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Prospects for the future: Community supported agriculture in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

Alternative food supply systems have been a subject of increasing interest for many decades in various perspectives of food and agriculture studies. This paper contributes to the discussion by examining how farmer led Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement in Hungary creates an alternative in the dominant food regime. To examine CSAs future potentials, semi-structured interviews with producers, consumers-members, and experts, a consumer-member survey, and secondary data sources were utilized. We analyse ambiguities or uncertainties of production, logistics, economic viability, and community formation to sort out social and material practices that co-produce goods and values centred on sustainability. We conclude that CSAs create open and democratic spaces of active and direct producer-consumer cooperation and thus present a model for rethinking our food system. However the scaling up of these experiences is the main challenge today.

1. Introduction

The future for food and farming became a question that is hard to avoid – activists, analysts, celebrities, policymakers create alternative visions. Big business raised the stakes in this – futures for food and agriculture are being shaped by new wave of financial actors (Clapp, 2014). Furthermore, in evidence-based policymaking agricultural production systems that supply environmentally and ethically preferable food are receiving ever more attention (Karner, 2010; Pretty et al., 2010). Academic interest on the futures for food has been informed by various sustainability ambitions ranging from climate-friendly diets (Vinnari & Tapio, 2012), sustainable consumption practices (Vinnari, 2009) co-creating sustainable eating futures (Davies, 2014), ethical consumption and fair trade (Lekakis, 2014), food justice and food sovereignty (Shiva, 2004), and resilience for food security (Barthel & Isendahl, 2013). Still, the present conditions and future prospects of alternative futures for food, or viable alternative foodways are relatively understudied. Recently Hurley (2008) convincingly argued that futures studies has an uneasy attitude towards food issues, has not taken up food as a topic and did not analyse positive examples of food movements to direct us towards futures based in healthy, diverse, and joyful communities. True, that

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scholarly examinations and debates of food futures are predominated by a technology-oriented productivist approach[1] which tells less about the role of food communities and social practices of citizens and consumers to construct more sustainable future food landscapes. A more integrated food system approach seeking the sustainable ways to food production, processing, distribution and consumption activities is only rarely used (Green & Foster, 2005), such as visioning exercises to anticipate imminent changes in the agribusiness sector (Chapuy, 2010). Recently Davies (2014) urged food future discussions to include more consideration of social practices after finding huge discrepancy between the stakeholders' focus on technological solutions and the lay participants' rejection of such approaches. Still, in sustainable future visions the topic of food (especially local, fresh, seasonal, and environmentally more appropriate food consumption) is still one of the most inspiring cross-cutting themes for stakeholders (Carlsson-Kanyama, Dreborg, Moll, & Padovan, 2008; Király, Pataki, Köves, & Balázs, 2013; Quist & Vergragt, 2006). Also interdisciplinary food futures research could meaningfully contribute to the understanding of new forms of sociality around food and the re-shaping of socio-economic networks of food (Hee-jeong Choi & Graham, 2014). Furthermore, the role of policies on actors have been investigated, analysing the way it affects smallholdings, associations of micro-small enterprises and the local retail sector (Gagliardi, Niglia, & Battistella, 2014). Therefore we share Hurley's (2008) optimistic remark that the futures studies community is suitably diverse, open enough, and supportive enough of each other's perspectives that we can think and write about food more often and within a spectrum of localised, alternative futures.

Emerging from this spectrum Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has a recognized future potential in transition to sustainability (Bloemmen, Bobulescu, Le, & Vitari, 2015; Nost, 2014) and has been often cited as a vibrant niche element in the robust growth of the local food sector (Renting, Schermer, & Rossi, 2012). By definition, CSAs are community-based agriculture cooperatives based on long-term partnership and risk-sharing between one or, in some instances, several producers and their consumers Henderson (2003). A CSA relationship implies the capacity to extend beyond economic exchange to include social roles, motivations and benefits for both farmers and consumers. CSA, in a sense, attempts to re-embed food production and consumption as economic activities in just and reciprocity-based social relations where conventional economic roles (such as producer and consumer) turn to social ones (members of a community) and, consequently, non-price considerations take on greater importance (Hinrichs, 2000) than in conventional market exchanges. CSAs are considered as potential laboratories for catalysing social change to enhance consumer-producer cooperation and regain citizens' control over the ways in which food is produced (Henderson, 2003).

Community Supported Agriculture implies that a community is built around producing and consuming food. A group of equally committed and active members (consumers and farmers) is, therefore, constitutive of a CSA. While the literature on the expansion of the CSA movement in so-called developed countries is extensive, not much information is available on the situation concerning so-called post-socialist countries, such as the ones in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This paper attempts to partially fill this gap and examine the CSA movement as experienced in Hungary, a CEE country still in her post-socialist cultural transformation phase. Though the CSA movement itself has no long tradition in the country, some individual leadership efforts have a history of their own; while the economic significance of CSAs is still marginal in the country, it seems to have a growing future potential. Policy makers at national and municipal levels now explicitly encourage operators to start community food programs. In 2012, the National Agricultural and Rural Development Strategy was created to help the institutional changes required to localise food system. Since then, locally grown food is, in general, more valorised, more and more market opportunities are created for small-scale family farmers (Balázs, 2012; Balázs, Bodorkós, Bela, Podmaniczky, & Balázs, 2009).

The article is divided into three sections. First, a literature review is provided in order to outline the theoretical-conceptual frameworks that shaped the present analysis. The focus is on the everyday practices of farmers and consumers around the CSAs. The review provides context to CSA development pathways by discussing their emergence and development in the last decades in Hungary reflecting also on policy context (legal-institutional background). Second, we present the materials and methods we used for researching CSAs in Hungary. In the results section socio-technical, cultural, and economic features will be examined characterizing the emergence of farmer-led CSAs in Hungary. In the final discussion, it will be argued that farmers in Hungary play a critical role in institutionalizing new forms of local food supply by investing into several dimensions of social life. It will be emphasized that, to consolidate their operations and sustain (financially) successful farm activities, CSA farmers tend to rely on an altruistic copying strategy and refrain from sharing full range of costs. We regard this as a fundamental difference from the North American and Western European CSAs, a deviation from the original economic principle of sharing all risks and rewards. In the CEE context of weak civic engagement and difficulties to trust others, CSA farmers take on the extra work to bring together members of the local community, nurture bonds of affinity and teach consumer-members about sustainable diets and local food systems. To highlight this socio-technical, cultural, economic paradox, the term "agriculture supported communities" will be

[1] Sciencedirect reports a remarkable 60,759 results for keywords, futures studies" and, food" in academic publications (journals, books, reference works). Most of these publications produced from 2010 are techno-science oriented (focusing on innovations in brain research, physiology and behaviour research, neuroscience, pharmacology, biochemistry) and do not address complex societal problems or reflect on challenges of the legitimacy/hegemony of the corporate food regime.

suggested to summarise the set of socio-economic practices that CSA farmers pursued to reach beneficial socio-ecological outcomes.[2]

2. Literature review

Transition to sustainability is frequently envisioned in academic, policy or civic discourses through the example of food systems (Benson, 2013; Foresight, 2011; IFPRI, 2009; SCAR, 2011; UNEP, 2009). Currently, different types of local food systems (LFSs) and short food supply chains (SFSCs) are seeking to avoid the evident problems, mitigate increasing pressures on the global food markets (Renting et al., 2012). With regard to the new patterns of supply and demand in the context of changing consumption and massive urbanisation and globalisation, analysts, policymakers, and food activists show growing interest in initiatives with significant potential to localise the food system, re-embed markets in localities (see for example Stagl, 2002; Wright & Middendorf, 2007). The literature on contemporary alternative agri-food economic practices depicts specific forms ranging from residential food production, buying groups, CSAs, farmers' markets, urban food councils, local food systems, farm to school programs, etc. (see for example Cooley & Lass 1996; DeLind, 1999; Lamine, 2005; Mariola, 2008; Stagl, 2002; Izumi, Wright, & Hamm, 2010; Kortwright & Wakefield, 2011; Verhaegen & Van Huylenbroeck, 2001). Among highly diverse conceptualisations, most analysts consider CSAs as important part of alternative food supply chains that strengthen the local economy and preserve agricultural diversity (Hinrichs, 2000; Stagl, 2002; Lyson, 2004).

Beyond the fact that physical land measures and volume of food supply place the CSA farms into the small farming category, as Henderson (2003) pointed out no two CSAs are alike. The CSA sector is a 'niche' in the food system where each successful CSA project reflects the needs, talents, and resources of its farm and community without a one-size-fits-all prescription to sustainability. The participants are creating CSAs as they go, inventing a great array of organizational solutions and learning to work together to live more sustainably. Since the initiatives are dependent on their local context, several different forms of CSAs are developed (producer-led or subscription-based, community-led or co-operative, collaborative, producer-community partnership, and community-owned farm enterprises) with specific aims and varied social basis. While CSAs can perform in many configurations, all are committed to shorten the distance between farmers and consumers and to share the risks and the rewards of food production and as a result to establish and maintain a more local and socially just food system (DeLind, 1999).

Analysts pursue different disciplinary and theoretical approaches ranging from non-representational theory (Hayden & Buck, 2012), transition theory (Brunori, Rossi, & Guidi, 2012), ethical consumerism (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), and alternative food networks (Dupuis & Gillon 2009; Izumi et al., 2010; Roep & Wiskerke, 2006). As a main interpretive framework studies often look at food relocalisation through reconnecting producers with consumers to re-appropriate food at the local level. The focus of studies differ in what main motives they identify behind CSAs: a set of instrumental and functional beliefs and collaborative practices (Feagan & Henderson 2009), or creating socioeconomic interconnections between farmers and consumers (Hinrichs, 2000; Holloway et al., 2007; Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003), tactile spaces that create human-nature interconnections by engaging all of the senses (Hayden & Buck, 2012), experiment station and innovative institutional arrangement (Henderson, 2003; Bougherara, Grolleau, & Mzoughi, 2009), or a form of ethical consumerism (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Commitments between CSA farmers and consumers are clearly highlighted in Flora and Bregendahl (2012) to achieve the balance of supply and demand. The more initiatives define their experiences as socio-political or economic the more likely they manage to expand. The balancing act with exchange of uncertainties allows consumers to reduce their qualitative uncertainties (safeness, taste, origin, etc.) and farmers to reduce their uncertainties of quantitative nature (sales and prices) (Lamine, 2005). A further experimental characteristic of the reconnection between producers and consumers was pointed out by Psarikidou and Szerszynski (2012). They argue that CSAs constitute a moral economy around relations of solidarity and justice, and ethical concern for land and the global environment.

Sustainability in CSAs requires a balance of supply with demand, farmers' and consumers' needs and interests in the face of volatile weather and prices. Studies that focus more on the demand side are mostly concerned with the motivation behind members' participation, the practices of consumer engagement in a CSA, the induced behaviour change, and the social inclusivity of the initiatives.

Cooley and Lass (1998) studied consumer benefits with regard to cost savings and found a substantial (60–150%) benefit of CSA share prices for the CSA farms studied, compared to retail prices for organic produce. Commitments to the environment and others as well as the social concern and support of members towards the farmer's personal struggles are often mentioned motives (Hayden & Buck, 2012). As for the behaviour change Torjusen, Lieblein, and Vittersø (2008) recorded increased knowledge of food practices and local production systems among organic box schemes participants. Cox et al. (2008) pointed to the graduation effect as participants start to address different aspects beyond their food consumption. Saltmarsh, Meldrum, and Longhurst (2011) found that majority of CSA members by using more local, seasonal and healthy food reported changing cooking and diets, as well as improving quality of life. A study on CSA participation

[2] Thanks to Mr. Attila Szeles, a CSA farmer for drawing this distinctive feature to our attention. Clearly, the term is quite uncommon in the scientific community and is used mainly for a certain type of community supported agriculture (very seldom) by food initiatives/activists. By using the term Agriculture Supported Communities, we also emphasize that the practices of CSAs in Hungary to some extent do not live up to the normative ideal of a CSA.

analysed in 264 French households by Bougherara et al. (2009) found that conscious consumers conceptualise CSAs as cost-effective institutional arrangements for delivering hard to measure characteristics that are important to them, such as environmental concerns. Hinrichs (2000) compared different alternative food supply chains and pointed out that farmers' markets create a context for closer social ties between farmers and consumers, but remain fundamentally rooted in commodity relations. Consumer-member surveys show that even if CSA moves closer towards the decommodifcation of food, power and privilege may sometimes rest more with urban, educated, middle-class consumers than with farmers or less-advantaged consumers (see also Shi, Cheng, Lei, Wen, & Merrifield, 2011). Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) regarded CSA as a form of ethical consumerism organized by a nexus of ideological discourses, romantic idealizations, unconventional marketplace practices and relationships. CSA enable consumers to experience "pragmatic inconveniences" and choice restrictions while enchanting moral virtues. CSAs are often regarded as providers of sustainable diets. Cohen et al., 2012 in their cohort study revealed that CSA participation causes an increase in subjective reports of fruit and vegetable consumption and the frequency of home-cooked meals. CSAs also create communities by involving active members to help fundraising for the farm land purchase, arranging for distribution of leftover food to low-income families, promoting the CSA through a newsletter, or organizing community events at the farm. In this respect Henderson (2003) depicted CSAs as farmer-consumer-controlled experiment stations, investigating the socio-economic relations of a more just and equitable future. Hayden and Buck (2012) in an ethnographic exploration of one CSA conceptualised the tactile space of the CSA through attending distribution, volunteering, trying new foods, cooking more (from previously unfamiliar vegetables), dealing with disappointment, reading the newsletter, visiting the farm, and encountering others—common characteristics across many CSAs.

Supply side researches looked at sustainability from the standpoint of producers. Feagan and Henderson (2009) analysed narratives of the CSA farmers and also surveyed their shareholders to show that the reality of dominant food system context and site-specific influences on the social sustainability of CSAs necessitates a rethinking of early idealized "model" traits. In a study on four CSA farmers Macias (2008) focused on equity issues in access to healthy food, social inclusion and participation in local production. Results show that local food projects should consider promoting programs for much broader social inclusion, including subsidized farmer-to-family coupons, whereby subscribers pay more for their shares to bring the cost down for others. Analysts of local food systems reported that in practice LFSs are socially, spatially, culturally quite clearly delineated, and serve groups with plenty of access already to locally and/or regionally produced food. More specifically CSAs even when they are organised to help low-income minority groups rather work for affluent educated European-American consumers. People of colour are less likely to participate in CSAs (Carolan, 2012).

Finally, in terms of economic sustainability Hinrichs (2000) noted how CSA farmers need to consider finances across a range of areas to be successful. According to Lyson (2004) successful CSAs are productive and profitable businesses: They have been able to carve out a segment of the market for fresh, locally produced vegetables that consumers desire" (p. 88). Fonte (2013) presents data on solidarity purchasing group (GAS) members in Rome who spend about 700 Euros yearly for a share in the annual harvest. In Italy altogether 2000 GAS groups make a total turnover of €90 million annually. In England the proportion of CSA members compared to the total population or CSA farmland compared to total farmland is under 0.01%. But the turnover for CSAs is relatively high: e.g. over 0.2% of total farm income for England. CSAs (working over 1300 ha of land) have a combined annual turnover of over £7,000,000 (Soil Association, 2011). In the US the CSA farms make higher gross farm income compared to the value of average farm sales. In a season with an average of 24 weeks of produce, CSA farms earn an average income of $15,000 (Lizio & Lass, 2005). The review of literature on the supply side leads one to a conclusion that CSAs as small scale diversified horticulture businesses or family farms have high productivity and use a business concept that provide sufficient income for farmers.

As for the analytical approach of this paper, a socio-technical transition framework was taken that attempts to understand the box scheme as a technical artefact, a central piece of the strategic niche management that farmers employ to manage socio-technical innovations around the farm (Brunori et al., 2012). In a socio-technical transition approach, CSAs are clearly regarded as social innovations that can deliver fresh, healthy food to varied customers, and also where farming has a specific socio-economic role in mobilising local civil society, and in creating a new moral economy. The article also draws upon the concept of social entrepreneurship and regards CSA as a new business model that combines a social goal with a business mentality heralded as an important new way to create social value such as sustainability (Witkamp, Raven, & Royakkers, 2011). Specifically, this paper by following a transition approach (Brunori et al., 2012) depicts the complex experiences of CSA activities as socio-technical systems, governed by coherent norms ('regimes'). In such circumstances, innovation emerges as reconfiguration in the socio-technical 'niches' that experience radically different cognitive frames, resource bases, relational patterns. The main players are CSA operators who manage a complex socio-technical network consisting of humans and technical devices. Actors are guided through socio-technical and normative rules while the operator orchestrates social innovation. The box is a non-human element that renders different social components.

In scholarly literature the evolution of the first CSA project, the organic box scheme of Open Garden in Gödöllő, Hungary initiated by Matthew Hayes have already been widely examined in various qualitative studies (Ángyán, Milánkovics, & Hayes, 2003; Hayes & Milánkovics, 2001; Milánkovics & Hayes, 2002; Vadovics & Hayes, 2010; Zsolnai & Podmaniczky, 2010). Founded in 1998 the Open Garden Foundation experienced quick uptake of membership reaching 150 families before complete closure in 2006. Similar pioneer projects were started in 2005, the Bioéléskamra by Attila Szeles and the Bionium by Csaba Puszta. For several reasons, however, these initiatives failed to deliver a viable business model in the long run. One reason for the failure in profitability was the huge portions of vegetables boxes for introductory prices which later could not

be adjusted to ensure economic viability of the farm. The increasing demand for organic products required constant infrastructural investments but the increasing transport and operational costs were not carefully calculated. Under these circumstances, the first CSA model in Hungary led to mutual disappointment; it could not offer services at reasonable prices that were acceptable for the consumers and profitable for the farmers.

Evaluations of the pathway of the early CSAs are mixed. According to Milánkovics and Hayes (2002) and Vadovics and Hayes (2010), the story of Open Garden was a constant restructuring to reach an economically viable, community-supported sales model. However financial profitability was never the first, since the garden was supported for years by the NESsT (Non-profit Enterprise and Self-sustainability Team) through providing assistance in financial management and also by the Szent István University through providing 2 and 1.5 ha from the educational farms. Zsolnai and Podmaniczky (2010) pointed the factors that help CSAs to avoid bargaining and balance farmers and consumers' interests and needs. In their principled approach successful CSAs are characterised by (i) wide assortment of products with transparent budgeting (ii) pricing based on yearly planned costs; (iii) sharing of production risks and volatile and seasonal supply. It all seems that the Open Garden Foundation could not comply with the principle of transparent budget planning. Following such precedents, a series of new CSA-projects were started in 2011. The necessary impulse to found new CSAs came from the social expectations of the improving institutional-regulatory framework; and practical training courses, networking opportunities media/marketing services and policy advocacy offered by the Hungarian CSA platform in 2012 and 2013.

In Hungary the remnants of informal economy, which is the continuation of the second economy, as a compensating for some faults of the planned economy (Sík, 1992) helped to maintain a strong local food culture and sustainable agriculture in traditional agricultural family households. Food provision is still often served by non-market mechanisms and through high level of food self-sufficiency. Recent simplification of food legislation on SFSCs and LFSs facilitated some alternative food supply systems (farmers' markets, farm gate sales, pick-your-own, local food festivals, food trails) to get widespread attention, whereas other forms, typically initiated by urban non-farmers (local food shops, buying groups, CSAs) have only rudimentary success. Although less than one-fifths of the agricultural farms are involved in direct sales activities the national level agricultural and rural development policy provides increasingly important institutional support for this sector. Exemptions and flexibility rules were successfully implemented to facilitate change in the local food sector. The foresight policy document, New Agricultural and Rural Development Strategy 2020, which is often regarded as a new constitution of rural Hungary, also promotes this enabling environment and renders proportionately much higher allocation of resources for LFSs and SFSCs than any previous high level policy document (Darányi Ignác Plan, 2012). Clearly top-down policy processes under the framework of the New Agricultural and Rural Development Strategy 2020 opened a window of opportunity for this sector and especially bottom-up initiatives. The new rural development regulation explicitly mentions CSA-s and promotes measures that help small-scale agro-ecological investments, various forms of producer co-operation.

CSAs were practically unknown in Hungary a decade ago. Popular press and advocacy literature helped such production and distribution systems founded on the mutual commitment of producers and consumers to get wide recognition. CSAs have been depicted as some of the hot food trends in the last few years that give a socially innovative panacea to the multiple – ecological, food and energy – crises. Most articles emphasized how CSAs support a group of farmers by providing them with a fair wage for healthy food. Similarly in public policy, CSAs have been regarded as a community form of direct sales and therefore a tool for the local economic development. In this policy context, the National Agricultural Advisory, Educational and Rural Development Institute, as the main body to implement the Rural Development Strategy financed the organisation of the Hungarian CSA platform in 2012 and 2013. Initiated by the Association of Conscious Customers, the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture and the Environmental Social Science Research Group the CSA platform provides networking opportunities media/marketing services and policy advocacy to CSAs in Hungary. In the European Union's new agricultural and rural development policy 2014–2020, SFSCs will be subject to thematic sub-programs within rural development programs and CSAs expect to get further public funding to extend their services (Kneafsey et al., 2013). This also raises the expectations on CSAs to create niches in the agricultural regime, the current food system, and also in the health regime dominated by food industry.

3. Materials and methods: researching farmer-led CSAs

This article draws upon prior experience of the authors from their personal involvement in the Hungarian CSA movement and a qualitative research conducted in 2012–13 on all vegetable box schemes operated by farmers in Hungary (see Appendix A for features of producer-operated CSAs) in order to explore CSA development pathways in a Central European context and reflect upon the underlying mechanisms and processes.

Authors belonging to the Environmental Social Science Research Group established research relationship with farmer-led CSAs through previous studies: one farmer is a former student taking part in classes and graduating on Alternative food systems, another farmer is a former colleague of the authors. Therefore in our sampling strategy we sought to trace this dominant or typical Hungarian form of CSA, where farmers collect trusted customer base for their box scheme and initiate the formulation of the CSA group. We consider this study an engaged scholarship, where authors are also constitutive parts of the system as experts, facilitators, in dialogue with the CSAs under study.

According to the research design, the empirical data was collected and analysed in three stages. Firstly, in total 21 in-person semi-structured interviews were carried out from November 2012 to March 2013 involving 5CSA producers, 13CSA consumer-members, and 3 policymakers and experts. Interview participants were all contacts of the farmers, while a

selection was made to reflect the heterogeneity of stakeholders in local food communities. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min, and took place at the interviewees own environment (Patton, 2002). All interviews used open-ended questions followed by probes on specific issues not mentioned in the responses; then all were audio recorded and transcribed before data analysis. The data analysis used thematic coding, a combination of meaning-condensation, categorisation and meaning-interpretation of the relevant themes (Kvale, 1996). Secondly, to cross-check the findings data was collected through desk research (newspaper articles, advocacy literature) and participant observations related to the box schemes (e.g. delivery and distribution of the boxes and interactions between farmers and consumers). Providing further context, the evolution of the Hungarian CSA platform was observed through participation at the Vision to Action Forums of CSAs in Gödöllő in February 2012 and in Budapest in April 2013. Third, a consumer (member) attitude survey consisting of 49 questions was carried out in 2013 among the members of four CSAs exploring their initial motivation for joining a CSA and their (positive and negative) experience being exposed for at least one year to the operation of a box scheme. Altogether 83 (64 female, 19 male) responses were collected out of 226 members of the four CSA farms and presented through basic statistical distributions and crosstabs.

By applying a relational-interpretivist approach, the present analysis turns to the level of personal experiences and meaning-making processes around food. More specifically, the following research questions were framed: How farmers and consumers construct their future ambitions around CSAs? What motivations and concerns are present in their stories and how they maintain the development of CSAs? For the interpretation of results, theories of alternative food networks and transition theories (Roep & Wiskerke, 2006; Dupuis & Gillon 2009; Izumi et al., 2010) will be drawn upon.

4. Results

4.1. Production uncertainties

As the review of literature showed handling uncertainties of seasonality and weather in production planning is the primary requirement of economically viable farming. We found that planting and cultivation in investigated farmer-led CSAs is mostly not mechanical: 90% of the work is done manually from March to November. Weed management and spreading organic dung (farmyard manure, green manure, compost, stem and root remains) require the most amount of manual labour and costs. Production would be more profitable if costly manual labour could be diminished. In the interviewed farmer-led CSAs this is done through employment of part time workers, sharecropping, and transparent scheduling:

- Farms often hire casual part-time workers from their own settlements to help with season's supply of fresh produce. During the most intensive season the proportion of casual workers compared to employees even reaches 7–1.
- Part of the manual work is organised as sharecropping, whereby contracts specify what is grown, what amount of work shall be done and how crop is shared in the end. With the participation of 8 families sharecropping was first introduced as an experiment in a cooperative CSA, where the families jointly cultivated the designated area. The experiment has an educational impact and the farmers aim to show members "why organic onion is so expensive".
- Keeping a transparent schedule of production tasks also helps consumers to better understand the challenges of farming and act as co-producers. The "Háromkaptár" farm organises harvesting only in the first two days of the week, then boxes are prepared on the pick-up days, that are Wednesdays, when the crop is sorted and the leafy vegetables are harvested until boxes are delivered in the evenings. All production work is done in the garden on Thursdays and Fridays.

These techniques do not necessarily translate into higher average income in most cases.

4.2. Assortment, quantity and delivery

As for the weekly shares, the interviews revealed that CSAs in Hungary typically do not offer full diet. It is not even a specific amount of produce but always extends to 8–10 vegetables, spices, herbal plants and some fruits, mostly organic and sometimes landraces. Relying on a diverse production assortment (e.g. 100 different vegetables, landraces, etc.) requires much more time and work from the farmer. For this reason, in certain CSAs voluntary coordinators help farmers to match the needs of local groups and manage the delivery. Collaboration of CSA farms also helps to provide a regular assortment of diversified produce throughout the entire season. To extend the variety consumers primarily would prefer fruits, some grain (wheat, barley, buckwheat, and millet), meat, cheese and dairy products. Farmers or members also invite other producers with seasonal fruits to the drop off points. Stories of production procedures, recipes with simple technologies of cooking, processing, preservation and storing of given varieties is often pre-circulated in email by the farmers to give an insight into the weekly box.

The assortment can be improved by easy to grow complementary plants (chives, green spices, etc.) which would not sell in a webshop but can certainly offer some variability in the supply. Simplicity in logistics is a main competitive advantage in the CSA-model that directs a larger share from the entire value chain to the farmer. Selecting the assortment into the boxes is considered a creative task and farmers are proud and happy to do it. The weekly delivery of boxes is the principal act to develop strong relationship between producers and consumers. Money is involved only once in a month therefore the interactions at the drop off point are very convivial, which helps to establish long-term partnership between producers and consumers. To further enhance personal interactions, several farms collect direct feedback from their members through

surveys, newsletters, and social media. Interviews also revealed that consumer feel that often they get too much of the same thing during the growing season. All CSAs have begun to offer half or small boxes as a way to keep prices down and help people from being overwhelmed with too much produce.

Members are entitled to an equal share of the produce delivered in the weekly box. However the box is invitational, consumers are extrinsically motivated to offer boxes for present in their network, or to needy families to help spreading the CSA-model. Farmers offer further flexibility by meeting individual demands through pre-orders. Consumers also cooperate with each other in splitting share and home delivery. Excess produce can be offered to other members in an exchange box at the drop off point. Farmers encourage these exchanges between consumers through the mailing list.

4.3. Investment, sales, income

"Sales can be different", "it is not the usual logic" or *"the mountain is taken to Muhammad"* —slogans that interviewed participants used when describing the sales model of a box scheme. The innovative element in the CSA-model ensures that farmers can cut back on their sales (delivery, marketing, and packaging) cost and through the membership make better production planning and predict revenues. In such way they manage to completely avoid insecurities of conventional small scale farming: dependency and anonymity on single market outlets and food commodity price pressure. As one of the interviewees explained:„ the leader of the organic market explicitly told us that we cannot enter the market to be competition for one of the main vendors . . . *it would not worth to come*".

As a basic economic arrangement farmer-led CSAs involve members paying before the season for the working capital. Weekly box prices or shares are calculated based on the operating capital needed to run the farms and accumulated from the full payment in advance of the growing season. However interviews also revealed that farmers are in trouble with fair price calculations. Seasonal labour costs, rent, seeds and garden supplies are usually in, but improvements, maintenance, organisational and educational costs, as well as incidental costs are typically taken out of the equation. In this way CSA farmers apply a risk hedging strategy that is hidden from consumers. No surprise, most consumers felt that they cannot look behind the scenes and cannot make estimations on how much work is done on the farms.

In practice the pricing techniques are based on the income level of the community. The most common method, according to the interviews, is to calculate a fair price solely on the basis of the production costs whereby the total cost is divided by the number of boxes. Some farmers try to further adapt their prices to the competitors, merchants and consumer-operated home delivery systems. Farmers also track current produce prices on the farmers' market. Based on Hungarian CSA farmers' self-reported assessment a typical CSA farm make an average income of circa 650 euro in total, which is similar to Italian data calculated by Fonte (2013).[3] The interviews also show that consumers would flexibly pay higher price if needed, although they typically think that the box has reasonable, fair price especially compared to the high quality of produce. It is also clear that Hungarian farmers are not able to charge a higher price without losing many customers.

As for the investment the interviews revealed that farmers needed to rely on external (off-farm) sources to start up the CSA. While the start-up does not require more investment than producing for and selling on the market, returns and operational costs are expected to stay much lower. Therefore all investigated business plans contain low-key calculations with a gradual increase in revenues. As the interviews pointed out farmers calculate low revenues that may not even cover wage costs in the first three years. What is clear is that the CSA itself does not provide enough to live on for any of the farmers and in these circumstances each farmer relies on off-farm income. Extra economic activities extend to gardening or part-time jobs in agriculture. Most farmers already have the necessary farming experience from the past and the capital as well to cover losses. CSA is regarded as an experimenting whereby they do not have much to lose. All in all CSA means an improvement in farmers' financial situation.

Interviews with producers pointed out that farmers rely on their already existing trust-based social network to set up the vegetable community. Production risks are kept partly hidden from the consumers or at least not communicated and shared. Membership fees are also set very low: payments by the members only cover the monthly cultivation costs. It almost seems as if farmers deliberately modify the production risk sharing principle of the CSA-model to survive while consumers shape the relationship with farmers to be more functional, service-oriented.

As for economic sustainability of the farmer-led CSAs our research results provide a paradox and some completely unexpected information for (potential) CSA operators. Many consumers are not familiar with the concept of CSA and are not willing to pay for positive environmental and social externalities but rather prefer a service oriented functional CSA model. Farmers are concerned about offering low share prices not entailing to all costs for consumers to be CSA shareholders. It seems that for most consumers the pricing is not transparent. Whole season budgets are divided to be more attractive to low-income consumers.

Farmers invest a lot into community building, build on pre-existing networks to explore and integrate consumers by the snowball technique. As interviews revealed they regularly finance the operation of CSA from external resources. However share prices do not capture costs of community building and environmental benefits. As a main consequence, farmers are not earning a living wage from their CSA operations and rely on different survival strategies. These include food processing to

[3] Note that the average farm income in Italy and the US is similar but the season in Hungary is much longer: 36 weeks (e.g. May 2014–February 2015) compared to only 24 weeks of produce in England and the US.

provide produce with higher added value (ratatouille, pumpkin seed, sea buckhorn for the market); season extension (by electrically or manure-heated hotbed, storage capacity for the winter); collaborative CSA (farmers team up to provide a full-diet assortment of diversified produce throughout the entire season); drop off points (develop infrastructure to reduce transport costs); involvement of members (volunteers for organising pickup points and work on the farm).

To sum up, CSAs integrated by the farmers are typically not self-sustainable. They operate as non-profit businesses which are basically regarded by the farmers, consumers and community organizers as social/community enterprises. The model requires labour investment from every participant. As formulated by a consumer, CSAs as social enterprises are rooted in the emotional relationship of farmers towards the land and farming. Beyond farming operators create and animate communities, foster a moral economy of human relationships. Solidarity is enhanced through interpersonal relations, community-level commitments and in its institutionalized form, the CSA contracts as well.

Nevertheless building a trusted customer base in alternative networks seems to be at least as vital for the survival of the farm as a more transparent sharing of costs. The more so since, according to the interviews, farmers are well aware that members' motivations change through their participation in CSAs. The expectation of growing members' commitment to the survival of local farms and to local economic activities might also explain, at least in part, the apparently "irrational" attitude of CSA farmers towards the sharing of costs if their CSAs are in an initial phase.

4.4. Sense of community

Survey research assessed members' reasons for joining a CSA, as well as members' enduring experience of being members of a CSA community. The majority of members joined their CSA for convenient supply of fresh, healthy, local, organic produce from a producer they personally know. Though they tend to mention environmental protection issues (such as environmentally friendly production methods and less packaging), they rarely explicitly emphasize broader sustainability concerns as reason to pursue box schemes. Very few respondents joined their CSA for other ambitions: to build community of like-minded individuals, or solidarity with farmers.

Interviews revealed that customers personally trust very much the farmers even if they were only less engaged to the sustainability achievements of CSAs. Consumers like to describe their relationship with the farmers as solidarity or friendship. Farmers are considered the most authentic information sources on food quality issues. Conversations with CSA farmers improve cooperation and reinforce the rules of the vegetable community. Sense of community and solidarity with the farmers is reinforced through farm visits when consumers have an insight into the processes and socio-ecological impacts of farming, and the socio-economic significance of production planning. Members feel that they are part of an alternative economy: "To feel that one create values, I live in a real world. Previously I never had this experience in my workplace that I am useful." It seems that members do not derive a very strong sense of community from their CSA, yet from time to time they appear to be engaged in activities around the farm and they feel "forming of moral human relations".

Our interview data suggests that due to uncertainties of the seasonality, assortment, and quantity experience-seeking consumers are more likely to be CSA members. However they also pursue a strong ethical commitment to a localised economic (production-consumption) model which carries many socio-ecological features that they chose for ethical reasons. Therefore several consumers have already actively participated in transforming the communities into a *"self-managing and self-organizing enterprise so that farmers can concentrate more on farming"*.

The consumer-member survey revealed a further pattern with regard to the enduring experience of being member in a CSA community. Examining the difference between the motivation of joining a CSA and the reported changes in experience of being member of a CSA pointed out the significance of the social: feeling of community membership, personal ties, and even friendship are reported as the main unexpected changes during a CSA experience. Respondents expressed their positive surprises by claiming, for example, of realising "*the whole ideal of this initiative*" of which "*being part is extremely good*". Further, respondents reported positive feelings "*of being one in the chain of production*" and "*providing a useful and meaningful time*" as unexpected when deciding on joining a CSA. Though it cannot be claimed that very strong ties develop among members, but it seems justified to argue, based on the survey that a CSA initiative provides opportunities to (re-)learn community feeling and relations.

CSA farmers, as interview data suggest, also re-define their own identity through the CSA experience. They often feel that the CSA provides them with a desired lifestyle, lower level of stress about the price squeeze, better quality of life. As one farmer pointed out the ultimate goal is "finding the peace inside that you do not feel wasted at the end of the day". They continuously look for opportunities to share this experience, offer activities beyond the basic transactions of box delivery. The organisational form (being a family business, a limited company or a cooperative) reinforces and pre-empts social boundaries and internal structure of CSAs. Farmers explore members' motivations; build up cooperative activities on mutual interests. Certainly they all developed very good social and communicational skills and they actively organise and encourage members to take leading part in seasonal food preparation, exchanges of recipes, and various interactions at the drop off points to meet and socialize.

Interviews with CSA producers illustrate that farmers attempt to provide transparency by involving consumer-members at various stages, such as specifying the array of produce in the boxes or taking photos at the drop off points. Farmers believe that members need more time and practice to identify their own inner needs, experience the socio-ecological impacts, relearn seasonality of food, and give continuous feedback to quality. As one farmer reported *"In the village there is no real community and people were no longer producing in their gardens, they rather go to supermarkets"*. In a few cases coordinators

help farmers in these activities and enhance cooperation of farmers and consumers. When talking about the members, farmers consciously avoid the concept of "consumers" and prefer to call CSA participants as "members" to foster community relations. Virtual activities through newsletters, e-mails, blogs, and social media are gaining more and more importance in experimentally creating, recombining and distributing new knowledge for sustainable agriculture. Unlike the members, farmers tend not to consider themselves as service providers but community developers continuously enhancing their members' commitment. They long for a more collaborative, partnership type of relationship.

In sum, interview and survey results suggest that Hungarian CSAs are on the move between functional and collaborative model as defined by as Feagan and Henderson (2009) and supporting community development in urban and *peri*-urban areas. As for the shared risk and reward agreements between farmers and consumers our findings reveal a contradictory picture. It all seems as if the contract in its present form is essential only to the farmers while customers are less interested in understanding its importance. In most cases the agreement is the translation of the French CSA (AMAP) contracts. Irregularities and seasonality of production pushes farmers to divide the yearly contract into seasonally adjusted parts and emphasize the advantages of membership. In such circumstances contracts are often seasonally adjusted to better track the production costs, accompanied by practical arrangements to diversify the product range.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we have examined recent developments and future prospects of CSAs in Hungary based on interviews and a consumer-member survey. We argued that the futures studies community should regard CSAs as positive examples that lead towards futures based in healthy, diverse, and joyful communities. As we pointed out CSAs offer a remarkable alternative vision on the futures of food which implies lifestyle changes, food activism, experimenting, as well as redirection of food research to sustainable forms of food supply. Clearly, CSAs create preferred futures where the growing and preparation of food is celebrated and as Hurley (2008) remarked honoured as important work in the world. CSAs could be also regarded as a model for other kinds of production (Stagl, 2002) and a vehicle for rethinking our food system which requires spaces of active and direct producer-consumer cooperation. However the scaling up of these experiences is the main challenge today. A successful business-rationale of farmers needs to rely on a trusted customer base, therefore in an initial phase farmers-led CSAs may choose to scale deeper (rather than up) into their customer base and not to share all the costs with the expectation of growing members' commitment.

Within a spectrum of localised, alternative futures farmer-led CSAs emerged in the recent years in Hungary as an increasingly developed sector followed by national level acknowledgement. Our empirical research reported here suggests that these relatively new and specific types of farmer-led CSAs can launch a learning process by educating members for consuming healthier and in a more environmentally friendly way on the one hand, and by assisting the development of community relations and solidarity feeling, on the other. In an attempt to live more sustainably, CSA – as Henderson (2003) also pointed out – provides unique organizational solutions and reflects the needs, talents, and resources of the farmer and the community. Our results clearly indicate that CSAs as farmer-controlled experiment stations investigate the viability of a more local and socially just food system (DeLind, 1999; Henderson, 2003).

As a main line or argument the article showed that CSA farmers pursue a set of social and material practices (in production, assortment and delivery of boxes, investments and pricing, and community building) to reach beneficial socio-ecological outcomes on the community level. Findings capture challenges that emerged as core experiences across the cases and illustrate an important point that has previously not received much attention in the literature. This led us to use the term "agriculture supported community" as a specific but previously unexamined form of moral economy, as defined by Psarikidou and Szerszynski (2012) whereby farmers create communities by relying on external financial resources and reaching out to trust-based personal networks or ethical consumers. Following Flora and Bregendahl (2012) this article suggested that farmer-led CSA initiatives need to strengthen their socio-political or economic bases to expand. As discussed by Hinrichs (2000) and Lyson (2004) our results have also shown that farmers started to establish a market segment through the building up of new food communities. The expansion of the CSA niche is imminent if farmers are becoming less and less reliant on off-farm income.

Taking a socio-technical transition approach this article presented the box scheme developed by these CSAs being more than just a creative marketing tool. As an artefact that keeps produce out of the logic of market economy, deprive vegetables of their commodity nature the CSA box practically re-codes the meaning attached to such products by the contemporary commodity culture. Farmers redirect the box scheme as a powerful learning tool in linking the consumer to local socio-ecological issues. Being ideologically oriented CSA farmers successfully create a moral economy, build solidarity, catalyse members ethical principles and moral feelings.

Similarly to SFSCs all over Europe farmer-led CSAs in Hungary almost exclusively target young, wealthy, self-reflexive, extrovert urban conscious consumers with high qualifications, who have a family in most cases and strongly resist the dominant consumption culture (see recently Kneafsey et al., 2013). Several consumers already actively participate in transforming the communities into, as they suggested, a "self-managing and self-organizing enterprise" so that "farmers can concentrate more on farming". For the most a box scheme proves to be a desirable step in reaching more sustainable lifestyle.

Farmers' experience in agro-economy and agro-ecology, involvement in public or private organisations that serve as a secure source of living gives them opportunity to experiment with the CSA model. Founders of CSAs increasingly sought for alternative channels because of the price squeeze in recent years they withdraw from the farmers market. Communities are

created by the farmers who start the discourse on food quality and social relations. Trust is built through systematic sharing of farming experience and active involvement in the production process.

Communities could survive in the long run if pricing would be more transparently done (involving higher membership fees) and strategies for survival based on outside sources would be harmonized. Social marketing that is able to share relevant news, articles; films can help the process community building. Professional community developers who could teach the community the values of socio-cultural heterogeneity could be involved in finding and organizing the right programs for the community.

Policy-makers aiming at ensuring sufficient revenues for small scale sustainable farming may be interested in CSAs that potentially could reshape food chain supply and allow an alternative value repartition among agents. A collaborative network of cooperatively organised CSAs could represent a real and viable alternative to mass produced, homogenous, imported produce found in most supermarkets.

This article examined farmer-led CSAs from the perspectives of both producers and the consumers. Instead of focussing only on economic viability of farmers and behaviour change of consumers, other dimensions of their social life were emphasized. The article explored the perceptions of uncertainties in production planning, assortment, quantity and delivery of boxes; farm level investment strategies and income, as well as the sense of community developed in farmer-led CSAs. Findings contribute to the literature by bringing the perceptions of farmer-led CSAs to the discourse surrounding LFSs (Roep & Wiskerke, 2006; Brunori et al., 2012; Dupuis & Gillon, 2009; Izumi et al., 2010).

Following a qualitative research design conclusions are derived from the specific experiences of interviewed farmers and consumers which may not be generalizable to other type of CSAs. Several theoretical and practical insights were drawn from this research. Theoretically, the socio-technical transition approach proves to be fruitful to understand the box scheme as a technical artefact and to examine how farmers manage socio-technical innovations around the CSA farm. The notion of "agriculture supported community" that this article suggested first, characterizes the farmer-led CSAs in Hungary that strive to build up necessary trust for operating a CSA. Farmers invest into building up of food communities in the Hungarian context of low level of participation, relatively weak civil society. With this risky community investment consumers more easily engage themselves in local food systems.

Farmer-led CSAs in Hungary perform complex and paradoxical roles beyond economic motives to enhance their socio-economically inclusive traits: they rely on specialised target groups by providing invitational event based marketing, offering insight into the production. In such circumstances what makes these farmer-led CSAs unique is their potential for catalyse changes in dominant food system, reconnect consumers with producers by fostering a collaborative culture of sharing, gifting, bartering and donating.

Finally, as CSAs expect to get further public funding to extend their services and advocates work to develop community agriculture, it is important to highlight the most critical factor this study pointed at with regard to farmer-led CSAs, that is the pricing anomaly which involves unrecognised cost of developing a community. Practically, this calls for sharing best practices to ensure farmers fair return and secure income. Further practice-oriented research would be also required to support the fruitful integration of farmers, members and expert-scientific knowledge necessary to solve such difficulties.

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Appendix A.

	Operation (years)	Produce	Land (ha)	Locality	Members	Employees	Organisational form
Évkerék EcoFarm	3	Fruit, veg, cereals, met	7 ha	Szeged (Kistelek)	50 boxes	2	Family farmer
Háromkaptár Organic Garden	3	Vegetables and organic food shop	1,5 ha	Tahitótfalu	80 boxes	1	Limited company
Biokert Szigetmonostor	7	Vegetables, cereals, legumes	5 ha	Szigetmonostor	60 boxes	2	Limited company
Matthews farm	3	Vegetables, egg, poultry	4 ha	Zsámbok	53 boxes	4	Limited company
Bioéléskamra (Eleven Föld cooperative)	8	Vegetables, pumpkin seed	7 ha	Hét (Miskolc)	47 boxes	2	Family farmer

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