



Universität für Bodenkultur Wien



Title: Analysing Food Citizenship in Austria: How does Community Supported Agriculture encourage political education and action?

Proposal for a master thesis

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the consumer-member perspective on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes and their political networks in Austria. This is relevant for two reasons: Firstly, the creation of CSA networks and advocacy on a national and international level bears the danger of distantiation from the local level and the consumer-members through dominance of the view of engaged CSA farmers and political activists. Secondly, the consumer-members of Austrian CSAs have not been researched before and there is a national CSA network on it's way of consolidation in Austria. With the approach of participatory action research (PAR) I follow the goal to strengthen community economies that are build by Communities of Practice (CoP): CSA members, farmers, activists and scholars. I want to accompagny the consolidation of an Austrian CSA network by analysing it and facilitate to create space for political education and action through participatory and empowering methods like semi-structured interviews, collaborative reflection, appreciative inquiry and open space meetings. The results should be published online and remain accessible and transformable for the CoP through an online platform. This proposal still allows other researchers to join in; if this is not possible the workload has to be reduced. The thesis should be finished in February 2015.

Table of Content

Abstract.....	2
1 Personal Motivation.....	3
2 Problem Definition.....	3
2.1 A variety of network-organisations.....	3
2.2 The Austrian CSA network.....	4
2.3 The consumer perspective on their network.....	4
3 Objectives and Research Question.....	5
4 Theoretical Framework.....	5
5 Research Approach, Methods and Data.....	5
5.1 Research Approach.....	5
5.2 Methods.....	6
5.3 Data.....	7
6 Structure of the thesis.....	8
7 Time schedule.....	8
8 Ressources.....	8
9 Sources.....	9
10 Further Reading:.....	10

1 Personal Motivation

I have been engaged in different networking and facilitating activities concerning CSA and food sovereignty in the past four years in Austria and Europe on different levels. Due to my exchange semester from march to june in Wageningen I had a physical distance and also left most of the activities to others or undone. During my absence the Austrian Forum for Food Sovereignty took place in april 2014. There a group of active CSA-members and Food-sovereignty activists articulated the need for „inner awarenessraising“ (german: Interne Bewusstseinsbildung) within CSA-members in Austria. That means they wished to know more about the „not as active“ CSA -members in Austria. This was coinciding with Judith Hitchman's call from Urgenci to get substantial support for her advocacy activities towards CSA in the FAO (URGENCI 2014a). In the advocacy-working group on the second European meeting on CSA near Paris, which I attended on the 2. march 2014, she articulated the need to ground advocacy on higher levels on evidence from the local level. As I was searching for a topic for my master thesis, that contributes to „the interest“ of „my“ local CSA-network and to „the European CSA network“, Urgenci and other activists in „the European Food Sovereignty movement“, i chose to find out more about the interests of Austrian CSA-members who are „not as active“ consumer-members. I chose Austria, because there hasn't been any research yet on CSA consumer-members and because I live there, which makes access easier and needs less ressources. The fact that I have been involved in the Austrian and European CSA-network as an activist and coordinator does frame my view on the topic and is certainly an issue I have to reflect throughout the research process.

2 Problem Definition

2.1 A variety of network-organisations

Facilitated by the umbrella organisation URGENCI an international Community-supported Agriculture (CSA) network is being woven in Europe. CSA farmers, consumers and activists are the actors, who work together on a local, regional, national and even on a global level. Members of Urgenci are the „solidarity based partnerships between consumers and producers“ on a local level or their regional or even national network-organisations (URGENCI 2013). Since the first European Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2011 Urgenci has the mandate to adress the issue of food provisioning as part of the Food Sovereignty movement.

Schlicht et al. 2012 has provided a broad overview of the characteristics of European CSA initiatives and their network-organisations in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany. CSA initiatives, that are not organised within these CSA-networks were not included in the research and most interviewees were active members of those network-organisations. So the research is lacking the view of consumer-members. Schlicht at al. Found that the organisational form of CSA-networks on national and regional levels varies from country to country as they also differ on a local scale. What they have in common, is, that they are barely linked to the state or other local authorities by law or subsidies. It seems that the lack of faith towards state organisation in the food system has provoked those countermovements. But there's also different development in those countries: In France, the french Suisse and the Brussels-region the CSA network-organisations are collaborating more with municipalities, regional and national authorities than in Germany, german Suisse and

Flanders and Vallonia. Besides this „France (is) having by far the most CSA initiatives and being the most advanced both in organisational network structures as well as interference with politics“ (Schlicht et al. 2012) The movement in France seems to be more accepted in the middle of the society than in the other three countries. It would be worth investigating to find out more about the reasons for this diverse characters of CSA networks. As this perspective is missing, the key to get further insights about the motivation of those networks might come from the perspective of the consumer-members.

2.2 The Austrian CSA network

Last years discussions about Food-Labeling-Skandals in Europe also raised awareness in Austrias public media and confronted it's viewers with the vision of a „democratic and decentralized Food System“ to overcome the centralized food processing and provisioning system (Arway, 2013). Civic food initiatives like buying groups, CSA have growing numbers in Europe and as well in Austria, as the number of Food Cooperatives and CSA-Initiatives has more than tripled since 2011. This corresponds with the observations of Schermer that the corporate food regime in Austria provokes more and more consumer engagment (Schermer 2012). The Austrian Food Sovereignty Movement sees CSA-initiatives as one possible step towards a democratization and decentralization of the agri-food system (Nyeleni Austria 2014).

Recently Nagy (2013) analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of CSA in Austria by interviewing experts from within and also outside the austrian CSA movement. On one side the CSA concept is seen as a powerful opportunity for small-scale farmers to have a guaranteed income and to create living opportunities in rural areas and contribute to social cohesion. On the other side disadvantages for consumers have been identified like the missing accessability for people with lower income and a high degree of dependence from the farm. The creation of a network-organisation and public relation work is seen necessary to make the CSA concept spread more towards people, that are not yet informed or aware of ethical consumerism and nutrition (ibd.). These answers seem rather speculative and the interviewed experts seem to be very active actors that have a ideologically framed view on CSA and some visionary ideas how the story should go on. This raises questions on how the consumers perceive themselves and these more active CSA members and their perception of CSA.

2.3 The consumer perspective on their network

The research on another example of a civic food network, the Italian network of Solidarity Purchasing Groups GAS (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale), has shown, that there are different types of consumers. Consumers that are mainly interested in fresh, local produced food and others that mainly engage themselves politically within the GAS and beyond on agriculture and food related issues (Amico 2014). Graziano 2012 shows that GAS are able to create new forms of political participation and „go beyond conventional forms of political consumerism“ (Graziano 2012).

Unless there's certain evidence on the perspective of consumer-members in a CSA model of food provisioning from Australia (Lea 2006); US (Lang, 2008 and 2010, Pole et al. 2012), Canada (Sumner et al. 2010), UK (Cox et al. 2014) and France (Bougherara et al. 2009) there's hardly any evidence yet if and how the membership in a CSA encourages network engagment or even political action.

Do consumers in or through a CSA become politically educated and aware citizens? Do they feel

and act as part of a bigger (regional, national, european or global) political movement? Or is it only the consumers that are already aware of their citizen power that become members of a CSA?

To understand the Austrian CSA-movement from the consumer-perspective and what kind of role a network-organisation for CSA in Austria can have in the future, further investigation is necessary.

3 Objectives and Research Question

The objective of the research is to raise awareness and gain evidence about the political principles and goals of consumer-members within the Austrian CSA-network. What kind of strategies do they follow and how do they perceive and position themselves towards other actors within the CSA network.

The results should contribute to the theoretical understanding of the correlations between CSA membership, civic engagement and political education. This knowledge and its critical reflection can be of relevance for the development of an Austrian CSA network-organisation and to strengthen the Austrian Food Sovereignty Movement for further democratization of the Agri-Food System.

MRQ: How does CSA membership create space for political education and action?

SRQ1: What is members motivation to engage in CSA and what are their political principles and goals?

SRQ2: How can CSA members shape their CSA and the wider network according to their political principles and goals?

SRQ3: How can CSA members shape the CSA movement according to their political principles and goals?

4 Theoretical Framework

Community supported Agriculture (CSA) is a common example for Civic Food Networks (CFN) (Renting et al. 2012). CFNs are seen as „an expression of process of change in the agri-food governance mechanisms, showing the increasing importance of the role of civil society compared to market forces and the (national) state“ (Renting et al. 2012). CSA has been repeatedly described as an empowering model of interaction between consumers and producers, where people can learn to act among their own principles and against the values of the globalized food system (Cox et al. 2008). The success of CSA – Initiatives and struggles towards Food Sovereignty on a local scale are on the one side dependent on a participative approach on the local level and on the other side on networking on a national and international level (Allen 2004).

As Tregear (2011) makes clear, the often taken for granted „desirable outcomes“ of a CSA do not depend on their unconventional structure or governance mechanisms, but on the „motivations of the key protagonists, how they interact and develop modes of working“.

Taking into account what has been stated above, one can look at CSA as a learning environment that creates space for political education and action in the food and agriculture system. This view sees the members (consumers and producers) as learners within this process towards food democracy (Hassanein 2003). With the following approach we might be able to analyze and strengthen the functionality of such spaces to be successful.

5 Research Approach, Methods, Data and Results

I want to start this section with a quote from GIBSON-GRAHAM (2008): “As university-based scholars, we are well positioned to mobilize the resources to support the co-creation of knowledges, create the networks necessary to spread these knowledges, work with activists and academics of the future, and foster an environment where new facts can survive.”

5.1 Research Approach

I want to follow here and develop further “the global project” to enact and support community economies, that has been theorized by Gibson-Graham (2006 and 2008). Therefore I take over their definition that “Community economies are simply economic spaces or networks in which relations of interdependence are democratically negotiated by participating individuals and organizations;” (GIBSON-GRAHAM 2008). It's not intended to look at CSA just as an alternative that saves us from the shortcomings of the conventional system, but to treat the subject as “new kinds of academic subjects” (ibd.) with an “experimental attitude towards the objects of our research and ... orient(ing) toward a collective research practice involving non-academic as well as academic subjects” (ibd.).

To achieve this, Participative Action Research (PAR) approach is selected, to be able to generate knowledge and facilitate change at the same time (HELMFRID et al. 2008). This helps to create a learning opportunity through facilitating “learning processes that create meaning, enabling self-determination, increase competence, and have impact, and are thus empowering to the participants” (HELMFRID et al. 2008, 110). Therefore it is important to integrate not only the farmers as actors of change, but also community members and supporters, to build the network with all the relevant stakeholders and give them the opportunity to engage.

The researchers role in this setting will be more of a facilitator or a coach than a teacher with the challenge, to be as well expected to create a “caring climate” and offer possibilities for taking action, because the feeling of “we did it and it worked” empowers individuals to seek more knowledge and engage in more action for change (HELMFRID et al. 2008, 111). This expects from the researcher to take part in the process and facilitate it at the same time. Therefore it is necessary to follow some guidelines that give a general framework to this research (HELMFRID et al. 2008, 114f):

1. the content is defined by the local actors, the facilitator stays ‘open to changes’ (ibd.).
2. the methods, process and borders are suggested and decided by the entire group – the facilitator ensures a ‘clear process and guards the borders’ (ibd.).
3. the facilitator takes an appreciative observing role ‘being as present and honest as possible’ (ibd.) and stays critical by using always a view from outside.
4. it’s important to the whole process, that the facilitator never takes a leading role. Leading roles and/or roles that deserve continuity must be taken over by locals.
5. ‘Approaching people with care and respect as subjects of their own life and work’ (ibd.)
6. ‘Focusing on positive core of the past, present and future’ (ibd)
7. ‘Uncovering until reaching the essence of issues’ (ibd.)
8. ‘Trusting human processes as being constructive’ (ibd.)

5.2 Methods

The main roles in the research are defined a priori, but can change with respect to the goals of the project. The roles are I) Core Group, II) Communities of Practice (CoP) and III) Facilitators. For better online communication, and also to reach the goal of implementing an online platform tool will be tested.

- I. Communities of Practice (CoP): are CSA members, farmers, political activists and scholars who can come together within their group of interest, share their experiences and concentrate on their goals.
- II. Core Group: is the coordinating committee for the CSA networking process consisting of at least one representative of each CoP: Community members, farmers, scholars, activists, who exchange and discuss their views and propose strategies.
- III. Facilitators: Scholars have this special role to get insight into the CSA networking process and are obliged to write reports and keep an reflexive overview on the whole process.

The research approach based on participatory action research leads to a combination of participative and empowering methods like i) semi-structured interviews ii) group/ collaborative reflection iii) appreciative inquiry and iv) open space meetings (see also HELMFRID et al. 2008, 115ff).

- i. The semi-structured interviews are conducted with stakeholders from the Core Group to identify their view on the CSA network.
- ii. Group/collaborative reflection – between phases the several group meetings (I, II, III) follow no specific methodology but all participants work through any problems accounted in the activities through dialogue and collaborative reflection towards commonly identified goals.
- iii. The appreciative inquiry - is used as a group facilitation method to focus on positive aspects and possibilities for innovation with four phases: discovery, dreams, design and destiny. Used by each of the four groups as a starter.
- iv. Open Space Meetings – is a meeting form that “combines the freedom and creativity of coffee breaks with the overview and structure of traditional conferences”. The participants formulate their topics and together they create the spatial and time structure of the meeting, form working groups and give oral and written reports to all participants at the end of each session.

5.3 Data and Results

5.3.1 Preliminary research

The research includes updating a database of domestic CSAs, identifying and selecting those for case studies (selection criteria based on relevance to the research theme, open and cooperative attitude towards the research, as well as diversity within the case studies) and establishing contacts with them. Some of the useful literatures to be studied include: CSA's

websites and other publications, academic publications, media reports (newspapers, magazines, and online sources), official documents of local authorities/municipalities etc.

Once potential case studies are identified, the results of the preliminary research are discussed with the Core Group to share the knowledge and make the decision transparent to the CSA-network stakeholders and to obtain appropriate feedback on the current research status.

5.3.2 Fieldwork preparation

Based on the preliminary research as well as the feedback received from the regional partners the field methods (an interview guideline, a workshop design and a field visit schedule) are developed. Meanwhile, the participating CSAs and their local stakeholders, such as CSA owners/workers, consumers/supporters, local authorities are invited to participate in appropriate parts of the fieldwork. A significant part of the fieldwork will be based on PAR where researchers will collaborate in the network building process.

5.3.3 Data gathering and analysis

- 1) Fieldwork
 - Fieldwork consists of 3 main parts:
 - A. Deep interview with selected stakeholders (CoP) (transcript)
 - B. Participatory action research, Field (site) visit and observation (fieldnotes)
 - C. and multi-stakeholders workshop (Protocoll)

5.3.4 Application of the theoretical framework / Further analysis

According to the theoretical framework discussed in the previous section, the fieldwork results are analysed and discussed.

The results are compared to other networks, that has been already studied in other European countries: identifying similar experiences, distinct differences, room for future cooperation and mutual learning etc.

5.3.5 Discussion and reporting

Sharing the research results on a public conference and online.

6 Ressources

The research as it is described now could still be divided onto several researchers, who write different parts of it as their own thesis; The workload has to be adapted and reduced if only one researcher works on this topic. As there will be a meeting of other interested students in September, who want to research on CSA and Food Sovereignty, I want to wait until this meeting.

The basic material ressources for one researcher (me) are:

- facilitation tools
- laptop
- camera
- voice recorder or video
- QDA-software

7 Time schedule

March and June 014:	Literature based work on proposal: researchquestion and -approach
July/August 014:	No work on thesis (ITCOA trainingcourse in Uganda)
September/October 014:	Finalizing method of research and Ressources
November/Dezember 014:	Field work
January 015:	Analysis and Discussion of Results
February 015:	Finish and Presentation

8 Structure of the thesis

- 1 Introduction + Problem Definition
- 2 Literature Review
 - 2.1 Civic Food Systems
 - 2.2 CSA and Food Sovereignty
 - 2.3 CSA in Europe
 - 2.3.1 network-organisations
 - 2.4 CSA in Austria
 - 2.4.1 network-organisation
- 3 Definitions and Approaches
 - 3.1 Community Economies
 - 3.2 Political Education and Action
 - 3.3 Participatory Action Research
 - 3.4 Community of Practice
- 4 Method and Data
 - 4.1 Interview transcripts
 - 4.2 Workshops protocols
 - 4.3 Participatory Observation - fieldnotes
- 5 Results of Fieldwork
- 6 Analysis of Results
 - 6.1 comparing to Literature Review
 - 6.2 comparing to experiences from other networks
- 7 Discussion
- 8 Conclusions and political and scientific impact

9 Used Literature

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