

SPECIAL MARKETS FOR LOCAL AGRO FOOD PRODUCTS

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the European Union's rural policies have focused on balanced rural development and, in particular, significant support for less-favored areas. This can be achieved through diversification strategies that focus on supporting and promoting local products in each region. The aim is to create synergies between local producers and various distributors to create and increase added value in the final local product. The importance of product quality has created a global trend in nutrition by helping to create a highly competitive food market. The quality and place of production aspect is a unique asset for maintaining global competitiveness. Consumers, in recent years, are increasingly interested in the origin of food not only for health reasons but also for an internal need to satisfy the lack of "original" and "traditional" flavors and flavors of their daily lives (Theodossiou, Goulas, Duquenne, 2017) and secondarily to support the protection of the environment and the conservation of biodiversity at the place of production.

The global trend that has prevailed around the standardization of agricultural products has created an alternative trend of valuing and consuming typical products of an area. In these typical products, social participation and their quality are considered to enhance economic activity and can be a competitive advantage in domestic and international markets (Goodman 2003; Bowen & Mutersbaugh, 2014).

Concerns about the environmental, economic, social and health risks inherent in global food systems have attracted both public and scientific attention to sustainability and food security. In this way, it is considered that sustainable development of food systems will be achieved. Thus, in recent decades, an increasing number of people in high-income countries, mainly, have turned to "alternative food networks".

In the present research paper an attempt to study and present the categories of markets created by the global tendency of citizens to be interested in the origin and place of production of the food they consume will be reviewed in the existing literature. Mainly, the inhabitants of the big urban centers show a special interest in the way and the place of production of their food. Thus, the creation of various citizen movements was the expected development of this trend. In fact, according to Hinrichs (2000), specific citizen movements, such as Socially Supported Agriculture and Community-Based Agricultural Production have conquered many countries in Europe, America and Asia. However, in addition to these, the international literature mentions other markets of agricultural products, such as urban agriculture, specific and specialized delicatessens on agro - products, as well as short food supply chains.

INTRODUCTION

Factors such as environment, society, heritage, place and tradition are taken into account and contribute to the creation of local products by innovative territorial business clusters. This, according to Mascarenhas G., and Touzard J.M., (2018), leads local business clusters to be increasingly the driving forces of this new, diversified production model, which has found in collective action the primary factor that exploits the material and immaterial resources of the region. While Bombaj F., (2018), argues that 'food markets are characterized by non-linear, unregulated and heterogeneous self-organized food value chains'. This fact, combined with the increasing importance given by consumers to different attributes related to the quality of agri-food, such as environment, safety, taste, and formality, among others.

Indeed, despite the long-term global economic crisis, there is a growing interest in local productions and in the formality and provenance of food, especially by the middle and upper classes in developed countries, but also by some urban middle classes in emerging and developing countries (Sanz – Canada & Muchnik, 2016). This food reform movement, as DuPuis E.M., and Goodman D., (2005) characteristically calls it, seeks to delineate alternative food networks and predetermined economies of quality. As also Holloway and Kneafsey (2004), argue that 'alternative food networks resist capitalism through an essentially rational form of rule-based action.

Hence, local food policies imply that food production and consumption takes place in an ethical context and that this "ethic of care" is inherently spatial: These spatial relations are often linked to the desire to promote concepts such as "proximity" or the "connection". Besides, as mentioned by Sanz – Canada J., and Muchnik J., (2016) 'a local agricultural food system (SYAL) is a gathering of local networks of producers, small crafts, institutions and agencies, located mainly in rural areas and specialized in the production and marketing of agri-food products based on identity. This territorial cluster includes the spatial concentration of a dispersed business and institutional nexus of agricultural holdings, agro-food crafts, enterprises providing services to farmers and breeders, research centers, local development organizations, sectoral organizations, local bodies and exhibits a relatively high degree of production specialization'.

Essentially, in the local food debate, the relationship between actors in the territorial cluster and consumers is special, as specific products are addressed to specific markets. In the process of making and transforming food identity, food, consumers, producers, know-how, tradition, trust and a sense of belonging are included. Local societies strengthen the anchoring of a local identity-based product throughout history through collective networks and intergenerational transmission of specific knowledge, know-how and skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Attempting to study the categories of markets that have been created by the global trend of citizens to care about the origin and place of production of the food they consume will be reviewed the existing literature. Primarily, residents of large urban centers show a particular interest in how and where their food is produced. Thus, the creation of various citizen movements was the expected development of this trend.

As already mentioned, it is a fact that in recent years there has been a global trend towards the consumption of healthy and environmentally friendly products that

have ties to the place of production, which are also called local food products or local products. According to Sarah A. Low, Stephen Vogel (2011), local farms produce mainly fresh vegetables, fruits and nuts, in contrast to traditional agricultural production, which consists mainly of livestock and agricultural commodity production. While according to Steve Martinez, Michael Hand, Michelle Da Pra, Susan Pollack, Katherine Ralston, Travis Smith, Stephen Vogel, Shellye Clark, Luanne Lohr, Sarah Low and Constance Newman, (2010), local food markets typically include smallholder farmers, heterogeneous products and small supply chains, in which farmers also perform marketing functions, including storage, packaging, transport, distribution and advertising.

Demand for local products depends on many variables. According to recent literature these variables are:

- the desire to consume a fresh and healthy product,
- supporting the local economy and local traditions,
- reduction of transport and processing affecting climate change, lower costs,
- creating a personal and direct relationship with the farmers,
- food safety,
- improved nutrition,
- better taste,
- but it is also a reaction to the feelings of alienation and disconnection from the land that the new way of life, mainly in urban centers, and the new way of consuming food products have created in consumers,
- farmers receiving a fair share of the economic returns;
- the preservation of local agricultural lands.

Economic, environmental and health impacts of local and regional food systems depend on changing consumer purchasing decisions.

Given today's market-oriented development framework, the local level of social and economic development can be both a challenge and a potential opportunity for certain rural areas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The goal of investigating the existence and operation of such markets is to study and present the dynamics and opportunities that may exist for the specific products. Such a study will inform any promising collective effort, as it will be able to demonstrate the target markets it could target, claiming a significant share.

1. Urban agriculture

Urban agriculture is an alternative model, in which farmers aim to reduce the physical and social distances between producer and consumer, as well as to eliminate middlemen. This strategy aims to increase producer profits and reduce consumer costs (Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003). According to Feenstra (1997), urban agriculture emphasizes the local characteristics of food systems, the economic viability of farmers and rural communities, ecologically sound production and distribution practices, reliance on local knowledge, and social equity for all members of the community.

2. Markets without middlemen

During the years of the economic crisis, a new special market appeared and strengthened in many countries, which was based on the movement of products from producers to consumers, without the intervention of intermediaries. The goal of this new market is a fair and ethical price for quality food products, with benefits for both the producer and the consumer.

In fact, as Blasi E., Panino B., and Franco S. (2015) emphasize in their related study, alternative markets bring producers into direct contact with the demand of consumers living in urban centers. The main characteristic of this market without intermediaries is proximity.

Thus, in countries as Greece, we observed the phenomenon of municipalities and citizens taking action, self-organizing and creating the conditions for markets without intermediaries. In these markets, products are available directly from the producers, at a better price, with high quality. The important thing about that kind of markets, like the other categories of alternative markets we studied, is that both contracting parties, producers and consumers, win.

3. Consumer cooperatives

Consumer cooperatives and especially food consumer cooperatives are gaining significant market share and have therefore grown significantly.

Also, Katchova A., and Woods T., (2011), argue that consumer cooperatives operating as retail outlets are primarily grocery stores, however, several consumer cooperatives have expanded into other business movements, such as restaurants. In fact, according to Katchova A., and Woods T., (2011), consumer cooperatives are the third most important food network market for the distribution of local products, with their popularity among consumers increasing over time.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that there are various markets in which any collective action can be targeted. The important thing in these markets is that although they concern different cases, however, they share common characteristics such as quality, health, environment. These characteristics, as it is understood, are found in the context of the model of territorial development, as it was presented in this doctoral dissertation. In addition, the characteristics of the territorial development, make the consumer, no matter how close or far from the place of production, to actively contribute to the maintenance of the activity and the production of food. In addition, in this way it is possible the environmental protection, the preservation of the tradition, the support of the farmers of the area, but also the consumption of food of higher quality. Undoubtedly, operating in markets such as Community Supported Agriculture, Urban Agriculture, Alternative Food Networks and markets without middlemen makes any business venture viable, from a financial-economic point of view.

It is important for the local producers and various distributors to understand the dynamics that are hidden on those special markets and the added value that can offer to their products. It is also mentioned and underlined that the

importance of product quality has created a global trend in nutrition by helping to create a highly competitive food market. Local producers should take advantage that global trend for their own benefit.

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