

Identifying New Social Movements in Lithuania: The Case of Local Food

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Abstract. *This paper presents a New Social Movement approach to the studies of local food system development. It aims to identify whether local food initiatives coalesce into a movement in Lithuania, drawing on the characteristics derived from the New Social Movement theory. Discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews with representatives of local food organizations and initiatives are applied as main methods of the study. Results reveal that social processes around local food are characterized by much unified commitment of participants to a cause, moderately expressed opposition to the adversary of movement, and fainting networking among them. The evidence of all applied characteristics suggests that local food movement is present in Lithuania yet in the incoherent and insubstantial form.*

Keywords: *social movement, New Social Movement theory, local food initiatives, local food movement, Lithuania*

Raktažodžiai: *socialinis judėjimas, Naujųjų socialinių judėjimų teorija, vietos maisto iniciatyvos, vietos maisto judėjimas, Lietuva*

Introduction

New configuration of urban resident interests underlies the emergence of social movements (SMs), confronting established norms and practices as well as including new topics into political agenda and public discourse. One of the outcomes of increasing urbanization and gentrification is an increased demand for locally grown food and different modes of food provisioning (Jarosz, 2008), turning local food into a cause for the emergence of a new social movement (NSM). Globally local food movement

de-routinize the practices of food producers, move the issue of food quality into public discourse and facilitate the establishment of new links between urban consumers and the countryside (Zagata, 2012).

Notwithstanding the growing importance of local food movement at a global level, its development and current situation in Lithuania is unclear. All forms of widespread local food initiatives are found in Lithuania: farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), box schemes, farmers' shops, in-store farmers' markets, internet delivery systems, farm-to school or kindergarten, an online sale platform, etc. Moreover, a recent research has revealed that approximately 79 percent of Lithuanian urban residents are local food buyers, i.e. buying local food more than once a week (Eičaitė, Dabkienė, 2015). Such multiplicity and success of local food initiatives, oriented towards creating a localised food system, raises question, whether they are part of a broader local food movement in Lithuania? Or is it more of a life-style driven coalition?

This paper presents the first attempt to analyse the development of NSMs in Lithuania in general and the development of local food movement in particular. NSMs as a social phenomenon has been investigated in detail by authors like A. Melucci (1985; 1995), C. Offe (1985), B. Klandermans (1986), M. Diani (1992; 2002), N. A. Pichardo (1997), D. Della Porta and M. Diani (2006), S. Simsek (2004), M. Wiewiorka (2005). A. Starr (2010) was one of the first authors to analyse comprehensively whether and how local food is a social movement. A. Murtagh (2010), A. Giovanangeli (2013), and Ch. Levkoe (2014) analysed the development of local food institutions from the SMs perspective in Irish, French and Canadian cases respectively.

The aim of this paper is to identify whether the local food movement is present in Lithuania using NSM theory as an analytic framework. Methods such as discourse analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews with the leaders of local food organizations and initiatives are applied. It allows ensuring the identification of the leading actors of local food system in Lithuania, their motives for establishment as well as development of their activity. Applied methods are also valuable in gathering the most reliable and accurate research data.

A NSM: definition and characterising elements

There is no unanimous definition of the SM in the academic discourse. In the broadest sense, SMs are important instruments ensuring assertion and defence of individual interests in contemporary politics. They incorporate new topics on political and social arena and counter the established norms and elites. According to H. Johnston (2011, p. 1), SMs are to be perceived as “politics by another means – peoples' politics, not elite politics”. More specific and precise definition of this phenomenon largely depends on the SM theory being applied and on the political as well as social situation.

After 1980s via the increase of technological advances and global communications Western countries underwent a silent revolution, which encouraged the emer-

gence of new movements. Besides classical trade union, student and nationalist activism, a great variety of other movements such as feminism, environmentalism, human rights activism, religious fundamentalism, ethnic and sexual preference movements sprang up one after the other (Simsek, 2004). They differed from their older counterparts in many respects. New theories began to follow NSMs in order to explain them and define them, the NSM theory being one of the most outstanding of these efforts (Simsek, 2004).

NSM theory is based on a collective identity and focus on micro-social movement level. It states that SMs are reactions to the increasing control over society and individual. They evolve as a result of peoples' opposition to the state and its interference in their private life. NSMs are based on the achievements of earlier movements; therefore their demands differ from the demands of the latter. They do not stress material concerns, for example, material well-being, and do not fight for elimination of political exclusion (Žukaitė, 2016). NSMs are more of a cultural nature and oriented towards struggle for the meaning of life.

NSM scientists provide a plethora of different and sometimes even conflicting definitions of SMs. Definitions by A. Melucci (1985) and M. Diani (1992) are used most commonly since they appear to be rigorous and comprehensive. Both authors describe movements as networks of formal as well as informal relationships, based on a shared collective identity and conflictual culture. A more precise definition by M. Diani (1992, p. 13) states that "social movements are networks of informal interactions, between a plurality of individuals, groups or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity".

Most authors considering characteristics of NSMs have approached the very novelty of this phenomenon so far. According to M. Diani (1992), the bulk of scientists, instead of clearly defining the concept of the SM or its features, analyse a particular aspect of SMs such as causes of emergence of SMs, conditions for mobilization, differences between new and traditional SMs, etc. In the latter case, researches dedicated to NSMs, for example by C. Offe (1985), H. Johnston et al (1994), and S. Simsek (2004), aim to define and stress the elements distinguishing new movements from their traditional, or old, counterparts.

Some authors such as A. Melucci (1995), B. Klandermans (1986), N. A. Pichardo (1997), and K. Paulauskas (2004) attempted to identify characteristics typifying the phenomenon of NSM. Although named differently, these characteristics are quite similar in substance and can be generalized as follows:

- *Ideology and goals*: rather than focusing on economic redistribution, NSMs emphasize quality of life and life-style concerns, culture and self-expression. Identity claims are the most distinctive feature of NSMs. They seek to disseminate ideas and values they advocate rather than to cause any particular social or political change.
- *Scope*: NSMs are usually transnational and global.

- *Structure*: role of the leader is relevant no more. Open, horizontal and hierarchical network for activity organisation is characteristic instead.
- *Constituency*: NSM participants are not defined by class boundaries, but are marked by a common concern over social issues. It is an ideological, rather than ethnic, religious, or class-based community defined by common values.

It stays however unclear which phenomena are to be attributed to SMs and which are to be labelled as other concepts, for example, a coalition, a voluntary action campaign, or other, as they share some common characteristics. It was not the task of this research to take into account all features common to NSMs, but rather to opt for the list of characteristics separating NSMs from other cognate phenomena. For this reason, we adopted D. Della Porta's and M. Diani's (2006) approach suggesting that the NSM is distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors, engaged in collective action:

- are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents;
- are linked by dense informal networks;
- share a distinct collective identity.

By conflict, an oppositional relationship between NSM and other actors seeking control of the same stake is meant. Addressing collective problems or expressing support for some moral values or principles does not automatically correspond to social movement action; the latter requires the identification of targets for collective efforts, specifically articulated in social or political terms (Della Porta, Diani, 2006). Collective action is to be attributed to different social phenomena than a SM, if actors do not make demands which, if realized, would damage the interests of the other actors. On the other hand, according to M. Wiewiorka (2005) and opposing to Della Porta's and Diani's view, NSMs are involved in conflicts with impersonal, distant or less clearly defined adversaries. A relatively clear social adversary, identifiable with real leaders, was a case for traditional SMs, whereas NSMs have only inchoate representations of it.

Second, the SM is in place to the extent that both individual and organized actors, while keeping their autonomy and independence, engage in sustained exchanges of resources in pursuit of common goals (Della Porta, Diani, 2006). The coordination of initiatives and individual actors' action along with the development of strategies depend on regular negotiations between the individuals and the organizations involved in collective action. Negotiations are embodied in networking between individuals and/or organizations, i.e. discussing ideas, exchanging information, pooling resources, engaging together in acts of defiance and social criticism. What qualifies them as SM and differentiates from ordinary campaigns is the fact that protagonists of exchanges and collaborations recognize each other as members of the same collective projects (Diani, 2002). Therefore, not all networks between likeminded individuals or organizations necessarily reflect SM processes. While networking is acknowledged as an essential component of movement dynamics, it must be of a certain type and intensity in order for social phenomenon to qualify as movement. C. Saunders (2007)

insists that sharing information is too weak as a network link to form a real movement dynamic; there should be collaboration, or at least two-way sharing of information, to be part of a movement.

Finally, shared identity implies a sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause which transcends boundaries of any specific event and connects different episodes of collective action (Della Porta, Diani, 2006). Due to the absence of exclusive membership criteria NSMs are based on the participation of the individuals and/or organizations sharing commitment to a particular ethical framework. These individuals, or actors, may share little but a common reliance on a particular set of values and preferences (Della Porta, Diani, 2006) and a common purpose to disseminate particular ways of thinking about health, environment or economy.

These three characteristics will be further used as a referential framework for the empirical research.

Research methodology

The presence of local food movement in Lithuania was assessed throughout the year 2017 using different methods, customary in ethnography. Organizations and initiatives declaring their participation in the development of local food system in Lithuania were identified using discourse analysis method via an extensive and systematic search of the Internet (media, organizations' official sites, social networks, blogs). They were further observed during thematic meetings and events, annual exhibitions and fairs as well as at farmers' markets. After thorough analysis of organizations' and initiatives' founding motives, activities carried out, and evolution, six of them were selected as case studies for further research – associations *Viva Sol* and *Tymo's market*, *Institute of a Healthy Child* (lith. – *Sveiko vaiko institutas*), online sale platform *Farm directly to home* (lith. – *Kaimas į namus*), restaurant *Joy* (lith. – *Džiaugsmas*), and CSA *Different garden* (lith. – *Kitoks daržas*).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the leaders or heads of selected initiatives and organizations in August and September 2017. Interview questionnaire was formulated according to the three NSM characteristics. Part of the questions were adopted from authors like C. Saunders (2007) and M. Diani (2002) and supplemented by the authors of this paper. Questionnaire included the following aspects:

- *Networking*: presence, form, and frequency of organization's or initiative's collaboration or at least contact with other organizations or initiatives that are part of local food movement; cases of shared members with these organizations;
- *Shared identity*: self-perception by organization or initiative as part of Lithuanian local food movement or other social movements; aims pursued by it; identification of other organizations or initiatives as part of Lithuanian local food movement;

- *Conflictual interactions*: opposition by organization to any other global or local actor or phenomenon; actions taken to express oppositional relationship; collaboration with other organizations and actors on the ground of opposition.

Rationale for interview respondent selection. According to D. Rucht (2002), a SM consists of networks of groups and organizations prepared to mobilize for protest actions or promote (or resist) social change, and individuals who attend protest activities or contribute resources without necessarily being attached to movement groups or organizations.

It is not the aim of this paper to examine the individual level of the local food movement but rather the collective, or organizational, for two reasons. First, attitudes of consumers, or individuals, towards local food in Lithuania along with their buying patterns, which basically characterises consumers' role in the local food movement, have already been examined by O. Eičaitė and V. Dabkienė (2015). Second, organizations and collective initiatives belonging to the movement can be regarded as agenda setters for the rest of the movement (Saunders, 2007). They develop main ideas of the movement, attract the greatest degree of press coverage and influence public opinion.

As for the selection of a particular set of local food organisations and initiatives as respondents, it was based on the discourse analysis which revealed most publicly visible and leading actors directly connected to the development of a local food system in Lithuania. Selection of an indicated number of initiatives was also caused by the limited scope of the research.

Main difficulty in the implementation of the initial research methodology was unwillingness of one of the selected respondent – the Institute of a 'Healthy Child' – to be interviewed. On the one hand, it demonstrated one of the shortcomings of the interview method; on the other hand, it confirmed the advantage of application and combination of multiple research methods in the study. All research data on the discussed initiative was obtained solely from its external narrative analysis.

Evaluating the presence of local food movement in Lithuania: research findings

Networking. The establishment of *Viva Sol* association in 2006 marked an inception of local food initiatives in Lithuania characterized by high dependence on networking. *Viva Sol* launched weekly tasting meetings of producers and consumers, called 'Farm coming to town', as well as open-door weekends when 'town was coming to farm' to take part in the food production process. The association also initiated the establishment of first regular farmers' market in Vilnius (*Tymo's market*) in 2007 and first CSA ('Viva Sol box') in 2009. Soon after that urban consumers supported the rise of flash farmers' markets in the largest Lithuanian cities. In 2007 *Viva Sol* initiated cheese making classes which turned into one of the activities of cheese producers' organization founded by the members of association three years later.

It shows the unique association's role in Lithuanian local food system creation. *Viva Sol* was important in providing one of the main movement sites in which networks form, reform and consolidate themselves; it operated as a location for contacts and exchange of information and for organizing informal or semi-formal gatherings of like-minded people. The association acted as a committed activist who shared a vision of establishing symbolic community of producers and consumers united by the idea of local food promotion. It was central to movement formation and its message reached beyond the core for wider mobilization.

Viva Sol together with *Tymo's market* was also the main consultant to the establishment of online sale platform *Farm directly to home* in 2015. It became the first platform of a kind where all desiring local farmers and all consumer communities could register without intermediation, creating Lithuanian-wide pre-order sale system. Some of the farmers who belonged to the consulting associations took advantage of opportunity to sell their products directly to consumers, and hereby became part of the new initiative.

Currently, networking related to the development of local food system in Lithuania is further supported by direct links among many food initiatives and organizations sharing same members, as local producers simultaneously take part in different initiatives. Of the initiatives interviewed, only two claimed to share members with other local food organizations. The rest did not identify any shared members.

Restaurants with a menu based on local seasonal cuisine co-operate with local producers through farmers' markets. One of them, the *Joy* restaurant was opened in the beginning of 2016 with the purpose to supply food made exclusively from fresh micro-seasonal local products. The idea of such a restaurant came up after personal contacts based on trust in fair farming were established between restaurant chef and farmers selling their products at *Tymo's market*.

On the other hand, some early local food initiatives, for example young farmers' market, some cases of CSA, inspired by shared experiences through networking, did not complete the pre-developmental phase because of the lack of committed consumers. So, at the beginning processes related to the development of local food system did not mobilise enough support. The role of *Viva Sol* has faded since then so did the networking among local food organizations and initiatives.

Interviewed local food actors recognize the need to develop long-term links with other like-minded organizations only partly. Apart from the above mentioned contact between locally oriented restaurants and farmers from *Tymo's market*, and the terminated contact among *Viva Sol*, *Tymo's market* and online sale platform *Farm directly to home*, other local food organizations with mutual connection were indicated by *Viva Sol*, and they were international such as *AMAP* (fr. – *Associations pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne*) and Slow Food movement. One of the interviewed initiatives is not in contact with any other local food organization or initiative. The situation related to mutual connections reveals limitations of the very network of local food in Lithuania, which seems to include no more organizations than indicated in the

research methodology. The connections are usually personal and farmer-level rather than organization-level. No contacts with other local food organizations or initiatives are present unless they were earlier established through cooperation projects.

In terms of collaboration, the single ongoing case was indicated between the *Joy* restaurant and *Tymo's market*. Some of the initiatives referred to terminated collaborations. *Viva Sol* association, previously the most committed activist, claimed not to collaborate with any other organization. Such modest collaboration usually appears in the form of information and ideas sharing, i.e. forms that requires minimal efforts. Just one initiative shares information and ideas mutually. This is the only initiative which collaborates on a continuing and repetitive basis. One of the interviewed organizations used to organize or/and take part in joint events in the past, and another one still does so. Hence, acting individually and in certain isolation is more inherent among Lithuanian organizations and initiatives than networking.

Shared identity. Common purpose and shared commitment, characterising local food movement, is considered as a congruence of goals, declared by the interviewed local food initiatives and organizations. Subjective dimension of shared identity is measured through self and mutual recognition of initiatives as part of the local food movement.

Some of the interviewed initiatives are socially-oriented; they seek to develop rural community and revive rural areas. Others are oriented towards the improvement of farming practice and closer ties between farmers and surrounding natural environment. Organizations and initiatives, which carry out an intermediary role in the local food system, such as the online sale platform or the restaurant, seek to educate as well as inform consumers about the availability of local products and sustainable consumption in general. They can be said to make consumers closer to the local food itself. Despite different motives and focus on particular aspects of their activities, all initiatives claim to promote provision of safe, quality food and closer ties between producers and consumers, based on solidarity and mutual trust. The majority of initiatives also aim to support local producers.

Attempts to communalize relations between food producers and consumers are linked to a commitment to localism. In particular, a rejection of conventional rural-urban distinction, largely through a rejection of rigid divisions between food producers and food consumers, is one of the main features of the shared identity of global local food movement. Therefore, in Lithuanian case the congruence is evident not only among actors of local food system but also between locally and globally set objectives.

Although different actors are not unified on a political agenda and they pursue different strategies and approaches to change, there is a general sense of being on the same side of the social conflict over food. On the other hand, as in the previous case of networking, interviewed organisations and initiatives do not either actively collaborate in pursuit of common goals. There is just one example of collaboration between them, and it is the restaurant *Joy* collaborating with *Tymo's market*. Yet this collaboration is not mutual, at least on the cognitive level, as during the interview the

representative of *Tymo's market* claimed not to cooperate with any other local food organizations or initiatives on the basis of common objectives. Among other organizations, unrelated, at least directly, to the development of local food system in Lithuania, local municipality and public institution were mentioned.

Shared identity among organized initiatives is complemented by the collection of individual consumers' values and motives: social conscience and health concern are the most important drivers of purchasing local food among Lithuanian consumers (Eičaitė, Dabkienė, 2015). Social conscience refers to supporting local producers and economy, preserving rural areas and traditional production. As for the health concern, specific quality attributes such as nutritiousness, healthiness and naturalness were considered. Therefore, full compliance of the objectives of two main SM participant groups – organizations and individuals – is being observed, and point to the identity being shared on a larger scale.

As for the subjective dimension of shared identity, the position of interviewed initiatives is less coherent. Their self-recognition as part of the local food movement shows that though most of the initiatives admit existence of the movement, all of them also consider it weak, just emerging and manifested mainly through individual initiatives. One of the interviewed organizations denied presence of the local food movement in Lithuania substantiating denial with the lack of 'critical mass which could coalesce into a movement'.

Most actors' overall ethos is part of a broader regional and global network, such as the organic, localism or Slow Food movement. Parallel cognitive affiliation to more than one of these networks implies a dispersed nature of self-recognition among Lithuanian initiatives, on the one hand, providing them with more chances of recognizing each other as part of the same community yet without focusing on one leading identity related to local food. The latter is more the case as mutual recognition among Lithuanian local food organizations and initiatives is rather limited. *Viva Sol* and *Tymo's market* associations were usually identified as 'other' actors of the local food movement reaffirming their leading role in the movement development. Restaurant *Joy* also mentioned some other restaurants promoting cooking from local food products. Two of the interviewed initiatives did not indicate any other organization or initiative taking part in the local food movement. These were the same initiatives which declared local food movement in Lithuania as non-existent or almost non-existent.

Identity is further sustained and constantly reproduced through personal contacts between consumers and producers, food blogging, chefs' creative engagement, educational events, and media.

Conflict. Display of an opposition towards the 'other', or the adversary of the movement, and its values is much less clearly articulated than value systems of the selected initiatives.

Local food organizations and initiatives usually oppose to the traditional food industry and harmful food additives. Another most commonly recognized adversaries were named as global food system and traditional resale, in particular retail

chains. Two of the interviewed initiatives even indicated public authorities as their opponents who support the above mentioned phenomena instead of quality food initiatives. Therefore, development of Lithuanian local food system largely conforms to the pattern of conflict inherent in globally spread local food movement, where locally situated food initiatives are framed as counter-movements that challenge the control of corporations and other national and global institutions and resist the ecologically and socially destructive practices of the contemporary global agri-food system.

What Lithuanian initiatives lack compared to their foreign counterparts is a more proactive as well as pretentious conflict with its opponents. Some of the interviewed initiatives accentuated their activities to be much more ‘pro’ than ‘against’ something or somebody. To put it in the words of *Viva Sol* representative, they ‘are not fighters’; they simply ‘witness the alternative’ with their activities. This rather passive position is further supported by the fact that only one initiative takes real action to express its oppositional relationship through the rejection of production that was grown using chemicals. As in the case of shared identity, no collaboration among local food organizations or initiatives is evident on the ground of conflict. It means no organization or participation in rallies or companies against the opponent.

Passive and mainly indistinct opposition of local food actors gained a clearer direction with the foundation of the *Institute of a healthy child* in 2009. It started as a catalogue of harmful food additives and developed into public campaigns. The Institute not only defines what healthy food is, but also indicates the source of unhealthy, noxious food products, i.e. it indicates the adversary of the movement which is anonymous food industry. More recently the Institute launched an autonomous initiative by organizing regular group sales of local organic production. While bringing local producers and consumers closer through its value system, the *Institute* makes both groups engage in a personal and clearly defined conflict.

On the other hand, none of the interviewed initiatives mentioned the *Institute* as a substantial actor of the local food movement or as their collaboration partner which suggests its weak role in mobilising broader scope activities on the basis of oppositional relationship.

Conclusions

1. According to identified NSM characteristics, to be part of the local food movement, organizations and initiatives nominally defined as part of the movement are expected to have shared concerns about local food, to engage in conflictual interactions with opponents, and to be networked collaboratively. The evidence of all applied NSM features suggests that local food initiatives in Lithuania do not form a rooted movement at the moment of research. In terms of shared identity, local food organisations and initiatives demonstrate a much unified position on the goals of their activities. The main aspects that part them from being attributed to NSM in a strict theoretical sense is a wider and tighter networking along with a more strongly expressed opposition to the movement adversary or adversaries.
2. The local food movement is mostly based on the efforts of separate movement participants. With a constantly growing number of local food initiatives, it becomes extensive rather than intensive as movement actors remain too disconnected from one another. Interviewed actors, representing the most visible and leading organizations and initiatives, reluctantly identify each other as participants of the movement. They are still less inclined to keep a contact and collaborate with each other. Networking among them, strong at the beginning, is fainting lately.
3. Regarding the conflictual interactions, Lithuanian local food organizations and initiatives are clearly aware of whom they oppose to, yet barely take any actions to express this opposition. Even less attempts are made to collaborate on the basis of conflict. The conflict is not intense, rather passive, directed mainly to the promotion and development of organization's or initiative's activities.
4. Developing local food system in Lithuania should not be conceptually separated from the notion of SM. It is rather a stage of a developing movement, characterized by fragmentation and incoherence, than any other social phenomenon. The local food movement might be considered as emerging, or embryonic, with an inherent strong shared commitment to the same goals and ideals or as passing through the stage of declining characterized by the fainting tendencies in networking.

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Naujųjų socialinių judėjimų identifikavimas Lietuvoje: vietos maisto atvejais

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Anotacija

Straipsnyje pateikiamas vietos maisto sistemos raidos vertinimas iš naujųjų socialinių judėjimų teorinės prieigos. Remiantis šios prieigos išskiriamais socialinių judėjimų bruožais, siekiama nustatyti, ar vietos maisto iniciatyvos Lietuvoje priklauso socialiniam judėjimui. Pagrindiniai tyrimo metu taikomi metodai – diskurso analizė ir pusiau struktūruoti interviu su vietos maisto organizacijų ir iniciatyvų atstovais. Atliktas tyrimas parodė, kad socialiniai procesai, susiję su vietos maistu Lietuvoje, pasižymi labai vieninga dalyvių pozicija dėl bendro siekiamo tikslo, vidutiniškai išreikšta konfliktine sąveika su judėjimo oponentu ir silpnėjančia tarpusavio tinklaveika. Socialinio judėjimo bruožų vertinimas leidžia daryti išvadą, kad vietos maisto judėjimas Lietuvoje egzistuoja, tačiau kol kas nėra nei nuoseklus, nei įsitvirtinęs.

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