchanged within a local system contains a traceable place of origin, and distinctive characteristics and qualities.

According to Kneafsey et al., there is no agreement upon definition of local food, and it is usually understood in a broader geographical scale such as national, regional or global. The biggest question is where the local area begins and ends. For instance, in supermarkets the whole region or even the whole country can be considered as a source for local production (2013: 23). Therefore, local food is no longer food that is produced near you; it might have travelled a long distance before reaching the shelf of a supermarket with a label invoking a local dimension. The notion of local food is thus multi-layered, subjective and context-dependent (Augère-Granier, 2016: 3). It can, however, be a key strategy of food re-localization and shifting the balance of power. What is more, consumers are becoming more interested in local food products. Even though it is not very clear what “Local food” means, according to Kneafsey et al., it does have a meaning. It can reflect consumers’ environmental or health concerns, a perception that local food provides better quality products, the willingness to support local farmers and communities, as well as changing perceptions of what pleasurable and sensual shopping is (Kneafsey et al, 2013: 35). Kneafsey et al. prefer to use the term SFSC rather than local food system (LFS), since the former term focuses more on the relations between producer and consumer, rather than the elusive attempt to define the local (Kneafsey, et al., 2013: 27-28).

Local food systems are marginal in European agro-food systems, only about 15% of the EU farmers sell more than half of their production directly to their consumers. Here too, it is possible to

notice some differences among countries. For example, “(...) the share of farms involved in direct sales is nearly 25% in Greece, 19% in Slovakia and around 18% in Hungary, Romania and Estonia, it is less than 5% in Malta, Austria and Spain. In France, 21% of farmers sell their products within SFSC, and half of those producing vegetables and honey are involved in SFSC” (Augère-Granier, 2016: 2). In general, direct sales between producers and consumers takes only 2 percent of the total fresh food market at the EU level. In Europe, food is mainly distributed through hypermarkets, supermarkets and discounters, which represent 54% of the total grocery sales. “In 2011, four retailers controlled 85% of the food market in Germany, and three retailers controlled 90% of the Portuguese food market.” (Augère-Granier, 2016: 5). Such a highly concentrated food distribution market and concentration of power can result in unfair trading conditions as well as undermining the livelihood of small-scale farmers and rural development. In the European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016, it is mentioned that a growing concentration of power among a few multinational groups can harm and increase disparities among medium and small producers. Unfair trading practices⁸ in particular can have harmful consequences for small and microenterprises, as well as impacting the greater European economy and the final consumer by limiting his/her choice of products (European Parliament, 2016)

It is necessary, then, to pay more attention to local food systems and to create institutional “spaces” for local food initiatives and alternative ways of food provisioning (Goodman et al., 2012: 59). At the EU level, there are certain attempts to support rural development through European programs. Filippo Barbera and Joselle Dagnes say that AFNs can be seen as a social innovation emerging from the bottom-up. AFNs should be perceived less as radical opposition towards hegemonic food system and receive more support from public policies in order become a substantial part of the food system rather than a niche phenomenon. “Only in this case, in fact, may they become a feasible alternative to the mass food market instead of an elitist project” (Barbera and Dagnes, 2016: 325). Local food systems should therefore not be seen as a resistance to capitalist logic, but as an attempt to make food systems more just (Harris, 2010: 366). Hence, the following section will present and discuss how AFNs are perceived from the EU’s perspective - Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

⁸ Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) include restricted access to the market; failure to provide either sufficiently detailed or unambiguously formulated information on contract terms; forced involvement in promotions, charging to place goods in prominent positions in shops and other additional fees; etc (European Parliament, 2016)

3.6. CAP and rural development

There is a growing concern over environmental protection and safeguarding safety and quality standards in the agricultural system in Europe (Goszczyński and Knieć, 2011). The EU's rural development policy, called the "Second Pillar" of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), focuses on helping rural areas to meet the economic, social and environmental challenges of the 21st century (European Commission, 2017b). The EU's rural development policy is funded through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Each member state of the EU receives their allocation of funds for a 7-year period.

In 2007 the European Commission (EC) established the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) and National Rural Networks (NRNs) in every member state, which created a mechanism for rural development policy implementation. The policy for the 2014-2020 period is entering a new phase as it aims at promoting structural reforms in farming and forestry, diversification of the rural economy and improved living conditions. Rural development policy is part of the overall Europe2020 strategy that sets certain strategic objectives and goals connected with the smart, inclusive and sustainable growth of Europe (European Commission, 2017a)

SFSCs can contribute to smart growth (f.e. creation of new jobs at the local level, increased knowledge and skills, community involvement, links between food, health and environment), inclusive growth (f.e. strengthening the role of local suppliers, development of local services, growing the local economy), sustainable growth (f.e. protection of natural capital, environmentally- friendly practices) (European Commission, 2013: 15-16). However, there are a few barriers for development of SFSCs. Some of the barriers are connected with existing public policies that favor conventional food supply chains and larger farmers, while other barriers are connected with specific farmers: for instance, the lack of knowledge and skills, or the lack of financial resources and age. The main challenges to SFSCs development are identified by the EC as follows (European Commission, 2013: 12-13):

- A lack of knowledge and skills to sell production directly to the consumers. It requires certain training as a farmer become more than just a producer, but also a distributor, marketing agent and consumer relations expert.
- To have the ability to sell production directly to the consumers require certain investments in selling facilities and new buildings.
- Administrative burdens and the difficulty in complying with food hygiene requirements are considered as the main difficulties to develop SFSCs.

- The huge competition with major market players; small-scale production is often affected by seasonality.
- In some environments, the model of cooperation is not successful and is conditioned by cultural characteristics - it either strengthens or weakens farmers' ability to cope with stronger players in the market.
- Difficulties participating in public food procurement such as in schools and hospitals.
- Financial constraint such as access to bank loans.
- Insufficient visibility, limited information and promotion of activities of the small-producers' production. The challenge of educating consumers about certain food characteristics.

Therefore, EU rural development policy offers a few measures helping to establish SFSCs through training, investment and the LEADER program ("Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale", meaning "Links between the rural economy and development actions"). The European Commission characterises this initiative as a rural development laboratory. It teaches farmers how to use different marketing and communication techniques in order to promote their product (Kneafsey et al., 2013).

The CAP strengthens European agricultural sector through the Direct Payments and through the Rural Development Programs (RDPs). The Lithuanian RDP outlines the country's priorities to use 1.9 billion euros for the 2014-2020 period. In Lithuania, 85 percent of the area is rural where farmland takes 60 percent and forest 32 percent. 33 percent of the population lives in rural areas. Different sectors of agriculture, the food industry and forestry employ more than 11 percent of total workforce, and contributes to a high national gross value, adding nearly 4 percent to the GDP (the EU average is 1.7 percentage of GDP). Even though exports are increasing, the sector faces a number of challenges: a low competitiveness of small and medium farms, the low productivity of labour, a polarised farm structure, a falling number of fruit, vegetable and livestock production, a lot of small private forests, and finally a lack of necessary skills and knowledge as well as cooperation (Factsheet on 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme for Lithuania). The main areas of interest in Lithuania's Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 are the modernization and improvement of economic performance of medium and small farms, the promotion of organic farming, the preservation of biodiversity, better management of soil and the creation of new jobs. (European Commission, 2016: 3).

All in all, the new CAP proposals for the 2014-2020 period aims at securing the livelihoods of small farmers in Europe and at the same time at promoting a sustainable and competitive agricultural

sector (Kneafsey, et al., 2013: 19). According to Kneafsey, “SFSCs and LFS are therefore seen to be at the crossroads of several CAP objectives” (2013:19). It is possible to notice that CAP is orienting its sectoral focus towards a more pluralistic and integrated approach to rural development (Goodman, 2010: 191).

4. Analysis

In order to understand the context in which alternative food places and spaces appear, it is important to analyze historical rural development in Lithuania and also to see what are the main enablers and constraints for local small-scale business. ANT is a way to link food together with its unique environment.

4.1. Historical developments of the agro-food system in Lithuania

In the past century, eastern European countries underwent a few transformations: from socialist to capitalist mode of production, from state to private property and from highly supervised to liberalized agro-food sector (Minčytė, 2012: 44). The post-Soviet period was marked by the dismantling of collective farms and processes of privatization. In Lithuania, decollectivization was a top-down, guided by recommendations from the IMF and other international organizations (Blumberg, 2014: 81). The agricultural sector dominated by small-scale farmers received little support during this period and new policies focused more on modernization and industrialization processes.

In the period of 1948-1953, when Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union, a collective system of farming was established through the forced consolidation of private lands into larger fields. *“The collectivised farms of Soviet times were large-scale, intensive operations that were now considered to be a distorted and unhealthy form of agricultural practice that went against economic rationality, cultural principles and nature”* (Minčytė, 2011: 105). It was a period of time connected with decreased living standards as people had no experience with collective farming: they did not know how to work collectively, as defined by the Soviet Union; they did not have enough expertise and equipment. Only in 1960s were a few improvements such as more machinery used (Knudsen, 2012: 35-36).

The process of de-collectivization provoked widespread confusion and an uneven distribution of property. In 1993, small farms were considered unproductive and backward (Minčytė, 2011: 106). According to Minčytė, small farms (under 5ha) did not impact global markets as farmers consumed most of their products themselves and the surplus was sold through personal networks (2011: 107). Lithuania signed a free trade agreement with the EU in 1994 and became an associate member in 1995. Since then, the primary aim was to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria and to implement certain reforms, where rural development took a central role. In the rural development plan for 2000-2006 it is stated that small scale farms were an outcome of processes of fragmentation and such farms were

disadvantaging agricultural development in Lithuania (Mincyte, 2011: 108-109). Certain programs such as EU accession favored large-scale producers and severely undermined the situation of small-scale farming.

In Lithuania, during the period of 2003-2010, the number of farms declined from 272 110 to 199 910, while the utilised agricultural area (UAA)⁹ increased by 10 percent. At the same time, the average area per holding increased from 9.2 ha to 13.7 ha, meaning that “(...) small farms were incorporated within the bigger ones.” (Eurostat, 2013a). According to Eurostat, the majority of agricultural holdings have less than 5ha of UAA, but they account just 12 percent of the UAA of the whole country. However, 54 percent of the UAA belong to a small number of bigger farms. They account for only 4 percent of all agricultural holdings, but have 50ha or more of UAA. The decreased number of holdings and changes in UAA confirms “(...) the tendency for the bigger farms to absorb the smaller ones.” (Eurostat, 2013a). In the 2003-2010 timeframe, the UAA of the large agricultural holdings (having 100ha or more) increased by 75 percent, while the biggest decrease in terms of both UAA and number of holdings is observable for those farms whose UAA ranged from 2ha to 4.9ha (ibid).

The polarization of farm structure between small and very big farms in the agricultural sector has been enhanced by the CAP measures as well as by certain political decisions. As Degutis notes, this was also the responsibility of Lithuanian officials who did not stand up for the small-scale producers. People in the newly formed government after the recognition of Lithuanian independence were followers of the economic communist school, naturally supporting bigger producers, and possibly even their own party members (Degutis, 2017). Additionally, people who had better connections and more influence managed to get more property and land (Knudsen, 2015: 380). Moreover, the CAP's 2007-2013 direct payment model strengthened the economies of scale of large firms that allowed farmers to obtain new equipment and accumulate financial resources. Subsidies were mostly absorbed by the largest farmers, which decreased the competitiveness of medium-sized farms in the agricultural development process. As noted by Melnikienė and Volkov, Lithuanian farm structure development is quite different compared with other Baltic states, and even some older member states such as Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Finland, etc., where medium-sized farms remain more viable and productive.

In Lithuania, over the period of independence, the number of livestock has been falling gradually. After the introduction of the direct payment scheme, it dropped even more significantly. The reason is that support for investment and direct payments encouraged farmers to engage in crop

⁹ UAA - “ (...) is the total area taken up by arable land, permanent grassland, permanent crops and kitchen gardens used by the holding, regardless of the type of tenure or of whether it is used as a part of common land.” (Eurostat, 2013b)

production (Melnikienė and Volkov, 2013: 119). Even though animal husbandry takes an important role in the branch of production, decreasing number of livestock reveals that support measures for this branch are “(...) inadequate to the support that grain crop farms competing for economies of scale, when direct payments are decoupled from production.” (Melnikienė and Volkov, 2013: 119). Hence, the CAP had a huge impact on the Lithuanian agro-food system development. Mainly, it created favorable conditions for large farms to intensify and modernize their production, generate bigger incomes and created opportunities for export; it also decreased small and medium-sized farms’ ability to compete in the market and their opportunities to expand (Melnikienė and Volkov, 2013: 121). In the period of 2016 01 01- 2017 01 01, the number of farms keeping cows decreased by 12.4 percent. 75 percent of those farmers who dropped-out from milk production were the smallholders having 1-2 cows (The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017b). Also it is noted that the Lithuanian dairy sector is becoming more intensified by increased milk yield per cow and the growth of the average milk farm size (most farms have 11 or more dairy cows) (ibid).

Nowadays, if you take dairy, meat, grain or any other food sector, you can see that it is controlled by a very few huge producers or families (Degutis, 2017). For example, five dairy plants process approximately 95 percent of Lithuanian raw milk (Pieno centras, 2017). This can still, however, be considered to be less monopolized than in Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands where one producer dominates in the market. In Denmark, the Arla Foods group processes more than 90 percent of the Danish milk pool (Danish Agriculture & Food, 2017). On the one hand, huge milk processing enterprises help to increase the GDP and the competitiveness in global markets. In the Lithuanian Dairy sector, 60 percent of its production is exported, which helps to strengthen the Lithuanian economy (Pieno centras, 2017). On the other hand, the market’s monopolization and concentration in the hands of a few producers, makes a state more vulnerable to certain occurrences, for instance, financial crisis and outbreaks of the food scares like the contamination of eggs with insecticide fipronil (Reuters, 2017). According to Degutis, having a greater number of small producers can create a better balance in the food system. In his opinion, if one huge eggs’ producer stops working, it brings great losses and increases the level of unemployment, but if in the market we have 5000 producers, it would not create such negative effects for the whole society. E. F. Schumacher (1973) notes that no matter how numerous small-scale operations are, they will always be less likely to harm the environment simply because of their relation to the forces of recuperation in nature. “The greatest danger invariably arises from the ruthless application, on a vast scale, of partial knowledge such as we are currently witnessing in the application of nuclear energy, of the new chemistry in agriculture, of transportation technology, and countless other things.” (Schumacher, 1973). It is possible, therefore,

to assume that the food system could be less vulnerable to certain food scares if production, transportation and consumption were less large-scale.

According to Minčytė, it is interesting that at the same time when small-scale farming and AFNs were seen as promoters of quality products across the EU, in the new member states small-scale farming was considered as unproductive and inefficient. The main aim was to encourage industrialization and consolidation of agricultural sector (Minčytė, 2011: 109). This rural development direction had far reaching implications such as nowadays the agro-food sector is highly monopolized in Lithuania, with mainly the large supermarkets' chains dominating in the market (Degutis, 2017). Additionally, the implementation of strict food safety standards favors large-scale farming, since small producers cannot afford the technologies necessary to comply with the rules. In Lithuania large companies that could afford the technologies and tests needed to comply with the numerous hygiene, animal wellbeing and food safety requirements, pushed out the small producers that were considered as “dangerous” and “dirty” (Minčytė, 2011: 110). Marsden notes that such bureaucratic-hygienic regulatory regime tend to distance farmers and rural dwellers from their natures and can threaten several culinary traditions that cannot meet all the hygiene requirements (Marsden, 2006: 5-6).

The new understanding of hygiene often conflicted with the general idea in Lithuanian society regarding what healthy and good food is, especially in the dairy sector. For example, drinking milk which comes straight from the cow used to be considered as very healthy, but suddenly it was banned by the EU's regulations (Knudsen, 2015: 384-385). After this, many local villagers engaged in illegal sales and sold their products through well-developed networks of neighbours, relatives, friends and others. As Knudsen says, these people shared an understanding that products from the villages are much better than the ones you can find in the store. “Indeed, Lithuanians from my field site cultivated a distinct culture about their own cuisine, which not only had a specific taste, but was also characterized by claims to having a higher quality of food than products from western Europe.” (Knudsen, 2015: 386). Imported products were associated with certain risks and dangers because of the chemical additives and food preservatives. As a result, the modernization of the food industry also brought some fears about subsequent decrease in the food quality (ibid).

All in all, accession to the EU greatly impacted Lithuanian agricultural sector. It was one of the growth factors for country's economy, but it also brought changes in farm structure, where the number of small and medium sized farms rapidly decreased and the number of larger farms and their UAA increased (Melnikienė and Volkov, 2013: 125). However, the new CAP direction for 2014-2020 is focused more on strengthening rural development and contributing to more competitive and sustainable agriculture. More attention is now paid to small-scale farming, which is perceived as a

promoter of quality products and traditional cultures across the EU; however, there are still a few obstacles for the emergence of alternative food places and spaces. These are discussed in Chapter 4.4.

4.2. Explanation of analytical fields - presenting Lithuanian artisan cheesemakers

In this section, Lithuanian small scale cheese-making business is presented following the Holloway et al. framework which was introduced in the methodology chapter. Three different Lithuanian cheesemaking farms are analysed: “Augų ūkis” (in English “Augai farm”), “Varinis puodas” (in English “Copper pot”) and “Paskui saulę ir ožkas” (in English “Following the sun and goats”). The table below briefly describes Lithuanian cheese-makers in relation to analytical fields. Attention is paid to the creation of new quality food places and spaces that try to reconnect processes of production and consumption through the SFSC.

Table 3: Three Lithuanian cheesemaking farms

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Heuristic analytical field | <i>Family farm “Augų ūkis” (“Augai Farm”), Creamery “Varinis puodas” (“Copper pot”), Farmstead “Paskui saulę ir ožkas” (“Following the sun and goats”)</i> |
| <i>Site of food production</i> | Farm in Didžiasalis village (“Augų Ūkis”) Farm in Kabeliai village (“Varinis puodas”) Farm in Norvydiškės village (“Paskui saulę ir ožkas”) |
| <i>Food production methods</i> | Small-scale, aged and fermented raw-milk cheese, french cheese making tradition “Paskui saulę ir ožkas” - modernized farm, having a “milk line” |
| <i>Supply chain</i> | SFSC, local selling |
| <i>Arena of exchange</i> | “Augų ūkis” - a farm shop in Didžiasalis village “Varinis puodas” - little farmers’ market (3 locations) “Paskui saulę ir ožkas” - cooperative shop “Sūrininkų namai” (“Cheesemakers’ home”) and farmers’ markets |

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Producer and consumer interaction</i> | <p>“Augų ūkis” - agrotourism and educational programs</p> <p>“Varinis puodas” - direct selling, organizers of the “Cheese Festival 2017” in Druskininkai</p> <p>“Paskui saulę ir ožkas” - founder of “VivaSol” association, cheese-making seminars</p> |
| <i>Motivations for participation</i> | <p>“Augų ūkis” - finding rural business opportunities</p> <p>“Varinis puodas” - living in friendship with nature</p> <p>“Paskui saulę ir ožkas” - emotional satisfaction of your work, eating healthy food, finding peace and harmony</p> |
| <i>Constitution of individual and group identities</i> | <p>Consumers are mainly urban people from Vilnius, Kaunas and Druskininkai</p> |

Source: Author’s compilation

The production of matured and fermented cheese by small producers started around 10 years ago in Lithuania. Cheesemaker V. Kavaliauskas was one of the initiators of such activities in rural Lithuania. Together, with three other people, he established the “VivaSol” association. Its main goal was to encourage development and solidarity between urban and rural people, and support small scale farming and artisan production in rural Lithuania. “VivaSol” began as a little farmers’ market in Vilnius (Lithuania) and eventually developed into a cheesemakers’ association connecting around 16-17 small-scale farmers across Lithuania. Kavaliauskas says that at first they were inspired by the French example of AMAP¹⁰ (in French “Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne”, in English “Association for the Maintenance of Family Farming”) and wanted to implement something similar in Lithuania. However, it did not work as expected for a couple of reasons: Lithuanian consumers were not ready for such partnership with producers, and there was a lack of cooperation among different small farmers (Kavaliauskas, 2017). Degutis emphasizes that the “VivaSol” association can be seen as a phenomenon emerging from the bottom-up, and tries to promote values such as solidarity, trust and cooperation. In some societies, such as France or Italy, such initiatives evolve naturally, because of historical and cultural characteristics where direct selling and quality food production are the long

¹⁰ AMAP - “These trust-based partnerships between urban consumers and farmers share some proximity with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organizations that developed in North America in the 1990s. Both organizations fight against large scale food chains and advocate for the necessity to change eating habits and mostly to switch to fresh seasonal organic products. They also stress the importance of setting human direct relations between the urban and agrarian areas.” (Lagane, 2015: 133)

lasting traditions; however, in Lithuanian society it was seen and experienced as “artificial”, and did not initially receive many supporters from neither the producers nor consumers side (Degutis, 2017).

“VivaSol” therefore decided to focus more on the cheese-making craft, establishing “Sūrininkų namai” (in English “Cheesemakers’ home”) – an educational and cultural center in Dargužiai village. Kavaliauskas is, to this day, organizing cheese-making seminars in Dargužiai village, even though he and Ilinauskaitė have recently moved to a new farmstead in the village of Norvydiškės. The main reasons for the move were to have bigger pastures for their goats (the enclosed area is around 10ha) and to have the ability to re-arrange the farm’s plan to make it more comfortable for the cheese-making craft (Kavaliauskas, 2017). As Kavaliauskas mentions, his farm is as modernized as they could make it. They have built annexes for the creamery and goats’ milking place, as well as a “milk line” where fresh milk travels through pipes straight to the fridge or to the creamery. The cheesemakers claim that this ensures the highest hygiene standards. It must be noted that such a high level of mechanization is very rare for a small-producer. At the same time, it took them 12 years to implement all these ideas, from the establishment of the “VivaSol” association and little farmer’s market in Vilnius, to the new and fully adapted farm devoted to the cheesemaking craft.

The cultural and educational center “Sūrininkų namai” in Dargužiai village established by Kavaliauskas and Ilinauskaitė is currently being rented out to a young couple, Večerkauskas and Malikėnaitė who are developing commercial activities there. They sell cheese from four different cheesemakers that belong to cooperative, including Kavaliauskas and Ilinauskaitė. At this moment, “Sūrininkų namai” could be defined as a farm shop and café where people can stop by to buy some cheese and at the same to spend some time in the little café. Večerkauskas and Malikėnaitė (2017) say that they try create a cozy atmosphere and to foster a connection between them, the cheesemakers, and the consumers. The consumer-producer interaction is actively encouraged through the degustation of different kinds of cheese made by Lithuanian producers.

Another cheesemaker, Auguvienė, runs a family farm called “Augų ūkis” in Didžiasalis village, Druskininkai municipality. While visiting France, she noticed that French producers have farm shops and decided to do the same in Lithuania. According to her, it is quite unusual to have a shop in your own farm, and she was the first one to build it in Druskininkai municipality. Auguvienė says that the municipality welcomed her idea and supported the project; the fridge, for example, was purchased with municipal funds. Gražina’s small business model fits the on-farm scheme, where consumers come to the farm and purchase products directly from the farmer. Auguvienė is also expanding her range of activities by organizing educational programs for groups of people. In her farm you can learn for yourself how to make butter, milk a goat and ride on a horse as well as to try “Augų ūkis” handcrafted

cheese. Gražina's future vision is to focus on agro-tourism and receive more tourist visits to her farmstead.

The creamery's "Varinis puodas" cheesemakers have quite a different business concept. They are two people who are working together and their activities are focused on cheese making and its sales on the weekends. Tėvelis says that they do not aim to receive many visitors on their farm as they enjoy the peaceful and calm life there. Additionally, more visitors would require more time, and less time would be spent on cheese-making, which is actually what they enjoy the most. The creamery "Varinis puodas" organized "Cheese Festival 2017" in Druskininkai, bringing 20 different cheese producers from Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, as well as a team of experts who chose the winners of different categories (Sūrininkai, 2017). The "Varinis puodas" small-scale cheese business is an example of the off-farm scheme, where producers bring their produce to the consumers at certain locations. Tėvelis and Jokubauskas sell their cheese themselves at three places in Vilnius, Kaunas and Druskininkai.

There are various motivations of the cheesemakers that lie behind small scale farming. In the case of "Augų ūkis" (in English "Augai farm"), at first this family farm was providing milk to the dairy, but when the dairy started to pay very little for milk, Auguvienė decided to make cheese on her own and not to give away all of her profits. It is possible to notice that farmer Auguvienė is entrepreneurially minded, and is searching for different rural business opportunities such as development of agro-tourism activities on her farm. Cheesemakers Kavaliauskas and Ilinauskaitė ["Following the sun and goats"] and Tėvelis and Jokubauskas ["Copper pot"] are people who exchanged their urban lifestyles and jobs in the cities for life in the village. The main motivation was to find inner satisfaction with their work, and to be closer to nature and animals. As Tėvelis mentions, "I enjoy working with animals, I enjoy making food, and here everything merges into one". These cheesemakers can be seen as a new generation of agricultural entrepreneurs who are newcomers to the villages and small-scale farming. At the same time, they have various experiences connected with their previous jobs, mainly in business sector, in Lithuania and abroad. Therefore, it is possible to claim that these cheesemakers are bringing different values, views and ideas to rural areas and have a "broader outlook" than most of the local people living in the villages.

Artisan cheesemakers fit within alternative forms of food provisioning such as SFSC, as they sell their cheese directly to the consumers or through one intermediary in the case of "Sūrininkų namai". It must also be noted that all the cheese producers who I interviewed, acknowledged that their main customers are urban people, and that their cheese is rarely bought by local people living in the villages. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly, artisanal cheese is more expensive, and rural people typically exist on a lower income than urban people. Secondly, people must first understand why they

should pay a price premium (such as natural flavour, better quality, hand-made, slow production, etc.). Auguvienė says that village people tend to buy more traditional types of cheese such as Lithuanian sweet milk or curd cheese, rather than fermented cheese. In different academic articles and the EU's initiated researches, it is stated that the development of SFSCs and LFS is helping to strengthen local economies, rural communities and their cohesion (European Commission, 2013: 6). However, my findings reveal that while handcrafted cheese production in rural areas is helping to reconnect rural and urban people (local cheesemakers and urban cheese consumers), it does not necessarily build closer relationships among people living in the villages. The reasons for this include an ageing population, migration processes and certain social issues such as alcoholism, etc.

Lithuanian artisan cheesemakers re-localize cheese production in the rural areas. It started 10 year ago, when Kavaliauskas and Ilinauskaitė moved to Dargužiai village and began small-scale cheese making business. They were the first ones who showed an example that a small producer can produce cheese, which meets all the hygiene requirements approved by the Lithuanian State Food and Veterinary Service (Kavaliauskas, 2017). Nowadays, there are more and more people who are engaged in both cheese production and consumption. Different cheesemakers construct alternative food spaces and places where producers and consumers can meet such as a farm shop, cooperative shop and farmers' markets. Those places and places change and evolve over time, f.e. the "VivaSol" association began as a little farmers' market in Vilnius and eventually evolved into the cheesemakers' association and the cultural and educational center in Dargužiai village (Kavaliauskas, 2017). Therefore, development of AFNs cannot be seen as "fixed", but rather as constantly changing.

4.3. The importance of alternative food places and spaces

AFNs and SFSCs can be seen as sources of resistance against the homogenizing effects of industrial and globalized modes of food provisioning (Goodman et al., 2012: 17). New "economic and cultural spaces" created by AFNs are helping to reconnect producer and consumer by shortening commodity chains (DuPuis and Block, 2008). In this section, the importance of the alternative food spaces is discussed.

In supermarkets or chain stores, there are producers, distributors, consumers and a label (Degutis, 2017). On the one hand, branding helps to create a symbolic relationship with the company, as consumers are familiar with the brand and its products even before they enter the place/point of sale such as a McDonald's restaurant (ibid; Murdoch, 2006: 174). The most interesting aspect in relationship between McDonald's consumers and the company is that very little attention is paid to the

food. “In fact, the effort McDonald’s makes to ‘personalize’ itself may actually require the suppression of knowledge about the processes of production that lie behind the restaurants’ food products” (Murdoch, 2006: 175).

On the other hand, Slow Food envisions quite a different role of the consumer. The main requirement here is attentiveness. According to Carlo Petrini¹¹, attentiveness is needed in all aspects of the process: while selecting ingredients, preparing and consuming the food (Murdoch, 2006: 175). Slow Food aims at extending the role of food into ecologies and cultures of production and involving the consumer in the heterogeneous relations that lie behind the product such as cultural, social, and environmental contexts (Murdoch, 2006: 175). Hence, it is possible to assume that different food spaces construct different consumers. In the case of fast food, consumers are distracted and know little about the product they consume, while conversely, Slow Food creates alternative food spaces that engage consumers in the food production and preparation processes (Murdoch, 2006: 176).

It is important to note that aged and fermented cheese had already started to be produced by small producers 10 years ago in Lithuania. Therefore, while it is not a novelty in Lithuania, it is not yet deeply embedded in Lithuanian food culture. People have a lack of understanding about its varieties, production methods and the necessary conditions to make it. During my interviews, I was trying to find out if consumers participate in the cheesemaking process and can be seen as co-producers; however, the findings reveal that in Lithuania, producers have to explain to the people what kind of cheese it is and how it is made (Tėvelis, 2017). If consumers had a better understanding of the product, as in France, for instance, then they could be considered as integrative part of the cheesemaking process. However, at the moment cheese culture and the knowledge about it is brought by the producers rather than consumers (ibid). Cheese-maker Auguvienė confirms that in some countries there is a long established cheesemaking tradition where cheese cellars are inherited from one generation to another, while here in Didžiasalis village she is the only one who came up with the idea to produce fermented and matured cheese. Yet at the same time, Auguvienė is paying more attention to consumers’ suggestions, and tries to experiment with different varieties of cheese. In her opinion, the same type of cheese becomes boring to the consumers, so you always have to search for new tastes and flavours.

I noticed that the most puzzling question for the interviewees was whether “matured and fermented cheese can be considered as Lithuanian cheese”. According to Auguvienė, if cheese is made in Lithuanian farm from Lithuanian cows and by Lithuanian producer, it should be considered as

¹¹ Carlo Petrini - founder and president of the Slow Food Movement.

Lithuanian, even though it came from French cheese-making traditions. Tévelis claims that now we live in a globalized world and not in the stone-age, so the technologies how to make cheese are very clear. Additionally, it is very hard to determine and define which kind of cheese is traditional and which is not and how many years it takes to be considered traditional: 100 years, 1000 or even much more? (Tévelis, 2017). Still it is possible to claim that nowadays cheese making in rural areas is revitalised by progressive cheese-makers who also bring new techniques and knowledges. In general, contemporary cheesemakers are creating alternative food places where hand-made, good quality cheese can reach consumers and at the same time educate them about the various flavours and tastes you can receive from non-pasteurized cow, sheep or goat milk.

This raised another question in the society concerning the raw milk: is it good or bad? I participated in a discussion regarding this topic during the opening of the new farmstead of farmers Kavaliauskas and Ilinauskaitė on the 9th of September, 2017. Different participants, such as the head of Varėna municipality State Food and Veterinary service Donatas Jonauskas, retired farmer from Normandy Jean-Jacques Patin, as well as owners of the farm Kavaliauskas and Ilinauskaitė, presented their opinions concerning raw and pasteurized milk, the nutritious features and raw milk-related risks (Delfi, 2017). It was agreed that this topic is not sufficiently elaborated upon in the society, with certain claims in the media forming and dominating general opinion. It is clear that the pasteurization of milk decreases the risk of dangerous infections, but at the same time it kills many bacteria and nutrients that are very important for human-beings. In general, raw milk cheese is linked to its unique environment and reflects the biodiversity. According to the Slow Food Movement, “(...) raw milk cheeses are alive, rich in natural bacteria that contribute to their overall flavor and complexity.” (Slow Food, 2017c). Therefore, more attention and debates concerning raw milk are needed, where different actors can participate in the discussion, such as institutions, scientists, small and larger producers as well as consumers.

According to the Lithuanian journalist and expert of gastronomy Paulius Jurkevičius, who lives in Italy, in Lithuania we have 2 cheese nominations (Lithuanian curd cheese and “Liliputas“ are included in PGI list), 150 small cheese-makers and a few Italian and French cheesemaking ideology “nuggets” who try to bring the leaders of cheesemaking and show them to the whole of Lithuania. That is how the “Cheese festival” was born (Jurkevičius, 2017). This year I visited the fourth “Cheese Festival 2017” organized by the creamery “Varinis puodas”. 20 cheesemakers from Lithuania, Latvia and Poland participated in the event, and the main aim was to promote and to develop cheese making and consumption culture in Lithuania (Sūrininkai, 2017).

All in all, the development of “cheese culture” requires more actors involved in the food relations such as consumers and institutions. The more engaged consumers are, the more they assess

the quality of food, involving economic, social and ecological aspects. Lithuanian consumers still have to go a long way to receive a certain level of understanding of what lies behind food production practices, as well as to become more “engaged” rather than “distracted”. Contemporary artisan cheesemakers are trying to bring changes in the society through the creation of alternative food spaces; however, there are a few obstacles which are discussed below.

4.4. Constraints for the development of alternative food networks (AFNs)

In this section, the main barriers for the development of AFNs are presented. The main issues are connected with the lack of certain knowledge and skills, institutional support, cooperation and initiatives emerging from the consumers’ side.

Cheesemakers acknowledge that theirs is not a common model of business where the small producer raises their own animals, processes milk, makes cheese and sells it directly to the consumers (Kavaliauskas, 2017). This type of organization of activities is usually used by large enterprises that have different capacities and resources such as a huge number of employees and specialists to accomplish different business operations such as packaging, promotion, sales, etc. For example, a small producer can have a few cows and provide milk for dairy, but starting to process milk and make cheese on his own requires quite different skills and knowledges. Therefore, as Degutis claims, the small producer has to be not only a farmer, but also an entrepreneur and possess many different capacities, including communication, management, marketing and others. In the EC staff working document, it is mentioned that the lack of certain skills and knowledge such as the activity of direct selling can be one of the barriers for SFSCs development (European Commission, 2013). Auguvienė says that she enjoys communicating with consumers and that it comes naturally to her; according to her, a producer can make the most delicious cheese, but in order to be successful, he or she has to be able to promote their product and to know how to communicate with their customers. Therefore, cheese production and selling require diverse skills and abilities.

One of the goals of my interviews was to discover whether small-producers are receiving enough support from institutions. Tėvelis and Kavaliauskas mention that they have received EU support for their small business, but that this required a great deal of effort as the process is very bureaucratic. Kavaliauskas claims that there are many control mechanisms in order to avoid fraud in Lithuania, and that this puts the receiver of support in the situation of a “suspect”, which is very unpleasant. What is more, the requirements are so demanding that even for a young and well-educated farmer it is hard to implement them, leaving very small and older farmers behind. It is possible to hire

a company which helps to prepare all the necessary documentation, but then this company takes part of the money. Tėvelis says that for a small producer everything should be a bit simpler, and the state should help more by cutting the administrative burden and providing more assistance. For instance, large enterprises have more money, time and human resources in order to fulfill all the requirements for receiving the EU funds; however, smaller producers have completely different capacities and this aspect should be taken into consideration. Finally, support for the small producer reaches up to 15 000 euros, which makes a producer question if this sum of money is worth all the time and effort to go through the huge list of requirements (ES parama kaimui, 2017).

In the website of National Paying Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, it is stated that support is given to operating farms that have declared crops and/or registered animals at least one year before submitting an application (NMA, 2015). As Degutis notes, this forces farmers to prepare for support well in advance, even though they are not sure if they are going to receive it (Degutis, 2017). Along with their application, the farmer must provide a business plan which includes an analysis of their agricultural holding, information about the activities, a plan of implementation and they must prove that they meet the criteria for economic viability (NMA, 2015). In addition, an economic size of agricultural holdings, expressed in terms of standard output (SO)¹², must be not less than 4000 euros and not more than 7 999 euros. Small and semi-subsistence farms have much lower access to the second pillar measures of the CAP than larger farms because either they are not able to meet eligibility criteria (f.e. farm size) or due to the complex application processes and associated risk-taking (Thomson, 2014: 25). In Lithuania, the biggest obstacle is that there is no continuous agricultural policy and rural development strategy. The former governments did not see prospects in small-scale farming and focused on larger producers (Žurauskienė, 2017). The current agriculture minister of Lithuania, Bronius Markauskas, claims that small and medium sized farms are not forgotten and they have quite a few opportunities to receive support from the rural development program (NMA, 2017). However, he regrets that there is a lack of initiatives from the producers' side. Small farmers may also benefit from the EU support for cooperation, but this remains unpopular in Lithuania (NMA, 2017; Degutis, 2017).

It confirms the fact that one of the key challenges of Lithuanian agricultural sector is a lack of cooperation (Factsheet on 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme for Lithuania). In the interview, Degutis says that due to the historical experience of Lithuanians, people are accustomed to hierarchical relationships and to receiving commands from above. People are not used to such democratic cultural

¹² Standard output (SO) “ (...) is the average monetary value of the agricultural output at farm-gate price, in euro per hectare or per head of livestock” (Eurostat, 2013c).

principles as negotiation and common problem solving. He gives the example of the Netherlands and Belgium, more densely populated countries where people live in closer proximity to each other, and communication is a long established tradition (Degutis, 2017). In Lithuania, previous experience is a huge obstacle which creates a lot of distrust among people. Kavaliauskas and Ilinauskaitė can notice an expressed Lithuanian feature which is individualism, where people look suspiciously at cooperation and are oriented towards attainment of their personal goals. Even though we have all the conditions for cooperation, it is not accepted by the people, Kavaliauskas adds. According to the interviewees, Lithuania still has to go a long way in order to have a different kind of mindset for cooperation.

Another obstacle which can be identified is the critical mass of people. There is a lack of inhabitants in the villages, and huge emigration flows to urban areas and abroad. Rural populations have an unfavorable age structure: 42 percent of farmers are more than 50 years old, and only 13 percent of farmers are between 20-30 years old (The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017c). That is why the number of the small farms constantly declines, creating favorable conditions for land consolidation (European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, 2014). Consequently, it is harder and harder to find people you can actually cooperate with in rural areas. Melnikienė, the director of Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics, notices that in the last period of time many farmers have bought new equipment, which consequently increased productivity and decreased the number of people employed in agro-food sector (Delfi, 2016). At the moment, the situation appears to be stabilizing, but there is still a lack of alternative activities that could create new jobs. According to her, it is important to search for alternative business opportunities, such as tourism, in order to preserve the population density in rural areas. She notes that every village person is important not only as a producer, but also as a consumer. In order to be able to develop your business activities, you must have consumers (ibid).

Small-scale cheese producers acknowledge, that in their opinion, there are just a few consumers that could be considered as active and willing to cooperate with producers. In Lithuania, most of the alternative food initiatives are quite small-scale and emerge from the producers' side rather than from the consumers. I have been puzzled by the question of why the Slow Food Movement is not active in Lithuania. Probably the most likely answer is the lack of a critical mass of consumers. Kavaliauskas (2017) adds that "Slow Food, or any other movement, are more consumers' initiatives in order to support certain ways of eating or certain products. So, consumers take an initiative to support certain ways of production and consumption. In Lithuania, everything is done from the producers' side as we tried to organize AMAP." (Kavaliauskas, 2017).

One of the reasons why Lithuanian consumers are less involved in AFNs is that for many years Lithuania belonged to the planned economy of the Soviet bloc; therefore, variety of different choices

and western food in the supermarkets was a doorway to an open and liberalized world (Blumberg, 2014: 83). After collapse of the Soviet Union, people had more options to choose what to consume and not to consume (Knudsen, 2015: 382). However, as mentioned before, industrialization and modernization of agro-food sector also brought some fears about dangers and uncertainties connected with food industry. An evaluation of Lithuanian consumers' attitudes to genetically modified food, investigated by Lukošūtė and Petrauskaitė-Senkevič (2017), reveals that negative opinion towards food containing GMO has increased significantly in the last decade: 76 percent of women and 73 percent of men expressed negative views. About a decade ago, only half of Lithuanians knew about GMOs, while now more than 93% of people responded that they know what it is¹³ (The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017a). Even though 72 percent of the respondents were aware that if food contains GMO, it must be indicated on the label, only a quarter of the respondents reported paying attention to such labelling while purchasing a product (ibid). Nevertheless, this research does reflect greater consumer concern regarding food safety and food additives. Finally, Ilinauskaitė adds, the recognition of cheese made from pasteurized and unpasteurized milk is another step in the development of consumer consciousness regarding food production processes.

All in all, in Lithuania there is a problem of critical mass of people, especially in rural areas, creating unfavorable conditions for cooperation. There are just a few consumers who are very motivated and in solidarity with producers (Kavaliauskas, 2017). In order to have a bigger number of conscious consumers, there is a need to educate them about certain "(...) characteristics and attributes of agricultural products and foodstuffs sold through short marketing chains" (European Commission, 2011: 47). It is important to emphasize that progressive consumer-producer relations are connected with societal and political transformations. Hence, in order to have wider changes in the society more actors should be included: local and regional institutions, private businesses, politicians, nature, etc. The following section explores how different agents interlink in the food system through the lens of ANT.

¹³ The survey was conducted in 2015 in order to find out the general opinion towards the food labelling "Without GMO" (The Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017a).

4.5. Small-scale cheesemaking with farm animals and microbes

Goat, cow or sheep cheese is not only made by humans, but together with microbes. The type of fodder animals eat, where they graze, what kind of breed the animal is – these are important elements in providing the unique taste of a cheese. The majority of its flavour, however, comes from the microbiomes that are found in the environment, or what can be called “the microclimate”. Microclimate is effective only when using non-pasteurised milk, otherwise standardised lactic acid bacteria is added and all the connection to the place is lost (Eriksson and Bull, 2017: 212). Therefore, cheesemaking is a significantly more-than-human process where animals, milk and local bacteria are involved.

A farm can be seen as a place where complex socio-natural processes take place: human and non-human species interaction. The wellbeing of the human is tied to non-human landscapes and various organisms (Alkon, 2013: 671). For example, micro-organisms more commonly survive in soil which is not treated with chemical pesticides. As cheesemaker Tèvelis mentions, when you are a small farmer, you have to live in harmony with nature and follow the rhythm of the sun, of the animals and of nature itself (Tèvelis, 2017). Thus, the small farmer’s role is not only to produce something, but also to protect nature. As Kavaliauskas mentions, while being permanently surrounded by the nature and animals, you start to realize that you cannot become an exploiter of the natural world (Bernardinai, 2010). Our soil is full of life, such as tiny insects, ants and earthworms, which are crucial for the wellbeing of plants and the soil itself. The industrial methods of farming and spreading chemicals not only kills the weeds and unwanted insects, but also the entire ecosystem underneath the soil. The less synthetic substances and pesticides are used, the more forms of life you have (ibid). In general, cheese making is a way of living which is closely connected to a place, its ecosystems and to non-humans (Eriksson and Bull, 2017: 216).

Farming is an activity where one can observe an intimate interaction between producers and farm animals. Sheeps, goats and cows play an important role in cultural, economic and material terms, and are co-constructing various ruralities (Jones, 2006: 10). For instance, the outbreak of BSE was connected with unnatural feeding practices and revealed how animals are closely related with agriculture. During my interviews with Lithuanian local cheesemakers, I tried to find answers about the animal welfare and feeding practices applied in Lithuanian cheesemaking farmsteads. All of the cheese producers emphasize that their farm animals are pasture-free. Tèvelis says that they feed their cows only with hay, as you cannot give any silage or sour fodder because in that case you could feel a strong flavoring of it in the raw milk cheese afterwards. He also mentions that flavour is given not only

from the type of fodder, but also by the bacterias, which confirms the fact that cheesemaking is a work process that includes microbes - the tiniest organisms (Tévelis, 2017). There are many ethical questions concerning animal welfare and humans' relationships with them, especially regarding industrial farming practices. Small farms can be seen as places where violations of farm animal welfare are less frequent (Hess et al., 2014: 2). Tévelis (2017) confirms this by saying: "(...) our cows are not very productive, but they are healthy, they give good and rich milk and it is enough for us."

Another feature which can be identified from my research is that all of the cheesemaking farms are situated in Dzūkija, the Southeastern part of Lithuania, which is known for its forested landscape and infertile soils. According to Auguvienė, in this region land is not suitable for intensive agricultural practices and most of the people practise subsistence farming. In the case of "Augų Ūkis", what they take from the nature, they give back to the nature. Auguvienė provides the example of how the manure which is accumulated through the winter time is then brought to the fields in spring time, where they grow the corn. In autumn, the corn is given to the cows and once again the same natural circle is being repeated. Tévelis also mentions that the environment surrounding their creamery is absolutely natural, as there are no big farmers nearby. Kavaliauskas adds that Dzūkija region has many shrubberies and forests and it is really good for the small producers as it makes easier to settle down. In the central part of Lithuania, it would be much more difficult to find a piece of land, since most of it is used by big agricultural farms (Kavaliauskas, 2017). Hence, certain geographical arrangements also play a role in shaping food relations. In Lithuania, certain types of soil, which are not good for agricultural activities, create better circumstances for small farmers to settle down and start their own activities such as artisan cheese production.

Different objects also have an agency, especially in the cheesemaking craft, such as equipment needed for production and cheese aging rooms that ensure certain levels of temperature and humidity (Auguvienė, 2017). Microclimates can be considered as actors as well as microorganisms. The agency of various actors and their ability to act are of course variable and context-based. Nevertheless, the main idea is to emphasize that human activity cannot be separated from the natural world, just as cheesemaking cannot be separated from farm animals and different microorganism. According to Alkon, the separation between nature and society is connected with the exploitation of people and planet; hence, the recognition that humans and nature are co-produced "(...) can lead to a politics seeking to better human society and non-human nature" (Alkon, 2013: 663-664). In order to have a better food system, it is important to apply farming practices that preserve the wellbeing of soil. Small-scale farming, as well as the artisan cheesemaking, is an activity where a close relation between animals, land and human-beings can be observed.

4.6. The role of the human and institutional actors in the food system

Firstly, it is important to mention that food is “self-evidently natural and the product of human labor” (Alkon, 2013: 667). It is usually exchanged as a commodity in the market. Once it is consumed, however, it again becomes a part of human bodies. Hence the necessity to pay attention to “good, clean and fair” food available for everyone (Slow Food, 2017d). The food system is an entangled network of people, regulations, states, ecosystems, beliefs and values (Carolan, 2012: 2). In the ANT understanding “(...) actors themselves are defined by their relationships, or are co-constituted with other actors, objects, and institutions.” (Gray and Gibson, 2013: 85). Lithuanian local cheese producers are not only entangled in the network of farm animals and microorganisms, but also of consumers and institutions. In this part of the analysis, different human and institutional actors are considered, as well as their abilities to shape the way food is produced, distributed and consumed.

Alternative food initiatives can bring wider changes in the food system if institutions played a more active role. For example, the municipality can be seen as an “inter-scalar policy actor” helping to reconfigure relationships between food producers and consumers and people living in rural and urban areas (Sonnino et al., 2016: 484). The debate about food security, every citizen's right to know how products are produced and the availability of quality food should be a concern from every governance perspective. It should take a mediator's role and bring rural and urban people together. European Health and Food Safety Commissioner Andriukaitis mentions that “(...) every time municipalities procure meals for local schools or canteens, for example, they have an opportunity to improve both the health of citizens and the sustainability of their local economies.” According to him, (...) healthy food, a healthy environment and healthy lifestyles make up the blueprint for healthier societies.” (Andriukaitis, 2017). Recently, the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme was launched. It entered into force on the 1st of August, 2017, aiming at improving the diet of schoolchildren's and encouraging them to consume more fruits, vegetables and milk. Every member state is free to choose local and organic products as well as SFSCs and agricultural quality schemes as part of the programme (European Commission, 2017c). This demonstrates that the state is an important food-chain actor, which has ability to create a better market for quality food exchange and to modify consumption habits that are more sustainable and healthier (Sonnino, 2013:5). In Lithuanian consumers' research, Jonkutė identifies the following main barriers that inhibit sustainable lifestyle choices: limited financial resources (the dominant opinion is that an eco-friendly lifestyle is much more expensive), distrust in companies and the information they provide, and a lack of political leadership promoting sustainable consumption (Jonkutė, 2015: 38). According to Jonkutė's research,

Lithuanian national and regional institutions cannot be seen as active promoters of more sustainable ways of producing and consuming food; however, more research is needed in order to clarify the actual situation.

It is possible to notice rising concerns among citizens over food safety and healthier diets. Patterns of consumption are very complex and influenced by many different factors such as average monthly income, social status, level of education, regional traditions and others. According to some research, Lithuanian consumers pay more attention to a product's quality and price, while the environmental characteristics of a product are less important in their decision making (Jonkutė, 2015). Consumers would be encouraged to consume more sustainably and choose more eco-friendly products if they did not cost more than other alternatives that are less environmentally-friendly (Jonkutė, 2015). In reference to artisanal cheese produced by local cheesemakers, this also differentiates consumers according to their level of income. The main cheese consumers are urban people who have the ability to pay more for the locally produced cheese, and who also possess a certain level of understanding about its qualities.

Consumers can be called both co-producers if they are involved in the production activities and co-sumers if they are involved through conscious purchasing decisions (Renting et al., 2012: 300-301). As Renting et al. claim, in recent years, many new types of AFNs have emerged, where citizens take a much more active role and create new forms of producer-consumer relationships (such as AMAP in France). These new relationships go far beyond the direct selling activities initiated by the producers (ibid). Still, in Lithuania, the most common form of producer-consumer interaction is direct sales. This means that Lithuanian consumers take a more passive role, and tend to be mere buyers of local food. Most of the initiatives, such as local farmers' markets, emerge from the producers' side, and there is a lack of more progressive forms of consumer-producer partnerships.

Small scale farmers play an important role in order to move towards environmentally sustainable agriculture, keep community coherence and to build a better food system. All cheesemakers that have been interviewed mention that they aim at remaining small, but capable to earn enough money for a "comfortable" life. Kavaliauskas and Auguvienė argue that they would like to show that even a small farmer can live quite well and not necessarily have to be poor and complain that everything is wrong: the state, system, consumers and so on. Auguvienė adds, that "we are the people who are creating our country". Lithuanian rural "liveliness" depends on the young people with fresh and new ideas, who are settling down there. As Kavaliauskas says, the future of the village is in the hands of immigrants to the village who not only bring a technology, but also a different mindset: desire to share, cooperate and build social relations around them.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that ability to change or improve the food system is a relational effect among various actors and “(...) there are always possibilities available for reimagining and restructuring those relationships towards different ways of doing things.” (Holloway et al., 2007: 6). As a result, local, fresh and good quality food accessible for everyone requires a strong political base and an active role of the state. Consumers can also influence how food is produced and distributed by their buying decisions as well as by forming new producer-consumer relationships. Small-scale farmers help to build a better food system by employing more sustainable farming practices, by preserving local traditions and knowledges, by providing local and fresh products, by preserving the biodiversity, and by creating a closer connection between the producers, consumers and nature.

5. Discussion

The research of agro-food systems and alternative food networks has mainly received attention from rural sociologists and human geographers, but at a time when we are witnessing the pressure of corporations and many ethical, social and environmental issues connected with industrial agriculture and long supply chains, this area of studies is becoming more and more political. This thesis tries to pay attention to how alternative forms of food provisioning can play an active role in fighting the fear over food insecurity and climate change as well as to lead towards more sustainable and healthier lifestyles. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of small scale production and small scale farming, which is connected with the preservation of local traditions and knowledge and the provision of seasonal and quality food. The industrial products found on our supermarkets' shelves are not only full of artificial additives that prolong their expiration date, but also break a bond between food and people who produce it. Hence, short food supply chains are a way to reconnect producers and consumers, leading to healthier diets, social cohesion, local development, sustainable farming and better eco-equilibrium between people, soil and animals.

Every different food scandal – the most recent one being the contamination of eggs with insecticide fipronil – encourages us to rethink our food system and its safety. AFNs are often seen as a “turn” to quality which supports food diversification, and the protection of biodiversity and traditions rather than monopolization, standardization and mass-production. I am questioning: “what is the future of the European food system, and which type of future is better for the economy, society, environment, nature and each of us?”. Therefore, in this master thesis attention is paid to the artisanal cheese makers in Lithuania who are trying to make good quality cheese from their own animals, raw milk, their own hands and to reveal variety of natural tastes and flavors. It is an alternative to the mass produced cheese which we can find on supermarket shelves made by vast milk processing enterprises - produced and bought in huge quantities anonymously. The aim of the thesis is not to change the whole food system and support only the artisan small-scale production, but rather, an invitation to re-think the current food system and where it is leading us to. I believe that different types of food systems (conventional and alternative) can “co-exist” where small producers are not overtaken by the big ones and where there is no threat to the loss of biodiversity, traditional foods and unique flavours. That is why I wanted to pay attention to alternative food spaces which are receiving more and more attention on national and European policy levels. Support for LFS and SFSCs is reflected in the CAP towards 2020 and meets many goals associated with smart, inclusive and innovative growth.

However, the EC admits that there are a few barriers for the development of alternative food networks, such as national policies that favour larger producers and a lack of certain skills and knowledge concerning small farmers and SFSC's development. Lithuanian agricultural policy is strongly focused on larger producers, while small-scale farming is still not receiving a lot of attention. The interviewees in my research emphasized bureaucratic constraints to receiving financial support for small producers. Another issue is the demographical situation in Lithuania: an aging society, declining birthrates, and huge emigration flows to urban areas and abroad, which makes villages emptier and less lively. Cheesemakers mention that it is hard to find people to cooperate with, either because of the critical mass of people or due to cultural characteristics - cooperation in Lithuanian society is not an accepted model of working. It is connected with such negative historical experiences as being a part of the Soviet Union, not having private property and having to obey to commands from "above". There remains a lot of mistrust among people. That being said, times are changing, as well as the understanding concerning food and its quality. While market's liberalization and monopolization by huge supermarket chains once was considered an indicator of positive development and the Westernization processes, nowadays it is increasingly seen as leading to decreased food quality, health problems, loss of small businesses and a decreased number of small farmers. Therefore, it is necessary to move towards production and consumption practices that are less harmful for the environment and for society. It is very important to pay more attention to the new entrepreneurs in the villages such as progressive Lithuanian cheesemakers, who re-localize cheese production in rural areas and, thus, establish closer relationships between producers and consumers.

6. Conclusion

From the ANT perspective, the food system which we have nowadays is a result of interactions among politicians, corporations, farmers, institutions, policies, technological developments, innovations in farming, animals, micro-organisms and others. But every alternative initiative can challenge mainstream worldviews and has the ability to reconfigure capitalist society. Therefore, in order to answer the research question: *How do different actors shape the development of alternative food networks (AFNs) of Lithuanian small-scale cheese production?*, it is necessary to reconsider all the actors included in the food relations - organic and inorganic beings.

In this master's thesis, places and spaces of localized artisanal cheese production and consumption are considered as AFNs. These networks operate through the sites such as farmers' markets at different locations in Vilnius, Kaunas and Druskininkai, a farm shop in Didžiasalis village and a cooperative shop in Dargužiai village. SFSC creates a direct connection between cheese producer and consumer. Lithuanian cheesemakers can be perceived as progressive, as they try not only to make a profit from their rural business activities, but also make changes in the society through promotion of sustainable and small-scale farming practices, as well as through the creation of a closer connection between soil, farm animals and the natural environment. In fact, raw milk cheese production has very strong ties to the territory it is produced in, which is reflected in the taste of the cheese. This demonstrates the complex nature of cheese production, where human and non-human actors are actively present. AFN's development not only includes farmers and local food spaces, but also many other actors such as consumers, institutions, technologies and others. It is possible to notice that in Lithuania, huge retailer-led chains are dominating in the food market, and alternative food networks do not take an important place in the food system. Most of the alternative food initiatives are small-scale, reaching a limited number of people. One of the reasons for this is that too few actors are participating in the network of food relations, such as a lack of consumer-activity and initiatives emerging from their side, and the passive role of the government towards small farming and its support.

It is important to note that the development of AFNs is seen as a process where different actors interact and shape each other. In Lithuania, alternative food initiatives began more than 10 years ago with a farmer's market in Vilnius, trying to implement a model similar to AMAP; however, it did not receive much support. Later on, it developed into the cheesemaker's association "VivaSol". At this moment, we have more and more small cheesemakers across Lithuania, who have created various food places and spaces (f.e. farm shop and cafe in Dargužiai village), where local, fresh and good quality cheese can reach consumers connecting them with the place of production and educating them about

various flavours and tastes that come from the raw milk cheese. However, there is a lack of even more progressive forms of consumer-producer relationships.

Nevertheless, if people with different worldviews took positions in the government, more progressive young farmers settled in villages and started to practice sustainable farming, more “engaged” and educated consumers were involved as well as new technologies were applied not only for the intensification of production processes, but to find more sustainable and environmentally friendly ways of farming, then AFNs would truly have the ability to reshape the conventional mode of food provisioning. This is an “utopian rural imagery” of various changes needed in the European food system. The future of the food system is in the hands of people who are willing to bring positive change and their ability to interact in the heterogeneous network of food relations where human and non-human actors are involved. As David Goodman et al. mention, it is important to understand alternative food system-making as a process where the world is seen as relational and process-based. In general, “(...) alternative food systems, in fact all alternative ways of life, require different ways of knowing as well” (Goodman et al., 2012:6). Hence, it is necessary to understand how alternative forms of knowledge and different ways of looking at the social world can help to build a better and more resilient food system in order to meet the challenges of our contemporary world.

7. Recommendations for future research

There are many further research possibilities that stem from this paper. One of them is further researching of AFNs, food security and environmental change. It is clear that a food system is a source of greenhouse gas emission and the pollution of land and waters, which also affects food security.

Following the Actor-Network-Theory, research could also focus on the application of high-technologies in farming and to see how it produces new human and non-human “hybrids”. In this case, agro-food sector research should include various actors such as bigger agro-food companies, biotechnologies, innovative farming apps, robotics and other technological innovations. It would reveal a more precise angle on how new technological developments are changing rural practices, creating more complex relationships and reconstructing the countryside.

More attention could also be paid to the rural/urban linkages. It is necessary to understand that food is more than just a commodity; it has the capacity to contribute to sustainable rural and urban development. Nowadays, the traditional dichotomy between rural and urban is no longer relevant as the boundaries between rural and urban regions is increasingly blurred. Rural/urban linkages are perceived as more and more connected rather than separated areas, as processes of urbanization and the increased movement of goods, people and services create new patterns of rural-urban relationships as well as new social and economic links (Augère-Granier, 2016b).

Future research could also focus more on the consumer’s role and certain choices regarding food consumption. An interesting question is to see if it is better to prioritise local producers rather the ones located on the other side of the world. More debate is needed concerning ethical consumption and global responsibility taking. Political consumption has attracted a lot of attention, where consumers use markets as an arena for politics in order to change institutional or market practices that are ethically, environmentally, or politically objectionable.

All in all, sustainability is often linked with economic, social and environmental development. Hence, it is necessary to shape consumption and production practices that are leading to the more sustainable lifestyles. “More sustainable food systems will be those that enable all food system actors, including consumers, to act responsibly.” (Harris, 2010). The European Health and Food safety commissioner mentioned that the biggest challenge is to ensure access to nutritious and safe food for the all people. As he put it, “To succeed in this aim we don't need more food. Food production is huge. We need to eliminate waste, produce better, more sustainable food.” (Andriukaitis, 2017). Therefore, new models and new systems are needed in order to shape European food system towards more sustainable ways of producing and consuming.

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Appendix

Malikėnaitė and Večerkauskas. Personal interview. “Sūrininkų namai” (in English “Cheesemakers’ home”), Dargužiai, 12 July 2017

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself?

I am Šarūnas and I am living in Dargužiai village. Together with my friend Kotryna we are running the “Sūrininkai namai” (engl. “Cheesemakers’ Home”) [a little farm shop]. Our main tasks are food catering, the sale of artisan cheese and the organization of cheese degustations in order to present Lithuanian cheese culture.

2. Which Lithuanian region encompass cheese production and consumption?

Mainly Varėna region [southeastern Lithuania]. All the cheesemakers are from Varėna region.

3. What is the natural environment surrounding Dargužiai village: smaller or bigger farms?

Dargužiai village is surrounded by agrarian landscape, mainly fields used for agriculture and forests. Varėna region is distinguished as being the most forested area in Lithuania. Talking about Dargužiai village, there are quite a few farmers here. Every second neighbour has approximately two tractors. There is a huge blackberry farm which is also making Dargužiai village more attractive to the visitors.

4. Are those farmers using environmentally friendly agricultural practices or traditional ones (using chemical fertilizers)?

It is hard to answer this question as nobody is declaring it. Those farms are not certified as organic or ecological farms. However, the previous owner of “Sūrininkų namai” Valdas [cheesemaker], always tried to avoid different sources of pollution such as electric grass cutting machine as they produce “acoustic pollution” which is unpleasant to humans as well as to nature. But at the same time, it is always possible to find areas that could become more eco-friendly.

5. What are you selling beside cheese in your farm shop?

Homemade desserts and kvass. Also, just yesterday we started producing our own beer.

6. Where have you learnt to make all those different products?

A lot of information is on the Internet. You can find many webpages providing detailed information and videos. In the shops, you can find a whole package of ingredients needed to produce beer together with instructions. So the whole process is quite mechanised, maybe making it less interesting, but also much easier.

7. Do you pay attention to the ingredients you are using, such as more natural products?

The most interesting thing is to make everything as much as possible on your own (from scratch) using local products, if possible. For example, while making bread we use flour from a small producer (otherwise, you can always buy flour from bigger producers or even from Poland, as it is much cheaper). Hence, our main criteria is to use more local products. For instance, we were making ice-cream and we took strawberries from our neighbour. This is also a good way to support the local economy. Of course, this exchange is on a very small-scale, but if it became larger, it would have much bigger economic outcomes.

8. How does seasonality affect cheese sales as well as the production of your own products?

At this moment [12 July], there are the biggest quantities of milk given by farm animals, and after that there is less and less milk. Therefore, after the summer, there will be less cheese. Our own production will be also affected by seasonal change. For example, in winter time, we use frozen strawberries, raspberries and blueberries. It depends on how you prepare for the winter time. [Šarūnas adds], in May we were using spinach, after that came strawberry season, and at this moment fresh blueberries and blackberries are used. In September and October, pumpkin and zucchini season will arrive. Everything goes together with the circle of nature. [Šarūnas and Kotryna mention in a mischievous way], frozen french fries do not change in January or June; however, we try to follow a more natural way.

9. Do you pay attention to the packaging, especially to the environmentally friendly one?

Yes, but it is quite complicated. We were looking for plastic bags that are biodegradable, but we found just one supplier in Lithuania and it was too complicated process to order those bags. We are trying to pay more attention to it, but still more time and efforts should be devoted to this issue.

10. Do you sort your waste?

We do. The only problem is that the waste is taken away only once in a month or once in two months, depending on the type of waste. It is a huge problem for us, as our containers of plastic, paper and glass are full in one week.

11. Does this mean that you have quite a few visitors? Are you able to sell all the products you make per week/day?

We do not make everything in very huge quantities, but as many cakes as we make, we are able to sell. On the weekends, we receive the biggest number of visitors and on the weekdays there are just a few people coming. The number of customers can vary a lot.

12. What are the main communication means used to communicate with the customers?

Mainly Facebook, sometimes e-mail.

13. Are you using your website?

At the moment, we are not using our webpage because we want to update it and maybe later it could be used as a means of communication.

14. Anything else?

Media also plays a big role. After reading an article on the Internet or in a journal, more visitors come. But since this does not assure a constant flow of customers, it has a periodic influence.

15. Is it possible to call “Sūrininkų namai” as a farm shop? How would you define it?

It is something in between a farm shop and a small cafe. It is a place where you can buy cheese, but at the same time it is a cozy place where you can sit down, spend some time, and have a little chat with us. We are trying to create a connection among us, our visitors and cheesemakers.

16. How are you trying to re-connect producers and consumers? Do you organize discussions/events here?

We only organize cheese degustations. The problem is that people do not come to different events. We tried to organize a few gatherings, but they did not receive much interest. Also, not everybody is willing to go a long distance from the city just for a little event in the village.

17. Is the perception about natural and quality products changing from the consumers' side? Can you see a higher demand for natural and artisan products?

Yes. Young mothers especially are very aware about certain products. For example, they consider that gluten in the bread is not good, that goats' milk for pregnant woman is not fitting or that non-pasteurized milk is not good too, even though non-pasteurized milk is much more nutritious and

healthier than pasteurized milk. But yes, it is possible to notice that people are becoming more aware about their diet.

18. What kind of environment are you trying to create in “Sūrininkų namai”?

We want to create a cozy place, to spread a good mood and always to communicate with our customers (more than just to sell food). It is very nice when parents come with their children here. We try to share some time with them such as to playing or drawing together. We try to create an atmosphere where everybody feels good: adults as well as children.

19. What was your motivation to change your lifestyle and move from the city out to the village?

Our jobs in the offices got boring in the city. [Kotryna] My work was not interesting and for Šarūnas his job environment was depressing. When you live in a city, you are always in a hurry (and in the traffic jams) and in the village the pace of life slower. But of course, your life gains different kinds of stress and responsibilities. But probably the main reason was to escape the city life.

20. What are the main values you try to encourage?

Maybe not to be afraid to change some things in your life such as your job and to search for new things in your life. Also, not to complain that the state is not giving anything to you, but rather, you should try to give something instead.

21. What are your future plans? To expand, to produce something new or something else?

In the autumn, we will receive less cheese from the cheesemakers, so it is important to find new ways to survive. Maybe to start going to the markets and fairs and sell our homemade cakes and bread, maybe beer or even homemade cider.

22. Who are your main customers: local or urban people?

Local people do not buy cheese unless they have visitors and bring them here. Mainly, people from the cities are coming to buy our cheese (Vilnius-Druskininkai direction). This place is oriented towards a city person who has a higher level of income and can afford buying a bit more expensive, better quality cheese.

23. Are you trying to integrate local people in your activities?

We are trying, but local people are a little bit passive. It is very hard to integrate them into our activities.

Auguvienė, Gražina. Personal interview. “Augų ūkis” (in English “Augai Farm”), Didžiasalis village, 14 July 2017

1. Where do you produce your cheese?

We live and produce our cheese in Druskininkai municipality, Didžiasalis village. It is a small family farm.

2. What kind of animals do you keep?

We have cows and goats. We have 4 goats and we also produce cheese from the goats' milk.

3. How are your farm animals kept? Are they pasture-free?

Cows are pasture-free in winter and summer time. We do not tie the cows up. Our goats can graze in the special enclosure. They are also free; at any time they can leave and come back. Our animals live freely, they are healthy and happy.

4. Could you describe the natural environment surrounding Didžiasalis village?

It is possible to say that in Dzūkija [southeastern region of Lithuania] farming is similar to “subsistence farming”, because here the soil is mainly sand and you cannot have such a huge harvest as in Žemaitija [northwestern region of Lithuania]. In a natural way, it is the region which is not suiting for intense farming. In our case, what we take from nature, we give back to nature. Manure, which is accumulated through the winter time, is then brought to the fields where we grow corn. In autumn, we bring the corn back home and give it to the cows and once again everything goes back on the fields. We also grow potatoes for our own consumption and we do not spray any chemicals. It is enough to have what we can grow naturally.

5. Can you describe your cheese production methods? Are they traditional or modern ones?

Mostly we produce sweet milk cheese where you only heat the milk, pour the whey or the sour milk which is being contracted, and from that curd you make the cheese. We also make cheese from cottage cheese. But the consumers' taste is changing and we now are producing such cheese only if we have special orders for it.

6. What kind of cheese is the most popular?

Mostly people eat the sweet milk cheese. This can be baked, smoked, with herbs, with cranberries, with caraway, everything that you can think to add, you can add. Fermented and matured cheese is bought by the people who understand what it is. A lot of this cheese is sold when we have groups of people visiting our farm, also by people from Kaunas and Vilnius [people from the bigger cities]. Matured cheese is more expensive, but still it is cheaper here than in Vilnius. Such kind of cheese is expensive because of what you have to do to prepare it: you have to keep it for half a year, visiting this cheese every second day and maintaining a certain temperature level. Those are the reasons that make it more expensive than other types of cheese.

7. Where have you learnt to make matured cheese?

We make this cheese according to the French method. I have been in France and I saw how this cheese is made there. Actually, you need a lot of knowledge to make it. In the beginning, I thought that my husband was going to produce it. He tried, but he didn't succeed, and we gave up this idea. After that, I thought that I have to try one more time. In Dargužiai, there was a free of charge practical seminar, and after that I came back home and started to produce mature cheese on my own. That was already 5 years ago, and it is possible to say that we can make it.

8. Where have you received most of the knowledge about cheese production?

Maybe 2 years ago, our farm was visited by professors from the food industry institute, who for one week taught us how to make lactose-free products. At that moment, I could find out everything I wanted and receive many skills and all the answers. This autumn this Institute wants to come to our farm again and to cooperate. When you start to make your own cheese, you think that you know everything, but when you actually make the cheese, you realize that you don't know anything. There is a saying "The more you know, the more you don't know".

9. Where do you get the ingredients for cheese production from: your own farm or not necessarily?

The main ingredients are milk, salt, yeast and rennet. We are buying yeast and rennet from a company, because on the farm you cannot save them, every time you need them you have to take a new portion. The price of the cheese is also higher because of the yeast and rennet which you have to buy separately.

10. Talking about microclimate, how does it affect cheese production in Lithuania?

For matured cheese, you have to maintain certain conditions: pay attention to the level of humidity and to the temperature. In our conditions, you don't have to keep cheese too long – 4-5 months – even one month maturity cheese is very tasty.

11. Could you call such type of cheese Lithuanian cheese?

It is a good question. From time to time, I like to discuss it with my customers. Sometimes they come and say: “Oh, Dutch cheese” and I answer “No, it is not Dutch cheese, it is Lithuanian cheese and it is produced here”. In my opinion, everything what is born in Lithuania (on a Lithuanian farm, made by a Lithuanian producer, from Lithuanian cows), could be called a Lithuanian product, such as Lithuanian fermented cheese. The only thing is that the technology came from French cheese-making traditions. In general, it is my cheese and so it is Lithuanian.

12. How does seasonality affect cheese production?

Oh, does not affect anything: in winter and in summer you are still making cheese. Only in summer time we make more sweet milk cheese - we bake, smoke it and produce more different varieties of cheese. In summer time, we have more customers. In winter time, we make more matured and fermented cheese, and we are preparing for the summer. We don't feel the seasonality in the sense that at some point you are supposed not to have milk and the most surprising aspect is that we have less milk right now [summer time]. The point is that our cows are not inseminating at this moment and every month you receive less and less milk. We have 10 cows, so not that much milk, but still enough of everything.

13. Do you pay attention to packaging?

Yes, fermented and matured cheese is packaged in small paper bags, while other types of cheese is packaged in plastic wrap because people have to see what kind of cheese it is.

14. How do you sell your cheese? Are there any intermediaries?

We provide our cheese to restaurants in Vilnius and Druskininkai. Mainly we sell our cheese on our own. We also don't make cheese in that huge quantities. We enjoy that our customers are coming to our farm shop and know that they always can find cheese here.

15. Some specialised shops?

Only to one little shop in Druskininkai and restaurant “Leičiai” in Vilnius. Some supermarkets and shops have asked me to provide my produce, but there are few problems connected with this. When you start giving cheese to them, they need different quantities. It means that I am making cheese and giving it away to different shops. When you give it away, they ask you for a smaller price. But if I am able to sell cheese with a higher price, there is no good reason to change it. Also, in that case, I would not have time for educational programs, which bring the highest revenues. So, providing food for bigger shops is not interesting and beneficial from an economic point of view. We also often are invited to participate in different fairs.

16. Are you going to participate in Druskininkai “Cheese Festival 2017”?

Yes! I will rent out a huge tent and I will sell my cheese there.

17. What kind of communication means are you using to reach your customers?

Most often through the mobile phone. Also Facebook. It is very common for my customers to have my phone number and to call me.

18. I have noticed that you belong to the “Kaimas į namus” (in english “Village to home”) consumers community where consumers can order food directly from the farmer on the Internet.

It is an idea which sounds very nice and is well promoted, but in my opinion it does not work very well. Maybe closer to Vilnius it is more active and better coordinated. In my case, consumers have to order a bigger quantity of cheese in order it would be beneficial for me to bring it to the consumer.

19. How many customers do you receive per day/week approximately?

Most customers we receive on the weekends. The number is very different. Sometimes you receive 50 people, sometimes just 2, but they buy almost the same quantity. So it is very hard to say. But the situation that there are no customers per day, it does not occur. Always somebody is going to come.

20. Do you try to reconnect producer and consumer through different means such as educational programs (as I have heard from you)?

We make degustation-educational programs. People try it, and like it. The best promotion is “from mouth-to-mouth” Some people who go to their summer cabins on the weekends visit us because from they have heard about us from somewhere. Also, some people saw me on the television and they wanted to try our cheese.

21. Does this mean that media has a positive effect?

Yes, television affects a lot. Earlier, I didn't want to be filmed and I was thinking that I have nothing to show as the farm is so small, but actually, it works very well as a promotional tool. A few magazines have also written about us.

22. How did the media find out about your small family farm?

That's a good question [laughing]. A lot of influence came from "Nacionalinė ekspedicija" (in english "National expedition") because this TV show has many viewers. For example, there are some leaflets launched with different programs/activities in the Druskininkai municipality area - they are not very effective. Even though all those programs are very interesting and the administration is trying to promote activities in rural areas, usually all the leaflets end up in the trash bin, because people who are interested can find us without those leaflets. Some people are very good at making something, but they are not good at promoting their produce.

23. So it is initiated by Druskininkai municipality?

No, it is not municipality, but Druskininkai local action group which is connecting rural areas. All the chairmen of different communities are in the board and we are creating plans and projects in order our villages would become nicer, that we would be working here, that we would be creating new jobs and so on. Through different events, educational programs. We are writing projects, receiving money and we are making some improvements and so on.

24. Is it possible to say that village is becoming more alive?

On the one hand, it is becoming more alive; on the other hand, it is dying. In all different times, those who wanted to be reborn, they have been reborn. And there is always somebody who is not interested in anything and closes all the doors... But there are some people who are interested in many things and we often meet each other and we like to dance and to make some theatrical performances together and to spend a nice time together.

25. Talking about consumers, can you notice the changing tastes and perception towards healthy and good quality products?

Yes, yes! They come, try it and say : "Here cheese has a taste and a smell and in the shop it is different, all cheeses are the same". Of course, some old types of cheese such as Gouda, parmesan, Džiugas [they are tasty]...but all the other ones, they practically cannot be different as they are assembled from the

whole of Lithuania and ground into something. So perception is changing and the more cheese is expensive, the better ...but in general, people like that it is a small family farm and that only family members are working there. Also, some people want to bring their own recipes, and we are trying to fulfill them. The other very important aspect is communication. People sometimes come and say that they miss me or sometimes my children sell cheese instead of me and some customers are disappointed if they don't meet me. So it is important how you communicate and how you sell your cheese. Well, for me, it comes naturally to communicate and talk. I enjoy it, but it all depends on one's personal skills.

26. Does this mean that it is necessary for producer to have ability to communicate with his/her customers?

It does. For example, you can make the most delicious cheese, but if you just stand and nobody knows you, you don't promote yourself, you don't give it away free of charge...once, one professor asked me: "How much cheese have you given away?" and my answer was: "It is a good question". In order for people to know you, you have to present your cheese and show up in the public and talk about it. There are so many things to do – people just have to take some action, and create something. There are so many things to do in Lithuania. If people would be working the same as abroad and if they would eat the same food as they eat there, they would not be living in worse conditions [in Lithuania]. People just have to not be afraid to create and make something on their own.

27. What was your own motivation to start a small family business?

We started to produce cheese in quite a simple way, little by little. First, we were providing our milk to a dairy factory, but when this dairy started to pay very little, I realized that I can make this cheese on my own and that I should not give away all my profits. Also, at that moment, my two children were students, and I had to think very well about my future: either to go to search for a new job or try to make something here [in the farm]. Little by little we started to produce cheese, bring it to Druskininkai, and we found our customers. Was it easy? No, it was not easy, but now we don't [need to] go anywhere, people are coming themselves.

28. What are your future plans: to expand or to maintain the small-scale production?

To expand – no. We already have everything. But we are dreaming to move more towards agro-tourism. To keep making what we make, and also to focus on agro-tourism. To have more tourists, because you can earn more from tourists. But with animals and land – no [expansion]. We have already have enough work with them.

29. How have your services and cheese changed over time?

In general, the same products can get boring. For how many days can you eat the same sweet cheese? After a while, you want something different, a different taste and so on. That is why we are searching for more diversity. The cheese has to be different, maybe with a wine filling or with turmeric or with coffee. During degustations, it is nice to show how cheese can be. After that, people are interested, and buy this cheese. So the cheese is changing while people are trying it, communicating... You pay attention to what people like more, and then you come up with some new ideas about what can be added in the cheese. If there weren't degustations and educational programs, in that case I would be searching for more restaurants and shops - in that case I would need an intermediary which could help with selling my cheese.

30. Who are your main customers: urban or local people?

They are urban people and foreigners. We have Latvians and Polish people and Ukrainians and Russians and Norwegians and if we have mixed groups, we can have Germans and Italians...

31. How do you communicate with them?

They bring their own translators: I don't have to think about it. With Russians and Poles I can talk. Maybe I should start learning English, but once again you have to find time for this. Maybe I should...

32. What about local people?

Village people – no. Maybe they are a little bit jealous. But people from Druskininkai or Leipalingis, they are coming. Another thing, sometimes my neighbour buys cheese from me. She is an older lady, however. How much cheese she does need? Sometimes the village people buy cheese, but the main customers are urban people.

33. Is your cheese priced accessibly for everybody, or only for customers that have a higher level of income?

Here the prices are the same as the market prices and the same as Druskininkai town prices. It is cheaper than in Vilnius or bigger cities. Sometimes people are surprised about the lower price here, as it can be cheaper than in a shop. Maybe here [in Lithuania] there is no general understanding about cheese production and cheese culture. In some countries there is a very strong cheese culture where cheese cellars are inherited from one generation to another, and here only Gražina [the farmer who is

being interviewed] came up with this idea. It also seemed very unique when we started building this farm shop. Villagers were wondering what we are doing here.

34. So it was a very new idea to build a farm shop?

Yes, we were the first ones in Druskininkai municipality who opened their own little shop on their farm. This idea came to me when I was in France. I walked around and it became a pity that we [in Lithuania?] have to hide away somewhere, go to the market... Why can others do it and we cannot? So I decided to build my own farm shop. It is better to cry less and to do something. Lithuania is us - we are the people who are creating our country and for me Lithuania is great, I am very happy to be living here.

35. Have you received any kind of support from the EU or the municipality?

From the municipality we are receiving support; for example, this fridge is from municipal funds. We also bought cheese making molds [with municipal funds]. These are small sums of money, but for a small business it is still beneficial. Also, I cannot say any bad word about Druskininkai municipality. If somebody is doing something, they always try to support it. They have a positive attitude towards small business, and they try to create a good environment for it.

36. Do you have any difficulties with raw milk law and all the hygiene requirements?

No, no problems. It is very normal that there are controls because it is a food product, and also, you have to try to work better. It is good that we have inspections, it's as it should be. Every quarter, milk samples are taken and everything is checked. Cheese and sour cream samples are also taken.

37. Is it possible to claim that small scale farming helps to revive village life, strengthen the community and to reconnect production and consumption practices?

Yes. As I am our village community's chairwoman, I am dreaming that our village would become more entrepreneurial. At first, we started with cheese. Later, our neighbour put a sign up for "Honey", and another one wrote down "Eggs". Another woman makes and sells cakes. People come to buy one thing and ask what else they can get, and then you send them to somebody who has something else. Unequivocally, I try to make my region more famous, unequivocally, I teach people to eat more naturally and how to produce it, unequivocally, it is important for Lithuania and for Lithuanians, we have to eat our own products and make it on our own and not to eat something "unknown". And I think that my work is a meaningful one and I am very happy and important [laughing].

Tèvelis, Giedrius. Personal Interview. Creamery “Varinis puodas” (in English “Copper pot”), Kabeliai village, 21 July 2017

Note: This is a unique interview where I had an opportunity to see the whole cheese making process while interviewing the farmer Giedrius Tèvelis. The interview started at 7 a.m. in the morning at “Varinis puodas” cheesemaking place. Some of the questions were answered by Giedrius’ colleague, cheesemaker Audrius Jokubauskas. The interview lasted for approximately 2.5 hours

1. Where do you keep your animals?

In summer time they are kept outside in the natural pastures and in the winter time they are kept in the cowshed.

2. What kind of natural environment surrounds your village?

It is absolutely natural, as there is no industry around. For 25 years, for sure. The meadows are natural and there are no big farmers nearby. We are one of the biggest here [laughing]. It is hard to seed something in this sand.

3. I can see that milk is being boiled in a copper pot. Do you make cheese only in such pots?

There is even a story about a copper pot which we bought, and here is the second one... from France with some little adventures, and that is why we called our cheese-making place “Copper pot”.

4. Could you introduce yourself?

I have been working for many years in the agricultural sector, actually on industrial poultry farms. I am from Vilnius. Audrius [another cheese-maker] is from Kaunas. I have been making cheese for 5 years now.

[Giedrius adds while working] The cheese we are making now, we will eat only after one year.

5. Where have you learnt to make cheese?

I have learnt to make it here from Audrius.

6. What kind of fodder are you giving to your animals?

Only hay. There is a certain specific rule while producing cheese that you cannot give silage or sour fodder. In the big factories milk is pasteurized and you cannot feel the strong flavouring of silage.

Also, flavoring is given by bacterias, and everywhere there are bacterias. So we are working with microbes - with the tiniest animals.

7. Are the conditions favourable here for cheese production such as in France?

Of course, it is a slightly different climate there. But times are changing and we cannot say that we brought it from some “caves”...it is marketing. Nowadays there are certain bacterias that are segregated according to their flavour qualities and they are grown in an industrial way. That’s it. In all types of production, it is the same. You produce parmezano and don’t have to think too much. It is quite different when you work with raw milk. That milk has many bacterias from itself. There are good and bad bacterias around us and you have to fight against the bad ones. You have to keep everything clean.

8. Does this mean that your cheese is unique?

Yes. The uniqueness is that we are making cheese from non-pasteurized milk and then inside the cheese there are many nutritious things.

9. Can you call this cheese Lithuanian cheese?

Of course. For example, is paneer Lithuanian or not? The same Lithuanian cheese is made in India and is called paneer. But we say in a straightforward way that it is not Lithuanian technology. But the question is: if the cheese is made for 100 years, is it Lithuanian? Or the cheese made for 1000 years in Italy or the first cheese in Egypt, in 5000 BC, so is this an Egyptian cheese? Technologies in these times are very clear, there are detailed written explanations, there are some bacterias that are added and we don’t play (we don’t segregate or we don’t have unique cellars where you have unique microbes). Everything is much simpler. Uniqueness comes from that it is handmade, that our animals are grazing in meadows...

10. How is your cheese production affected by seasonality?

Cheese is a little bit different when animals are fed by hay and by grass. Also, sometimes you get less milk from cows and you produce a little bit of a different type of cheese. For other types of cheese you need 60-70 liters of milk and today [the day of the interview] we have 130 liters and we will make 2 pieces of cheese.

[Adds] The production of matured cheese is very slow and teaches us to be more patient.

11. How did you appear in the small cheese-making business?

Actually, my previous job got boring for me. I didn't want to be a hired employee. My speciality is as a zoo-technician, or what is nowadays called an animal technologist. I enjoy working with animals, I enjoy making food and here everything merges into one.

12. What are the main values and motivations you try to spread?

In reality you have to survive and on a personal level: I want to do what I like and I do not want to do what I do not like. I am trying to live in this way. And here everything comes naturally - you have to live in friendship with nature. First of all, the rhythm of the sun, and secondly, there is the animals' rhythm, cold and warm days. When you are small, you choose this concept. For example, our cows are not very productive, but they are healthy, they give good and rich milk and it is enough for us. But of course, our cheese is more expensive.

13. Who are your main customers: local or urban people?

Mainly people from bigger cities.

14. Do you try to integrate different people in your activities? You have mentioned that you used to have a few volunteers.

Talking about village people, it is hard to integrate them as there are not that many people. Somebody who is doing something, he/she is doing it, somebody who is not doing anything, he/she is doing nothing. So we do not want people who do nothing and people who do something, they are already busy with their own things. It is enough "tragic" situation. We would like to involve more people, but we do not have the financial possibility, such as to pay salaries.

[Later adds] Talking about values, we do not cheat. I do not like Lithuanian businesses. I have been working in huge concerns (businesses), at least in two of them. I don't like Lithuanian businesses, but I like Scandinavian ones. I have been working with Swedes and everything is much nicer and more beautiful (...). In Lithuania, greed is always present (...)

15. Is the village alive in Lithuania?

It is a complicated question. It is not very vivid. We have very different personal experiences. I am from Vilnius, Audrius is from Kaunas. We come from the cities and we see things differently from villagers. They see everything through their own prism and they see problems in different things.

16. Do you have a farm shop?

We sell our cheese if somebody comes, but we do not have a farm shop like Gražina [“Augų ūkis” cheese-maker]. We don’t make educational programs or excursions. If somebody is very interested to see how we make cheese, they are welcome to come.

17. What is your cheese supply chain?

We provide our cheese to a few specialised shops and restaurants...We have 3 locations where we always sell our cheese: Druskininkai, Vilnius and Kaunas

18. What is the influence of media?

[Audrius] There are a few articles about us. But recently, I am trying to avoid them. Because they increase interest... Our model it is that we produce cheese here and then we go to sell it at different locations and we cannot be here all the time. When there is a bigger interest, you receive more calls and visits. Otherwise, it would be a completely different model: we couldn’t go to different places [little markets], but we would have to sit here. [Giedrius adds] It is a different concept.

19. Have you received support from the EU?

[Audrius] Yes, we have got it last year. We bought the new pot [copper pot].

20. Have you received any support from the municipality?

[Audrius] We received it from Varėna, but not from Druskininkai.

21. I heard that you are organizers of the “Cheese Festival”. Is it an annual event?

[Audrius] Yes, it is the 4th one. Cheesemakers from different Lithuanian regions are supposed to come. There are around 100 producers who have permission to produce their cheese in Lithuania. But in our circle, the informal community is around 50 cheesemakers who know each other. And in the festival, 20 different cheesemakers come to sell their cheese.

22. What about increasing competition? And sharing knowledge?

In reality, the more cheesemakers we have, the more people buy. This movement began around 10 years ago, and the idea was to have more cheesemakers and more different varieties of cheese. Then the consumer can have better choice and it is even easier to attract more customers. If a person does not like your cheese, he has another alternative to buy it in Maxima [Lithuanian supermarket] and when there are more producers, people have more choices. The “Vivasol” movement was the

beginning of this concept. The ideology comes from France, to reconnect rural and urban people through food.

23. Do you see changing perceptions about cheese from the consumer's side?

It used to be a novelty 10 years ago.

24. What can cheese-production teach you?

People are not used to grow something for others. People, especially younger ones, don't have the skills to stubbornly as part of a team. Now, making cheese teaches you this - you have to sit and wait for 1 year. So you have to wait and wait...and you might throw it away if it is not successful. It takes at least half a year to understand what you have made. Also, animals teach you to be more patient. The cow is a huge animal. You have to understand what it is doing, and you have to understand how to trick it, otherwise you could not move it. We used to have sheep, which in the worst case you can lift up and take away.

25. Is it true that consumers do not have enough knowledge about different kinds of cheese, its varieties and methods of production?

3-4 years ago we established an association, and it has a mission to educate people.

26. Are you changing something in your cheese production according to the consumers suggestions?

No, not really. For example, if a French cheesemaker would come and say do this and this and you would have a better cheese, in this case, I would change something. But if consumers come and start telling me how I should make cheese, then probably no (...). In reality, there are not that many consumers, as in France, who have better knowledge about cheese. In our case, you [producer] have to explain to them what kind of cheese it is and how it is made

27. What are the main obstacles for small producers to receive support?

I don't really believe in the liveliness of the village, especially with european money. Of course, it makes the village a bit more alive. But first of all, it is so bureaucratized that it is almost impossible to write a project in reality. For a small farmer, it needs to be much simpler. We haven't managed to write an application. Audrius is for sure the "brain", but you have to invest so much time and the questions are formalized in a very bureaucratic way that you cannot answer them. There are some companies that write projects, but those companies also take away part of the money. Everything is done in a very complicated way. Of course, this is done in order to avoid the misuse of the money, but my philosophy

or wish would be that the state would help small producers more. I know very well that a lot of money is used by concerns (businesses), also by bigger companies, agricultural companies, but they have completely different capacities and different sums of money. These sums are used to advance huge enterprises (the whole focus is to increase Lithuanian competitiveness globally and increase the growth of the GDP), but it does not bring anything to the village.

Degutis, Arūnas. Personal interview. “Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania”, Vilnius, 26 July 2017

1. [Asta] I am writing about Short Food Supply Chains and taking Lithuanian small cheese-makers as representatives of such type of supply chains. I am researching how SFSCs are helping to reconnect producer and consumer.

[Arūnas] Is the concept of SFSC well known to you?

[Asta] Yes, I conceptualize it as an alternative food network (AFN).

[Arūnas] Lithuania, like many post-Soviet countries, went through the process of monopolization, especially the biggest networks, and it created a lot of damage, in my opinion. It pushed out or didn't allow to form alternative groups, which is why the movements of “VivaSol” or the concept of “Sūrininkų namai” [“Cheesemakers’ home] are very exceptional. They are precedent which have existed for 10 years, but haven't become massive because of the two reasons. First of all, the mentality is more complicated because you have to cooperate. You also have to be not only a farmer, but also an entrepreneur. The short chain encompasses realization and marketing principles. Mostly in the villages, producers are making something, sometimes only the raw material, and for them to create something additionally is possible, for instance cheese or sausages, but it is more complicated to develop sales. If you need to sell your product, you will not have enough time and you have to cooperate with somebody and here begins the question of cooperation. In our society, the culture of cooperation is very weak; it is a post-Soviet syndrome which comes from a distorted cooperational system and collective farming. People do not trust in themselves, we have a lack of self-confidence syndrome. That is how we are different from westerners, as they tend to believe in what they say. And here, first of all, you don't trust in yourself and later if you receive some acknowledgement, you can agree with others. That is why, cooperation in our society is very hardly adaptable, and here [the case of “VivaSol”] you have to cooperate inevitably as it is not a business where you have stocks and a dominant voice. Here everything is based on an agreement and there is a lot of sociability and you need a lot of trust, similar culture, various experiences. That is why “Sūrininkų namai” is a precedent or phenomenon. Maybe there are a few more such cases, but I don't know them. We have created “VivaSol” to invite more cheesemakers and to provoke these different principles of communication which we can call a short food supply chain principle. There are some objective reasons: the market is taken, the large food networks have monopolized the space. Now you either have to create new spaces or integrate together

with large networks because a few larger chains have started creating their own small farmers' markets. Those big chains have money and time, so they meet different tendencies and even form them in order to retain their influence. In the markets [bazaars], then, all all sellers are re-sellers because nobody is selling their own products, but in the best case products comes from farmers or in the worst case from warehouses. So all those markets are quite distorted - they are like a supermarket that just has the illusion that they have farmers. But actually, there are no farmers. So "Sūrininkų namai" has the concept that cheesemakers grow, produce, process and sell cheese on their own. They have very few alternative markets, and occasional ones, as they are not open everyday. Moreover, the quantity of cheese is not so huge that they could realize a huge demand. They do not have problems with sales because they are too small to become sales' professionals, but they also have different aims. They are producers rather than sellers, so mainly in the sales context they cooperate. They do not hire people for production - in order to retain the form of family micro-farming. It used to be a philosophical/moral value that hiring is putting people into an "unfair relationship" because of the money. It gains a commodified and commercial character, and here everything is more connected with a social character. It means keeping the direct relations between cheese consumer and seller. Also, when you use non-pasteurized milk, you as producer is responsible for the risks related to such milk, so this relationship is very real between consumer and producer. Conversely, in supermarkets there are producers, labels and consumers - everything happens anonymously; there are some regulations in order to check if production meets food safety requirements, but there is no social aspect in this relationship. There is very strong marketing and nobody sees anything. People are simply buying the image and not necessarily the quality (quality is only assumed). They also buy a certain standard because there is trust in it, but the closer connection is gone - the social aspect has totally disappeared. Shareholders, hired sellers, unclear places of origin, distributors and producers who are very far away... This form is dominating in Lithuania, because, as I said, the market is monopolized. I think that in Poland the situation is different, I am not sure, but it seems to me. In Lithuania, when cooperative trade collapsed, it created a vacuum which did not transform. That's why it was monopolized. In Poland, there always existed small businesses. They did not have collective farms, and they had very small farms, which maybe were not very effective, but they were there. The state did not ruin them and did not allow to monopolize the market by the newly formed supermarkets and producers. The state is very stable because such enterprises do not go bankrupt, such producers and such trade do not go bankrupt. In Poland, even during the highest peak of the financial crises, they had growth. And the situation in Lithuania is not very stable. All the crises that happened in Europe affected Lithuania the most. All crises, such as the political crisis with the Russians or economic crisis in Europe, or the global crisis.

Lithuania is the first one to be affected, the most affected, and the last one to get over it. I think, this is our political mistake.

In Lithuania there are dairies - milk processing enterprises. It is possible to say that around 5 families control 80 percent of Lithuanian milk producers or even more. If you take meat processing, it is almost the same: there are a few families that control meat processing and influence the whole sector. If you take grain production - there are a lot of farmers, but concentration is in hands of the big grain processing enterprises. In every sector, it is the same situation. This shows that it comes from common politics and that it was supported and encouraged by the state. So it was a flaw from state's governance, and we will have to correct this issue for a long time to come. Until the next turmoil, when the system would collapse . . . but now it is an established system which is very hard to change.

That's why cooperatives or different initiatives are quite rare. Even though now the EU is supporting a lot of such cooperation, but as I know, at this moment there are no applications. Because we don't have people who want to join cooperatives. For instance, it is possible to have some "fictive" cooperatives where family members create it, but having very different people join it is not common. The problem is that cooperation is not culturally acceptable; it is alien to the Lithuanian mentality.

I have looked at the regulatory framework for cooperatives. According to it, you can receive different means of support. For example, talking about small farms, there are two requirements. A farmer who wants to receive the support for cooperatives (for example, to buy a new bus or equipment) has to have at least two years of bookkeeping, so it forces you to prepare in advance for the support even though you are not sure if you are going to receive it. Also, all this "paperwork" requires having the competence or hiring some people. If you hire someone, you would pay at least 100-150 euros each month. So, for a small farmer to pay this sum of money for something that is only hypothetically important, is not very adequate. Another requirement is to prepare a business plan which shows your viability for growth. There are very simple things to evaluate viability according to your utilities and the number of animals. But if we are talking about older people who have three cows, for example, and who are preparing business plan..or for somebody who wants to cooperate...

We do not have people who can apply to such types of programs because we do not have such businesses, or if we have, there are a few obstacles which bureaucratically limit your choice. In the village you even cannot find a critical mass to cooperate. For instance, in my village there are 2 persons with whom I can potentially cooperate, but they can have totally different understanding, culture, and

education. So in order to find 3 people, you should have at least 30 people to choose from. We have a demographic problem in the village; there is inadequate regulation, and the “past” mistakes which are very hard to correct. Sectors have been monopolized, production is concentrated, bigger grain producers are dominating in funds allocation and a lot of money is going to them. They need more equipment, more land and then they are monopolizing and becoming more important and responsible.

In my opinion, the opportunity to support small producers was missed by the government. We used to have social democrats, the former communist party. This was an economic communist school following group which for a very long time was in power. They naturally, through their economic understanding, supported bigger producers, maybe even members of the party who managed to monopolize and from inertia they created an environment to grow for bigger companies. Small-scale cooperation was never interesting. In Soviet times it was even forbidden to have a private business.

This situation was formed because there was no responsible attitude, and non-competence from the state. It was possible to do much more, to support small farms in order to have a better balance in different sectors, to have stability during crisis. For example, if a couple of poultry farms would stop working, in Lithuania there are 3 poultry farms who are controlling 90 percent of the market, and this would bring great loss and a lot of jobs would be lost. When there are 5000 producers of eggs, then it is impossible to have such huge negative effects for the whole society.

2. If we compare Lithuania with other Baltic states, is the situation similar?

In Lithuania, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first step was to disassemble collective farming system. This created the space for monopolization, and we didn't form alternatives. In Estonia, they did not have the political threat that the system could “turn back” to communism. The newly formed government was formed from completely new people, while in Lithuania it was a compromise - old and new parliament members. The first independent government worked only for 1.5 years, almost 2 years. Later, the older members came back and they already had their own people, discipline, and structure, a well-established order, so they quickly took over the mechanism which was not been fully formed. In Estonia, they started everything from a “blank piece of paper”. What is more, they always had Finland as a role model, which always helped and opposed their enemies. Estonians could gain a very good experience and know-how, the direction about how to govern. So, up till now they are more advanced. Also it is a bit easier to govern a smaller state.

3. Talking about Lithuanian consumers, is understanding about responsible consumption emerging, as in Western countries, from the consumers' side?

We are still homo-sovieticus. You can have a new Western car or wear a suit, but still you can beat your children or use violence against you wife or on the street use Russian swearwords and at work not trust other people. So you can integrate into any kind of club. In that club you still bring your mentality, even though others would not suspect it. The new generation which is forming now, as in the Western countries, is a consumerist one. Worldwide, the gap between the number of billionaires and poor people is increasing, including in the Western world. Even though those countries have their own traditions and democratic institutions, they cannot withstand the pressure. So talking about us [Lithuanians] where there is no culture, no experience...(…). For example, Western oil companies are supporting environmental institutions, but it is a PR step and truly they drill, drill and drill.

4. What was your own motivation to support the “Sūrinkų namai” project?

While I was in the parliament, I understood all the threats. I have been in politics from the very beginning, since the independence of Lithuania, so I consider myself as a citizen. Personally, those values always fascinated me and I consider myself to be “ideological”, maybe that is why I am not the most successful entrepreneur, because I always have many sentiments. I always see the “other” sides. Especially with age, you start seeing not only the material side, you try to understand the reasons of happiness and unhappiness. Truly, it was only for ideological reasons...I liked the concept that relationships are formed not only through money, that there is help, co-operation, the elimination of taking advantage of others...so I liked the initiative and I wanted to support it.

5. Is it true that the “VivaSol” association is not as active as it used to be a few years ago?

Yes. Firstly, there is a routine: a human-being cannot be a public person and have 50 sheep or goats. Also, it didn't develop as it was supposed to. Most of the people came to “Sūrininkų namai” to learn how to make cheese, but not for the cooperation and to support the concept. We also tried to create a social environment where people could join it and to show an example that you can survive and cooperate. We had different experiences, because people understand “social business” differently. Such types of “new formation” bring you to various situations that require new ways of problem solving such as to discuss, co-operate, persuade, and apply democratic cultural principles. People are used to a hierarchical mechanism of problem solving, where nobody is negotiating and you get the command from above. For example, the reason russian people do not fit the model of democracy, is because they have a huge territory and a small number of inhabitants, so they never had a need to negotiate, since you can always go to the forest and live there. In the Netherlands, Belgium, The United

Kingdom, you have water which you have to pump out and you have to negotiate how to use the land in order not to have a war, so communication is a long established tradition. Lithuania is in the middle; our previous experience did not teach us to negotiate, but to accomplish the communist directives (...)

So, alternative initiatives do not receive that much support. Everything is oriented towards the growth of the GDP, and it is created in modernized and very efficient business. So our idea was not for the masses. The situation in the village is quite hopeless because we do not have a critical mass of people. So if there is even one precedent, it is worth receiving support.

6. Speaking about the Slow Food Movement, is it not as active because we do not have people to develop it in Lithuania?

We have two more tendencies: to move to the cities and to emigrate, and most people who emigrate are from villages or small towns. So we have a demographic crisis, large scale emigration and urbanization processes in the cities. Such movements [Slow Food] are active when there is an upsurge. At the moment, there is no influx, but there is a “landslide”. These are the objective reasons. Subjectively, there are all the factors of the liveliness of this movement: living in a harmony with nature, with neighbours and so on. So subjective reasons show the vitality of this concept, but objective circumstances make it invalid.

7. Is it possible to claim that these cheesemakers are educated people from the cities who are moving to the villages?

People who settle down in the villages do not necessarily have to be very clever, they need one leader and that leader can be from the city. But there is no need that everybody would be the same. It is enough to have one person to bring change in a village which has 100 houses.

8. What are the future perspectives for Lithuanian rural development: will it move towards alternative or more and more standardized food systems?

Talking about agriculture, I do not see it . . . It is very hard to disassemble monopolies. It only can happen through cataclysm, which ruins the whole false practice and starts everything from the “blank piece of paper”. Such a situation will not happen. The EU is created in order to maintain stability. So, from an objective point of view, I do not see a perspective to improve the situation. It is a pity, but I do not want to mislead myself. All my insights reveal that there is no foundation for things to be different.

9. So it is possible to say that “VivaSol” is an exceptional case?

Yes, because it emerged fully from bottom-up, without institutional support or support from the EU. Valdas [cheesemaker] took some ideas from France. But in France there is a critical mass of producers and consumers and for them everything comes very naturally. And here in Lithuania, everything was a little bit artificial, as there is neither demand nor supply.

10. The last question. Is it possible to claim that matured cheese production was brought to Lithuania 10 years ago?

Valdas lived in France. He was trying to make cheese in the cheesemakers’ environment. One type of cheese, “Žan Žakas”, was named according to his partner and advisor’s name. He is a very ideological Frenchman who created an anti-capitalist movement supporting small producers. Valdas got many impulses, knowledge and good examples from this person and tried to create in a space which is not matured in all necessary aspects (culture of sharing, different understanding).

Kavaliauskas, Valdas and Ilinauskaitė, Rasa. Personal interview. “Paskui saulę ir ožkas” (in English “Following the sun and goats”) farm, Norvydiškės, 5 August 2017

1. Is it true that you produce your cheese in your farm? You have 46 goats, where do they graze?

They graze right here [it is a huge enclosed area for the goats].

2. Was this the reason you have moved from Dargužiai village to here?

Yes, one of the main motivations was that our animals could graze nearby and to arrange our farmstead in order for it to be better adjusted to this craftsmanship [cheese-making] and for a certain number of animals. If you take a traditional Lithuanian farmstead where the maximum number of farm animals are two cows, five pigs and ten chickens, it is constructed in this way. But if you want to have a different number of animals, you have to optimize it [the arrangement of your farm]. For me, this farm is not necessarily following old traditions like my grandmother used to do, or somebody used to do 100 or 50 years ago. In my opinion, the small farm is oriented towards the sale of the products, and it has to have an optimized organization of its work, hygiene and etc. For us, it took 12 years to implement those ideas, such as the relationship between producer and consumer. In the beginning we were quite radical. We were thinking not to register our creamery, to work only with cheese eaters - to create our circle of friends. The idea was to organize an active network and organize an exchange of our products where money would be only a mediator. There were many “pink” and beautiful dreams, and also some theories, which you mentioned, and those theories are partly working. They are working in other countries, and in Lithuania it works in a complicated way because of many reasons. Later, this question could be discussed. But talking about our moving, it was mainly because of the bigger pastures for animals and the ability to rearrange the farm’s plan and to build annexes, to make our milking place and creamery. We still try to keep the style of a countryside farmstead, and we also aim at remaining small, even though this is a very subjective concept, how to define what is small. Today, our definition of it is supported by the facts that we do not hire people, and we process the products on our own. Some people assume that we are not small producers anymore as we have 10ha of pastures (part of it is rented and part of it is ours). Our farmstead is modern, as maximally modern as we could make it. At the moment, we have 46 goats for milking and 15 we are just raising, so we are planning to have 60 goats in the future, up to 200 liters milk per day. We expect that our turnover would reach the European average maybe next year or in two years. So we are orienting not towards the Lithuanian annual turnover, but the European one (maybe not the Danish, but let’s say the French one). We plan to earn 2000 euros each of us per month (2 people), so if we can implement it, then we can say that we

can “stand up on our own feet” and not just to put ourselves in the position that small-scale farming is something very bad, very hard and that a small producer is very poor. Then you start blaming the state, your country, the consumers who do not understand what cheese is and just wants a cheap product [laughing]. So, we aim to have maximal independence. Because it is not too interesting for the state what we are doing here, and in Lithuania the number of people, the critical mass of people is not very huge. It is the same if we talk about the consumers – the kind of consumers who would be motivated, in solidarity with producers - something that we wanted from the very beginning - they are just a very few. The situation in Denmark, France, or Finland is quite different, as there is quite a different level of consumption there, a certain intellectual level, and we are quite far away from this in Lithuania. So, sometimes those naive dreams encounter painful reality...

We see a few people, a few couples who try to take a similar path as we did, and some things turn out to be quite good enough (...)

3. What were your main motivations and values when you started your activities in the village? Probably they were not only financial ones?

For sure not. Before we moved to the village, we already had finances. We were moving to the village in order to find more meaning in our work. It is one thing when you produce a chair in the factory and you are responsible just for one leg and it is another thing when you have to make the whole chair on your own. It gives quite a different satisfaction to your work results. So this was one of the motivations: to see the result of your work and to feel not only a material, but also an emotional satisfaction. We also like to eat well, and to eat healthy food. Another motivation was that I do not want to buy food which is provided in the supermarkets and what I want, I cannot find. So we thought that in the village we will manage to make something for us and for the others. The third motivation was to stop always being in a hurry and to live in such a way that you would start your car only once a week. So we wanted to make our workplace and our lives closer to each other (that it would be more than just finishing your working hours and closing the office door). While living in the village, especially with our craftsmanship, everything is interconnected. People ask us: “Are you milking your goats everyday day two times per day? When do you have holidays?” and my answer is that “I am always on a holiday, everyday”. Here at our place is a permanent resort [smiling].

Briefly, the main motivation was to find a peace within yourself, with your emotions, with environment and with nature. I really love animals, very very much, and Rasa loves animals as well as different plants, so we wanted to be closer to animals and plants. In one word, our main motivation is the search for peace and harmony. And we succeeded [laughing].

4. Could you tell more about the “VivaSol” association: how it appeared, developed and what is the ideological background?

We were four people who began it: Julija and Šarūnas [Valdas and Rasa]. Julija - she finished her studies in France and she brought ideas about harmonious development. She lives in France at the moment, as she is married there. She used to work in the association in Vilnius in the public institutions, connected with small projects. Šarūnas - he is purely an “eater”, who works with intellectual technologies, and supports the idea concerning the food. Then, me and Rasa - so we are four who founded it [the association “VivaSol”]. The motivation was to have a certain tool to reconnect consumers and producers. The fundamental ideas were to create a close connection between eaters and producers, with the idea that we do not need traditional places of sale. Instead, we would communicate only through networks. We were inspired by the French example of AMAP (in French, Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne). The principle is an abonament principle. Let's say there is a vegetable producer, and a consumer pays 100 euro per month, and he receives a vegetable box every week. You even do not know what you will get in that box. So, we were inspired by this French culture and exactly at that moment, our friend Žan Žakas also started to organize AMAP in France. So we also decided to create it in Lithuania, and we called our association “VivaSol”. We did not plan to make it formal, but to use it as a tool if somebody wants to collaborate with us, but not for writing projects. The association's first step was to organize a little farmers' market in Vilnius, in the “Cafe de Paris” in Pilies Street. Every second Wednesday, and later every Wednesday, we were organizing little markets. Later we invited more farmers, at one moment we were 7 or 8. As you know, “Cafe de Paris” is really tiny. At that moment we tried to connect producers and consumers – we were organizing meetings such as consumers who were preparing meals in the cafe from the producers' products. It was quite an interesting phenomenon, and through it we found many interesting people. Maybe all the most famous people in Lithuania have been in that cafe. It was a very nice moment, but nothing lasts forever. That cafe was searching for its own path and the owner opened another restaurant in Vilnius called “Jalta”. We also tried to organize little markets there, but it didn't go that well. After that, we organized Tymo turgus together with the Užupis community [neighbourhood of Vilnius]. Not long time ago, this market celebrated its 10 year anniversary.

We also tried to collaborate with one biodynamic products shop and created cheese abonnements. But it did not work as cheese consumers did not want to commit and eat all the time the same type of cheese, they always wanted something different and not just the same cheese for the whole year. Maybe the assortment was not so wide. In general, there were many reasons why it didn't work. But our

primary idea to bring consumers and producers to one place and to create an association without traditional ways of selling – this, it did not confirm.

Hence, the association mutated more towards cheesemaking craftsmanship. Then, we established a public institution called “Sūrininkų namai” in Dargužiai. It happened 7 years ago. The first year was very interesting. A young French couple was working for 1 year as volunteers, but they also received remuneration. This public institution moved towards commercial activities. At the moment it is rented out to a young couple, Šarūnas and Kotryna. Right now, the activities of “Sūrininkų namai” have turned to educational cheese-making seminars and are oriented towards the development of this craftsmanship. I am the head of this institution and I organize the educational seminars. We began it 4 years ago. So, the association “VivaSol” became a cheesemakers association, a lot of new members joined it, and at this moment there are 16-17 members and half of them are the cheesemakers and half of them cheese-consumers, but there are no other types of producers and professions.

The slogan of our association is “Kad kaimas būtų gyvas” (in english “Let’s make the village alive”) and now the association is moving towards territorial development - something what is needed in order to bring more liveliness to rural areas. One of the biggest problems of small scale farming and life in the village is that you are isolated. For young people it is a huge obstacle because moving to the village means cutting off relationship with your friends, and with certain kinds of entertainment. So if you want to live in the village, you should have neighbours. And we should encourage those neighbours to settle, to work, to educate - you have to create mini-communities around you in order to make your life in a certain sense more comfortable and pleasant, so you don’t live alone in your fenced yard. So one of the goals of the association is the creation of social relationships in the sense of the territory, exactly in rural areas.

Today, we try to communicate with Varėna municipality. We have partners in France. We have just signed an agreement of Erasmus+ with 5 countries. So, at this moment the “VivaSol” association has lost its “liveliness” because it became more than just a cheesemakers’ association. As long as it was a cheesemakers association, everything was quite clear: we are cheesemakers and we are developing cheese-making craftsmanship. Now everything is not so clear. Not every cheesemaker is interested in the new topic [the development of local communities]. So “VivaSol” is at a crossroads right now, since it cannot find critical mass of partners. Through this Erasmus+ program, we would like to bring together a bigger group of people.

So the aim of the association has recently been less oriented towards the connection between producer and consumer, but we started to think that little by little we should return to the consumers again. To have closer communication. On the 9th of September we are planning to open the doors of our farm and organize a discussion about raw milk. Also, to show people how we milk our goats and so on. We hope that this event will encourage people to be more involved and have better knowledge about how cheese is born, how it is made, its pluses and minuses. Maybe it will help to bring “eaters” closer and to encourage more new cheesemakers. We also want to introduce ourselves to our neighbours. We would like to have more local consumers, as Vilnius is already too far for us.

When we lived in Dargužiai, our cheese was bought for sure not by the neighbours. Neighbours were buying it only before visiting a doctor or if they were having some guests. But it is changing. In Dargužiai, new young people are settling down. In Dargužiai one young couple had their wedding and they took a lot of our cheese, so it is very nice (...).

5. How do local people look at the “Sūrininkų namai” project? Is it something new, a little bit unusual in the village?

Most probably it is seen as some kind of “novelty”. At first it was barely understood or accepted, because people started to gossip in the village. Some things that we started to do with “Sūrininkų namai” were not understood and were misinterpreted. Over time, people got used to it and accepted it as a present being and it became an important component [of the village]. As people found out that we were moving to another farmstead, there were many discussions about why and how, with even some claims that we cannot leave. Today, here, on the 9th of September, we will announce about ourselves. But a model like ours, together with food processing, is not very common in Lithuania, and is not very common for a small producer. Some farmers process vegetables or meat, but most often they are big producers, and after that there are even larger producers who have 5000 cows and their own processing enterprises. But for a small-producer to go to the market with his own products - it is quite rare and that’s why for people it is interesting.

6. Is it possible to say that village is becoming less lively as people are getting older, they do not show much initiative and so on?

In my opinion, the future of the village or rural areas depends on newcomers who are willing to do something and to settle down with a slightly different motivation than current youths in the villages. If the motivation is to come and find a new job, it is not going to happen, as nobody is creating new jobs. If somebody comes with the motivation to live in harmony with nature, to enjoy the natural food

and products, such people can settle down and to do something. But in my opinion, the target is not the people who live today in the villages, the addressee is outside the village, actually the immigrants to the village. There are many advantages that come with living in the village, but it is not interesting for everyone.

[Rasa] It is not so easy to live in the village. You have to have certain abilities and to like certain things, you have to be “specific”. You have to have professional abilities and you have to be interested in many areas: the land, animals, plants, farming, processing, relationships with people...(…)

[Valdas] The future of the village is in [the hands of] a little bit different kind of people, and how many of them there will be, it is hard to say. But from the position of the government, there is a feeling of temporality, there is a lack of long-term strategies. Most of the strategies last from one election to another, and part of the decisions are taken by votes. In rural areas, most of the voters are retired people, so their priorities are oriented towards social services, their priorities are not directed towards the future of the village. So that is the situation.

7. But the EU is paying more attention to rural development and SFSCs?

[Valdas] Yes, our government is also talking about it, but because there are certain programs from the EU and they have to do it. However, 10 years ago, we [small producers] visited the agricultural ministry and we were not understood as we do not create GDP and we do not pay VAT, so we are not really needed. Nowadays, there are not too many changes, but at least politicians started to talk about small-scale farming and its importance.

[Rasa] Actually, nothing is happening. All the EU money is going to those who already have established structures. So the money is taken by the bigger producers.

8. Have you used any support from the EU?

[Valdas] Yes, we received a little support for small producers. It ranges from 10 000 to 15 000 euros, and that’s it. This support is not even for 1 year, but for the whole project. So it did not contribute too much.

[Rasa] It was very complicated to receive the support. If you cannot manage to do it on your own, you have to hire a consultant who takes part of your money. There is so much bureaucracy that it is almost impossible to arrange all the papers.

[Valdas] There are many control mechanisms in order to avoid different deceptions, which do happen, but on a large-scale. But in order to ensure the identification of large-scale fraud, they try to catch the small ones (to show that this process is happening). So even a very little project is entangled in various control mechanisms, so that you are always suspected as being a deceiver. Sometimes you just do not

want to receive any support as you are always being looked at as a criminal and you have to prove that you are not one . . . morally, it is not very pleasant. I think it is a very huge problem – the European money – as bigger producers take the biggest part and the money for development is not really being used.

[Rasa] That kind of control is degenerating as you are forced to cheat or arrange agreements with somebody in order to receive the support. For example, you want to buy a grain crusher and you have to receive 3 commercial suggestions from different companies about the same product. It means that one company makes an agreement and goes around.

[Valdas] If you look at the European support, it really helped the bigger producers. It helped to develop the commodity market in order for it to take a bigger [share of the] market place, and it has succeeded. Dzūkija [southeastern region of Lithuania] has many advantages as it has many shrubberies and forested areas - so it is good for the small-scale producers to settle down here. But if you take central Lithuania, it would be impossible as nobody would give you any piece of land [it would be used for agriculture by big producers].

9. I know that you are teaching how to make cheese. Aren't you worried about the increasing competition in the cheese-making craftsmanship?

[Valdas] On the one hand, we are creating more rivals, but on the other hand, we are creating an infrastructure around us, a certain number of people who could help to each other and cooperate on something.

[Rasa] You will always find pluses in cooperation and multiplication. For example, if in the desert a new tree grows, it will create a shadow. It is the same with cooperation and moving to the village.

10. Arūnas has mentioned that there are a few problems with Lithuania and cooperation. People's post-soviet mentality and misunderstanding of the sharing economy do not make a model of cooperation acceptable.

[Valdas] We have a huge heritage of certain form of control: a relationship of the lord and the peasant. This kind of relationship is in our genes and it affects our working relations and from that comes huge mistrust. If a person is giving something to another person, it seems that he is hiding something. Once, a Lithuanian philosopher told to us: "You are not making cheese, you are creating trust among people". In this case, trust between a consumer and producer, in another case trust between producers. If producers trusted in each other and shared some of their generosity, cooperation could actually exist. There are all the assumptions and the demand, actually all the conditions, but there are emotional factors that hinder it.

[Rasa] With time, history and climate, we have certain types of personalities and certain features of the people. Here a quite expressed feature is individualism, and we have to know how to live together with it. But we have to understand consciously that we have to move towards cooperation.

[Valdas] Objectively, we have all the conditions for cooperation, but if it is not accepted by the people, it does not give any result. Maybe it is necessary to create an environment for individualists to come too.

[Rasa] Lithuania has still to go a long way...

[Valdas] It is a pity, because Lithuania has quite a nice climate, you can even compare it with Normandy. We have quite a lot of land and not everything is so expensive, taxes are not too high for a small-producer...

[Rasa] Lithuanians have to broaden their outlook, they have to travel.

[Valdas] Younger people have to see how it is done and to take over not only the technology, but also the relations of communication, the desire to share and to cooperate, to be open and not to be afraid.

11. Talking about Slow Food, why it is not so active in Lithuania? Is it because consumers are not aware about the threats connected with mass-production, or that we do not have such deep gastronomical traditions, or that there are not that many active people?

[Rasa] Probably it is everything what you have just mentioned!

[Valdas] If you do something, you need some professional and managerial skills. In every association, there should be a structure, not only chaos. So it is the same with Slow Food, it is necessary to work with it.

[Rasa] There is no structure, no budget, no projects...Association should be formed in a different way. It is necessary to have money and people and not only volunteers.

[Valdas] There are many professional associations Lithuania, for instance, goat-keepers, but all those associations have a very clear common goal. One of the main reasons is that we are small, a small number of people which is decreasing, and if we are not able to integrate into bigger structures with different countries, we will not have anything. In every area (f.e. youth care, prevention of suicides) we need professionalism, critical mass, finances in order to have an effect. So if we cooperate with other countries, we could make something.

12. Is it true that you brought the matured cheese culture to Lithuania or that you have been the “heart” of this cheese-making movement?

[Valdas] For sure no. It was brought to Lithuania maybe in the middle ages. We brought an approach that a small producer can make fermented cheese.

[Rasa] We also showed the liveliness of the small farm and that it is a nice thing to live in the village. Veterinary control used to constrain small producers, so nobody could believe that it is possible to have your own creamery with small amounts of the milk. So we had “moved the ice”.

13. What is the role played by the media?

[Valdas] It does help. We used to have a few “sensations”, which helped to promote us free of charge.

[Rasa] Also a president visited our farm shop.

[Valdas] It is possible to say that she is a godmother of the “Sūrininkų namai”, as she helped to push everything forward. Because of her we started to receive customers. Sometimes you can have a super good idea, but you don’t have people. For example, Lithuanian road supervisors do not let us have any advertisement by the road. Sometimes communication with eaters helps you, as you can have intellectual backing in certain unexpected critical situations.

14. The law of the raw milk, is it hindering?

[Valdas] Everything is ok with the law. But there is a public opinion that raw milk is dangerous and also the media is searching for some “sensations” such as that goats’ milk is not good for pregnant woman and so on. A few not-very-well supported claims are published and form public opinion. So, our goal is to organize a discussion where different opinions could be expressed: such as why raw milk is good and bad, and search for the compromise.

[Rasa] It is a pity, that the culture of food, especially understanding about cheese, is not well developed.

[Valdas] Slow Food, or any other movements, are more consumers initiatives in order to support certain way of eating or certain products. So consumers take an initiative to support certain production. In Lithuania, everything is done from the producers side, as we tried to organize AMAP. Maybe it is one of the reasons why it was not successful, as consumers are not mature enough. Today, maybe not, but 10 years ago, when you entered the supermarket you were fascinated by the variety of choice. For 50 years we did not have [choice about] what to buy, and now we have.

[Rasa] After that, to begin recognise pasteurized and unpasteurized milk cheese is another step/stage. But when you get used to eating in this way, you cannot go back...

15. How do consumers perceive goat-milk cheese, is it unusual?

[Valdas] Our main contingent of consumers are people who travel and who see, who read, they have a certain level of understanding...

[Rasa] Goats milk and cheese used to have a bad reputation in Lithuania. It was considered to be a very fat milk, though that is just a gossip and people are afraid of it. A lot of people have a negative

opinion before they try it. So it is important to know how to work with it and to change people's thinking.

[Valdas] But it is changing. Wine culture is changing. It shows that people pay more attention to the taste and to search for more harmony while eating. Also cheese finds its way.