

CONNECTION BETWEEN COMMUNITY STRATEGIES AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

Zoltán SZAKÁLY, Viktória SZENTE

Kaposvár University, Faculty of Economic Science, Hungary
szakaly.zoltan@ke.hu

ABSTRACT

Sustainability is tightly linked to the conception of food sovereignty, which has become a central issue for the international social movements dealing with agriculture during the past decade. According to the philosophy of the movement farmers have the right to produce local food products, and the consumers have the right to decide what they want to consume, who they want it to be produced by and how they want it to be produced. In this system it is task of the state to protect the local farms from the huge amount of agricultural product and food import. In the presentation the authors put great emphasis on highlighting the possibility of forming consumer patriotism, on the direct sale of agricultural and food products with special regard to the traditional and regional food products. The Hungarian food producers are fighting a losing battle against the import products flooding into our country. The price competition on the market causes them increasing losses, while their production efficiency is unable to improve significantly neither in the short, nor in the midterm. A direct result of this is that the Hungarian food producers – through price competition – are unable to keep their target markets, so they are forced to use other marketing tools. One possibility is to make consumer patriotism stronger among Hungarian consumers. If we are able to show the consumers' positive attitudes towards the Hungarian products, then the market strategy of the Hungarian food products can be supplemented with a new element. Another possibility for increasing the added value is to build the system of direct sale. An increasing number of producers realize in Western-Europe and in the United States that direct sale increases the profit significantly and also results in a certain level of independence from the processing industry and from trade. The farmers also know that there is a greater demand for reliable, healthy products with safe, origin, for which – in case of proper marketing influencing - they are willing to pay more. From the producers' view direct sale leads to a change in attitude as well: instead of the previous production conception they consider the consumers' demands too, they try to accommodate to them supply.

Keywords: food sovereignty, ethnocentrism, labelling, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

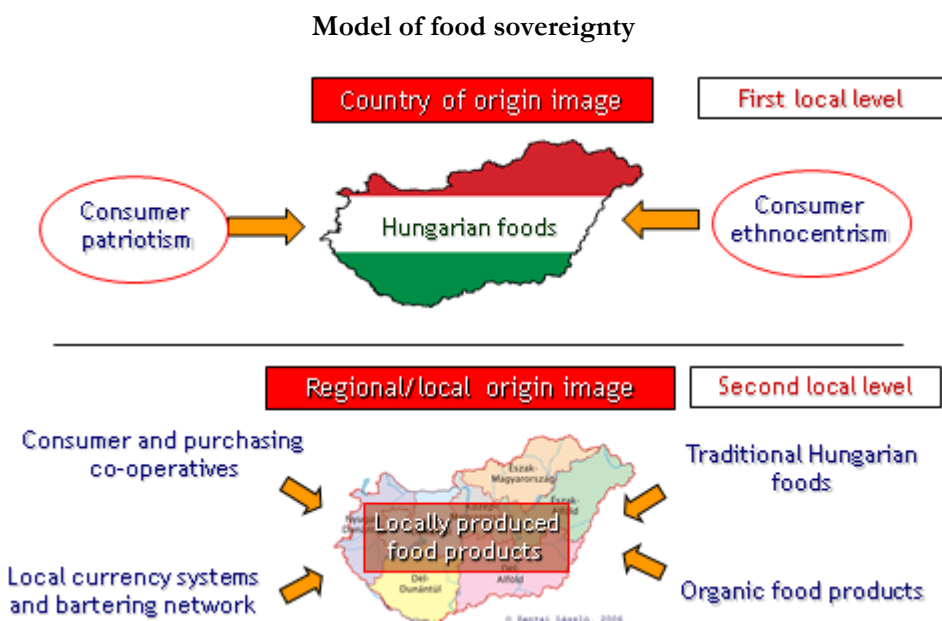
During the past years the harmful economic, social, environmental and cultural effects of globalization and free trade have been addressed with a lot of criticism. In this process there are few winners, but the number of the losers is increasing. The question arises: Who belong to the losers in economic sense? It is apparently the small national companies, among them the small agricultural producers, the small Hungarian food-processors as well as the retailers who have their own shops but do

not belong to the chains of retail stores. The core problem is that the production and the consumption are not linked to each other, for which the following statement is a sad example: because of the closing-down of local markets 75% of the poor and the hungry worldwide are small agricultural producers. Knowing these facts, we can ask the question: Is there a solution in this situation?

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MODEL

In our opinion *food sovereignty is a possible solution to the problem*. According to the philosophy of the movement the producers have the right to produce local (domestic) food product, and the consumers have the right to decide what they want to consume, who they want it to be produced by and how they want it to be produced. It is the task of the state to protect the local (domestic) farms from the vast amount of agricultural product and food import. If we want to summarize the main idea in one sentence, then the most important task is to reduce the spatial division of production and consumption. In other words it is best if the produced foods are consumed as close to the site of the production as possible. Based on this theory we worked out an integrated model which defines food sovereignty at two levels (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1



At the first local level the domestic (in this case the Hungarian) food products appear, the consumption of which is relatively close to the production site. In this case our task is to make the emotional affections for national products stronger (we can also call it a positive country of origin image), and its final manifestation is the

high purchase rate. At the second local level are the locally produced food products. The most important key words here are consumer and purchasing co-cooperatives, the local currency systems and bartering network, as well as at the level of the product category the so-called traditional Hungarian foods (the so-called *hungaricums*), and organic food products also belong here. The consumers' trust felt for this type of products manifests itself in the regional and local origin image. This model is able to ensure the *sustainable food consumption*, behind which there is a very strong consumer public awareness, that is solidarity with the national and local producers. In this paper we deal with the first local level that is with the ethnocentric and, within it, with the patriotic consumer behaviour in details.

The concept of ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to believe that one's ethnic or cultural group is centrally important, and that all other groups are measured in relation to one's own. Ethnocentrism is a kind of attitude to other groups from the group's own view. Ethnocentrism manifests itself in three forms (*Kosterman and Fesbach, 1989*).

- The first is the *patriotic way of thinking* in the centre of which is an adherence to the motherland, and patriotism. For us consumers advocating such principles may be a solution regarding the preference of domestic products (*Doob, 1964; Druckman, 1994*).
- The second group is made up of *people with national feelings*. These people see the solution in the supremacy and dominance of their own country (*Shafer and Robert, 1982*), and naturally it influences their product preference as well.
- The third category involves the so-called *cosmopolitans*, those who, regarding their attitudes towards other nations, are liberal that is they accept the products of other countries, too (*Yoon et al., 1994*).

Within this, consumer ethnocentrism means those convictions of the consumers that refer to the approval and morality of purchasing goods exported from a foreign country (*Shimp and Sharma, 1987*). Ethnocentric consumers regard the purchase of products originating from a foreign country inappropriate because it may threaten the domestic country's economy and employment (*Malota, 2003*). The consumers with such a way of thinking declare their solidarity with the Hungarian (domestic) producers and products; they characteristically buy Hungarian food products.

Research background of ethnocentrism

Let's ask the question: Is there consumer ethnocentrism in Europe? Now let me investigate two other countries – Austria and France – besides Hungary. For the *Austrian food consumers* the most important factor influencing their shopping decision is the Austrian origin (for 28% of them), which precedes quality (15%) and price (11%). In other words we could say that *consumers' public awareness or ethnocentrism is very strong in Austria*. 7-9 persons in 10 consumers in Austria buy only Austrian cheeses, meat products, or Austrian wines.

According to *French people* a good quality food product can have only French origin. The French produce over 1000 different types of cheese and most of them

are available in the local chains of retail stores and in specialized cheese shops. *French consumers do not think about not buying French products.*

But what is the situation like in Hungary? According to the results of a survey which was carried out at the beginning of the 1990s, it was only the Hungarians among eight countries' consumers who did not buy their own products most frequently and who were the least satisfied with them. The situation did not change in 2000 either: from 15 countries – together with the Indonesian people – it was the Hungarians who preferred their own products the least. *Malota's* (2003) researches supported that the Hungarian consumers, based on quality parameters, ranked their domestic products behind the German and Canadian products, and the Hungarian products preceded only the Czech products.

But has the situation changed since then? To come clear with it we launched a nationwide consumer survey. Our aim was to analyse consumer ethnocentrism and its influence on the judgement of the Hungarian food products. Regarding this we compiled a model the starting point of which is the positive ethnocentrism that is the patriotic way of thinking. We can talk about consumer ethnocentrism, the forming of country of origin image, the preference of domestic food products and finally about a positive shopping intention if the rate of patriots is high in a country.

Now let's see each point of the model and let's find out how much Hungarians are patriots?

- I like Hungarians in general, say 78.2% of them.
- I have emotions for Hungary, say 75.8% of them.
- I am proud to be Hungarian, say 75.3% of them.
- The Hungarians, besides their national status, have other common features unifying them (say 75%).
- As a summary we can state that 8 in 10 Hungarians have emotions for their own country (*Szakály et al.*, 2009).

ETHNOCENTRISM AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The question is whether this positive attitude appears in the refusal of the foreign products? It seems that the first contradiction in the consumers' way of thinking appears here. According to 83% of the respondents workplaces can be saved by purchasing domestic products. On the contrary to this, 70% of them think that those who buy foreign products are not responsible for the job losses of fellow countrymen (this is the first contradiction). 70% of the consumers state that all import activities should be strictly regulated. However, according to 65% of the consumers foreign companies have the right to display their products on the Hungarian market. 70% of the respondents think that we should import such products from abroad that cannot be produced in Hungary. Contrary to this, according to 60% of the consumers a real patriot does not always have to buy food products produced in his or her own country.

But how to explain the obtained results? On the one hand, the *Hungarian consumers moralize*, which costs nothing, on the other hand, *they do not take responsibility for their acts*. We can summarize that in general they agree with the preference of

Hungarian products, but in a particular case they think differently. This contradictory situation is called *ethnocentrism paradox* by us.

But do they think the same about the domestic food products? In our survey the image of the Hungarian food products was compared to the image of the German and French food products. In general it can be stated that based on the listed features the *Hungarian food products were qualified the best, overtaking the German and the French products*. The opinions about the reliability, quality, variety and price of the Hungarian products are extremely positive. The consumers are satisfied with the Hungarian food products and they emotionally identify themselves with them.) The Hungarian food conception does not seem to have a weak point.

After this we ask the most important question: does this positive image appear in the shopping frequency of the Hungarian food products? According to our results as you can see in *Table 1*.

Table 1

Likelihood and shopping frequency

Hungarian food products are...	Divisions of answers	
	head	%
...liked and purchased regularly.	349	34.9
...liked, but not purchased regularly.	402	40.2
...liked, but their origin is not considered.	200	20.2
...not likes and their origin is not considered.	17	1.7
uncertain consumers	32	3.2

Source: *Szakály et al., 2009*

According to the results 34.9% of the respondents like and regularly purchase Hungarian food products, that is they can be regarded the primary target group of the Hungarian food products. 40.2% of the respondents like but do not regularly buy Hungarian food products, they may be won to buy Hungarian food products with appropriate marketing communication. If it is a success, then we would reach that patriot level (7-9 consumers) that characterizes the developed Western-European countries today. 20% of the shoppers like but are uninterested in the origin of the product, while the rate of those who do not like Hungarian food products and do not care about their origin is very low (only 1.7%). The rate of uncertain people is only 3.2%. What do the above results mean? They mean that the rate of liking is 95% compared to 35% regular shoppers. This is what we call the *first food paradox*.

What is responsible for the difference between liking and shopping? According to our results it is the price. We put the consumers the following question: If you had a foreign and a Hungarian food product of the same price, then would you prefer to buy the Hungarian product opposed to the foreign one? 77% of the respondents said yes, which is a very favourable rate. But what if the Hungarian product is more expensive? In this case only 25% of the consumers say yes, that is

due to the higher price we have lost 5 consumers. We do not believe the situation would get better if the Hungarian product had a trade-mark displayed on it to show the Hungarian origin. In this case 31% of the consumers would buy the Hungarian product. As a summary it can be stated that at present 3 in 10 consumers can be considered to have a commitment to Hungarian food products in the course of their shopping.

But why do we have only 3 consumers? Because today consumer behaviour is shaped not by collective (community) marketing, but by the profit oriented companies, among them it is the sales strategy of the retail chain stores that has the greatest influence on the consumers' behaviour. The chain stores invite the consumers into their shops with continuous low prices, where only price matters, but not the origin of the product. The phenomenon is called a price terror by us. They do it because they are totally aware that 88% of the Hungarian consumers look for sales and price reductions. In this respect the Hungarian consumers are the closest to the German consumers.

What is the final result of this process? It is that for the Hungarian consumers a good bargain is the most important and because in most cases the foreign food products are available at a lower price, this is why *7 in 10 Hungarians prefer the import food products*. As a result of this the products produced in Hungary continuously disappear from the shelves of the shops. According to a recent survey (Kasza, 2010) the rate of the Hungarian food products was 76.4% in the chain stores in Hungary, which is a very low rate compared to 92% in 2003.

Consumer perception of labelling

The question arises: what possibilities do we have in this situation? One possibility is a *voluntary obligation of the retailers* to sell Hungarian food products. But considering the experience of the previous years this plan does not work. This is why we have another one left: to increase the loyalty of the Hungarian consumers towards Hungarian food products. An excellent tool for this can be a label guaranteeing Hungarian origin and quality. But at this stage another question arises, how much are labels important for the Hungarian consumers?

According to 73.5% of the Hungarian shoppers labels referring to quality are important. According to 68.5% of the respondents it is important that the consumers have information about the place of origin on the package. For 67.7% of the consumers it is important to see labels giving information about the production method of the product. The results show that for 6-7 in 10 consumers labels are important, however, only 23% trust them. In Austria this rate was 87% in 2007. The significant difference between importance and trust is called the *second food-paradox*.

First of all this paradox situation is caused by that the spontaneous knowledge of labels is very low. According to our research the knowledge of the trademark label "Hungarian product" is rateable, 30.5% of the respondents mentioned it spontaneously. The rate of the mentioning of the other labels is under 10%, e.g. label "Made in Hungary", which is a very low rate. However, the most astonishing thing is that the most important Hungarian trademark label "Quality Food from Hungary" did not get a rateable rate of spontaneous mentioning.

In the next step the consumers were assisted by being shown the visual picture of trademark labels and they were asked to indicate if they recognized them. In this case the rate of knowledge was higher than the rate of spontaneous mentioning. The greatest rate of mentioning had the “Hungarian product” trademark label with 90%, which is followed by the “Made in Hungary” and the “Quality Food from Hungary” trademark labels of the same rates. We called this significant difference between the spontaneous knowledge and the so-called assisted knowledge the “third food-paradox”. But the question may arise: what is the message of this paradox situation?

The Hungarian consumers have only passive information about the trademark labels referring to the origin and quality, so only few of them can recall them spontaneously. But this passive knowledge can become active if they see the trademark labels on the package of the products.

Then based on the above: which are the most important anomalies? On the one hand, the consumers do not have appropriate information, this is the reason why a necessary level of trust in trademarks does not exist, and it has a negative influence on the shopping willingness.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this situation a community marketing strategy to be followed has to be defined as well as the strategic aims. The first step of this process is to inform the consumers and in this way to improve trust. The next step is to make the consumers realize the importance of trademark labels, their feelings for the labels have to be shaped, and finally they have to be oriented in and motivated for shopping. If this community marketing strategy is a success, then we can talk about a conscious trademark strategy that will take shape in loyalty towards domestic products.

Then let's put the most important question: what will be the future of the Hungarian food products? Maybe the “Red ocean” strategy where companies compete with the same products for the same market, and they are slowly drained of blood by each other and the water of the ocean becomes red with blood? If this happens, then there will be no domestic innovation, no common marketing action, no consumers' consciousness forming, no distinguishing label, and as a result of this the producers will be forced into a continuous price-rivalry with the import products arriving from far places. In my opinion we should refuse this strategy and had better visualize the “Blue ocean” strategy. In this case domestic innovation, community marketing, consumers' loyalty, a differentiating trademark, consumers' public awareness already exist, and finally we can develop Hungarian food products of shaping and not following position.

But what is the main idea of the shaping position? Domestic food products have to be enjoyable and healthy with a modern image, they also have to have an excellent quality and have to be of Hungarian origin. These five factors together are able to shape the positive beliefs of and attitudes towards Hungarian food products, the final result of which can be the realized action, in other words high shopping willingness.

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