



SOLIDARITY ECONOMY CENTER

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY



Analysis of the problem

The reigning capitalist food-systems eliminated the resilience of societies and natural environments. Humanity must satisfy its most basic human need, food, through utilizing exhausted soil, exploitative work, and unjust redistributive systems, all in the context of its gravest crisis so far. Amongst the many faults of the (food-) production and commerce, based on the logic of capital accumulation, the most discussed problem is their organization within long supply chains (LSCs). Some of the consequences of these are the significant amount of packaging needed, the environmental impact of transportation, and the sustainment of the global economy's inequalities, just to list a few. Another symptomatic tendency is that the market, within which these long supply chains form, got detached from society. The capitalist market economy assigned the economy above the society. Due to the concentration of property, this economy is at the disposal of fewer and fewer people. Consequently, capitalist food systems won't concentrate on the supply of the society, but rather on the accumulation of capital. The cause of starvation is not the lack of production capacity, but the unequal redistribution. These structural problems appear on an individual level through consumption embedding itself within the market economy and thus becoming impersonal and individualized. As such, the responsibility of basic food security is diverted towards the individual, who will satisfy his/her needs through agents of the market- with all its disadvantages.

The negative consequences regarding production are even graver than the ones regarding consumption. The structure of the agrarian society has been drastically re-organized by large-scale, industrial food-production, rendering the survival of small producers, who wouldn't operate within this logic of accumulation, impossible. Furthermore, the tightly connected methods of monocultural and industrial agriculture gained a monopolistic position within the current market and its regulation environments. Excessive mechanization causes significant amounts of harmful emissions. Monocultural food production deteriorates the quality of both food and soil, while it also necessitates unreasonable amounts of land. While the former phenomenon heats up Earth, the latter intensifies qualitative starvation, while limiting the habitations of wildlife and consequently the planet's essential biodiversity. With capitalist big business producers having an advantage within markets, smaller producers fall into poverty, having to sell their lands to big businesses. This is the process through which land-concentration happens. This process on the other hand is often promoted by the State's unjust and inefficient system of agricultural aids. While smaller producers' products are of higher quality, the capitalist system promotes quantity, disregarding quality and the environmental impact of production. Parallely, the access to knowledge within the sector of agriculture is unequally available to differing actors, mimicking the inequalities of access within society at large. Small producers lacking capital can't access either the knowledge to implement progressive methods of production, or the knowledge to see themselves within a system, organizing themselves and ultimately creating systems more advantageous for them and others.

Yet the already existing initiatives reacting to these problems (E.g.: shopping communities, community-supported farms, small producers utilizing permaculture methods, experts of

agroecology etc.) are not organized into real, political networks. For example, shopping communities typically do not aspire to move outside the framework of their operation towards an explicitly political aim. While they are organized collectively, they satisfy atomized, individual consumption needs. As such, they do not aim to organize local catering to reduce for example the reproductive responsibilities affecting women. Their capacity and outreach are limited because they are not capable of significant growth and they do not integrate into wider coalitions of a movement.

Food sovereignty can be a potential method of integrating the market and more specifically agriculture into society. This would entail radically democratic economic decision making, enforcing collective control over consumption and production alike, and collective ownership of these processes' material basis. This economic logic could offer solutions to the enlisted problems. Firstly, it could potentially act as a balancing force against capitalism's logic of capital accumulation, hence emancipating exploited economic actors in precarious positions. On the other hand, it could potentially turn organizations, which are generally working against the forces of the present system's logic, yet remain apolitical and operate within narrow boundaries, towards economic autonomy and revolutionary municipalism. Our project, operating in alignment with the logic of food sovereignty, can, in the long run, offer the communities of consumers the opportunity to purchase products of high quality, produced environmentally and socially ethically, strengthening local economies. Our proposed vision, apart from promoting conscious consumption, can further reinforce the support of reproductive workers. Consequently, it could become a part of a community-based, radically democratic economic ecosystem, and a food system forming within its framework.

The ultimate goal would be eliminating food's form being a commodity. Furthermore, to change our current food systems, relying on large-scale, industrialized, and monocultural agriculture into ones resting on practices of democracy, just redistribution, and ecologically sustainable operation. In accordance with this, as an organization, we would like to facilitate the creation of practices (and their consequent organization into networks) that offer community-based solutions to the above-mentioned problems through utilizing the methods of food sovereignty, agroecology, permaculture, and cooperativism.

Our Goals

Based on the theory of change outlined above, our short-term mission is the launching of a consumer cooperative. Our focus group would be the members of the movement organized around Gólya presszó and Kazán-house, as well as its immediate surroundings, the citizens of the 8th district. Through this practical project we hope to contact farmers and producers, and in the long run, gain their trust for building tight-knit economic cooperation between them and our cooperative.

One of the advantages of a consumer cooperative is its organization of consumption in Short Supply Chains (SSCs), connecting the producers and consumers directly. If there

are no mediating economic actors interested in exploitation between the producers and the consumers, while they are brought closer together in physical space too, emissions and packaging can be significantly reduced (or ideally eliminated). Profit-orientated interest and the outflow of value can be similarly reduced. The connection between consumers and producers/production becomes tighter and more personal. As such consumers can relate more consciously to the products (e.g.: recognizing seasonal products, different production methods, their preferred products' production-cost, etc.), while farmers can gain stable markets for their products, as well as support in their reproductive labor, or more concretely even production itself. If besides this cooperation the farmers would be open for closer economic cooperation between themselves too, they could make production smoother and more stable through utilizing collectively owned tools, collective administration, and reciprocal solidary guarantees. Through the implementation of methods and frameworks of production like permaculture and agroecology, crop yield could be increased, with workload decreasing. This could further make farming more resistant to external impacts of for example the climate crisis. The acquisition and implementation of these methods will always be easier collectively. Furthermore, the above-mentioned principals' political framework, food sovereignty, and the fight for its goals are possible only in communities.

From the perspective of consumption, we would like to make the acts of shopping and eating more conscious and healthier. For this reason, as a first step, we created a Facebook group, where the members can share the pictures and recipes of meals they made from products bought from us. The group also proves to be an efficient way for the community to communicate. It is generally true for shopping communities, that they make certain foods available which are not just healthy but are often unavailable, or difficult to come by in urban environments. For our shopping community, purchasing food is not using a service, but rather the result of collective work between the consumers and the producers. Therefore, we chose the organisation's ideal bureaucratic and legal form to be the co-operative. Furthermore, since the location of our shopping community is the city, where the conditions and institutions of food production available in rural areas are limited, we would further like to support the creation of collectively organized urban gardens. This way, a portion of the food requirements of our community could be produced locally.

We would like to collaborate with farmers who can hardly or cannot create their own market at all, but their production methods in some ways fit into the framework of principles and strategies of the Solidarity Economy Centre, or at least they are open to them. In this framework, within our evaluation, the principal guideline of short supply chains' ideal 40-70 km distance between consumers and producers is overwritten by the principle of solidarity. In return, we try to minimize the environmental impact of our work through logistical solutions such as transporting the purchased products from capital-deficient areas to the capital city in one single vehicle.

In the future we hope to implement a delivery system, collaborating with the movement's bicycle delivery cooperative, resulting in every step of the process of buying food resting on the principles of solidarity. Through delivering our products, we could further ease the reproductive workload of the homes of our consumers.

Finally, through building new connections and networking we hope to promote the principles of Solidarity Economy within agriculture. Through this work, we hope to see more and more projects launch whose operations are based on the above-mentioned principles.

Vörösbegy (Robin) Consumer Cooperative: a pilot project

The *Vörösbegy Consumer Cooperative* launched its practical operation in August 2020, following a long period of preparatory research. Our distribution-days started initially with only fresh vegetables and fruits. The only processed foods on offer were olive oil, ethically produced and transported from Greece, and bread from a local bakery. Later juices and honey (produced by one of our supplying farmers) were added to our offer, along with dried pasta, produced in a small factory, operating as a cooperative. As a result of another collaboration, we were able to sell a community-led, sustainable craft project's, Tangly Hands' handmade bags, designed for vegetable and bread storage.

The connection of the consumers and the producers are realized within the spaces of Kazán house, in the form of weekly distribution-days. The distribution days are preceded by the organizing team's operative work throughout the week. These entail first assessing the amount and quality of our farmers' available stock of products. With the received information we then create „baskets”, aiming to create a diverse selection of products enough for a weeks' consumption. Our consumers can order from these baskets, through the use of a mailing list.

With the knowledge of our consumers' needs, we then give our orders to the farmers. We transport the products to Budapest by car, and organize them on our distribution-days into the pre-selected “baskets”, with the help of volunteers. Finally, the consumers can collect their orders in a given timeslot.

With the system described above so far we operated typically buying from 3-4 farmers, selling our products to 30-40 consumers weekly. Besides the olive oil and the bread, all of our products came from Borsod County, from the broader area of Miskolc. Among our farmers are ones operating in the frameworks of subsistence agriculture, cooperativism, but also farmers working on bigger scales, yet still not utilizing industrialized methods. None of them rely on our cooperative as their sole market, but all of them are open to closer collaboration with us.

Our consumers are predominantly the members of progressive organizations organized around Gólya and Kazán House (eg. Társadalomelméleti Kollégium). From a socio-cultural perspective, they are mostly part of an educated middle-class, who take part in our project as conscious consumers, who support the principles of a solidarity driven economy. This eased our communication with the consumers, we didn't have to decrease significantly

our prices, and we had the opportunity to order from farmers who do not produce ecologically progressively yet but are open to these methods.

The organizing team comprises more or less 10 active members, who synthesize different parts of the processes as part of working groups. Apart from a working group dedicated to organizing the distribution day itself, we have working groups responsible for administration, infrastructure, and the management of both the organizing teams' and the consumers' community. The working groups operate in a radically democratic manner, which principle is the dominant operating method throughout the whole of the organization.

The working groups, apart from orchestrating the weekly exchange of goods, further engage in long-term research. Through this process we continuously reflect upon and synthesize the knowledge we gather, thinking collectively about the future and growth of the organization. As such we consider Vörösbegy to be a method of practical research about food sovereignty, cooperativism, and radical democracy.

This research actively integrates into Solidary Economy Center's Food section's work, which considers questions of agriculture not just in the framework of a project, but systematically. This higher level of organization aims to produce and synthesize knowledge along the following themes:

- Acquiring theoretical knowledge about agroecology, permaculture, and food-sovereignty
- Identifying and creating a network of the scene's organizations, researchers, shopping communities
- Mapping the agricultural scene: who produces what, where with what methods
- Acquiring the knowledge for launching and operating sustainable shopping communities and cooperatives

In the long run, our aim is to gather enough practical knowledge and create a group of experts who will be able to operate as a consultancy, supporting newly founded projects of food sovereignty. From our experience, we can already tell that this would be a much-needed service in the narrower circle of experts of the field and a wider circle of people interested in community-led agriculture alike.

With our current financial and human resources, we have reached the organizational limits of our operation. As the next step of our formalization, we hope to launch a form of webshop system, where we could promote more producers, and satisfy more consumers. We also wish to collaborate more closely with our distribution-days' hosting building/organization. This is necessary for our growing infrastructure needs. These changes also help us to acquire the administrative (legal and accounting) knowledge, which while is often neglected, is not particularly accessible, yet very expensive, and is essential for solidary economy projects becoming sustainable. These developments bring us further along the road of getting to know the limits and conditions of shopping communities within the system of food sovereignty.

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