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Revealing the hidden geography of alternative food networks: The travelling concept of farmers' markets

Lenka Fendrychová and Petr Jehlička

Abstract: Alternative food networks in post-socialist settings are often studied using concepts and analytical tools developed in the Anglo-American context. As a result, the findings tend to replicate and confirm rather than challenge and extend the extant knowledge and theorisations. Based on a recent study of farmers' markets in the Czech capital Prague, the paper claims that viewing these 'from the periphery' produces novel insights complementing those garnered in researching them in the West. In the context of earlier alternative food initiatives, the boom of farmers' markets, which Prague experienced in the early 2010s, was unparalleled. In less than 24 months, 41 farmers' markets were established in and around the city. Focusing methodologically on the discourse of the organisers of farmers' markets and theoretically on the complex hidden geography underlying the farmers' markets' boom, we are able to unpick the intricacy and paradoxical nature inherent in this development. While acknowledging the farmers' markets embeddedness in the local context, we argue that a more comprehensive understanding of farmers' markets requires engagement with a flow of ideas and know-how transcending the locality. The ensuing type of farmers' markets is a result of interactions among different travelling concepts as well as of their encounter with the specificities of the local post-socialist context. We argue that the fact that these concepts were not necessarily concordant with each other and also insufficiently adapted to the local context had a profound effect on Prague farmers' markets' boom.

Key words: Alternative food networks, farmers' markets, food relocalization, post-socialism, situated knowledge, travelling concepts

1. Introduction: researching farmers' markets in the global semiperiphery

The recent proliferation of farmers' markets (FMs) outside the 'core area' of North America and Western Europe in a diversity of social contexts in both the Global South and European East raises some important geographical questions which have, so far, been largely overlooked in alternative food scholarship: How do 'food innovations' like FMs 'travel' and which factors – both within and transcending the FMs' locality – are at play? How do these insights extend the existing knowledge on FMs and alternative food networks (AFNs) more generally, and in particular, with respect to the cosmopolitan relevance of their conceptualisations? This is an important question as the dominant academic discourse of AFNs and FMs have so far been mainly produced in the North American and West European contexts.

The emerging research of FMs in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) tends to focus on consumers' motivations for shopping at FMs and their relations with vendors (Balcarová et al., 2016; Rajkovic et al., 2017; Spilková, 2008; Zikienė and Pilelienė, 2016) and the question of FMs' diffusion from the Western centre has so far largely escaped researchers' attention. The existing literature seems to assume that the markets in the 'global semi-periphery', such as CEE, occur in response to similar concerns and aim to deliver similar results to those in Western contexts. They are 'read from the West' or, as Wendy Larner put it, 'here' continues to be studied by using the analytical tools of 'there' (Larner, 2011, p. 89). Drawing on an in-depth investigation into the boom of FMs in the Czech Republic's capital Prague in the early 2010s, in this paper, we take issue with this stance and propose an approach aimed at producing 'situated knowledge' (Larner, 2011) on FMs.

As alternative food researchers we were captivated by the speed with which a large number of FMs sprang up around Prague.¹ The May 2009 issue of the first Czech cooking magazine for foodies *Apetit* published an article titled ‘Is Prague going to get its markets?’ The article was scathing about the limited opportunities for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables in the Czech capital. At the time of publishing the article, there was not a single farmers’ market in Prague. The main places to shop for food were supermarkets and other large stores. A bit more than one year later, in the autumn of 2010, twenty-four FMs were regularly held in Prague. At the end of summer 2011, forty-one FMs were serving their customers in Prague.

The sudden surge in the number of Prague FMs deviated profoundly from the hitherto experience of similar food initiatives in Czechia, which had been marked by their niche and small-scale character, limited reach and incremental development (Zagata, 2012; Fendrychová, 2015). To understand this intriguing phenomenon, we explored its sources, main actors, and their motives and aims. Focusing on the key group actor behind the emergence of FMs in Prague – food activists turned market promoters and organisers – the paper identifies and then disentangles what is termed the ‘organisers’ discourse’. Important inconsistencies within this discourse and its dissonance with the dominant academic understanding of FMs point to the need for a ‘geographical revision’ of FMs’ conceptualisation, namely extending the research of FMs beyond the Western core and focusing on the processes by which ideas and know-how travel.

In the field of FMs research, our approach is innovative in three ways. First of all, in what we study – the boom of FMs in the locality (compared to case studies of one or two FMs), secondly, in where we study it – in the post-socialist CEE semi-periphery (compared to the core area of North America and Western Europe) and thirdly, given the status of the locality, also in how we study it – producing situated knowledge (compared to applying existing conceptualisations from ‘the core’) and utilizing the organisers discourse (compared to the consumers’ survey). The paper begins with a brief overview of the conceptualisations of AFNs and FMs and proceeds to the identification of the ‘geographical knowledge gap’ in this scholarship. After outlining our research methodology, we turn to the empirical material by exploring the timing and context of the Prague FMs boom. We then analyse the organisers’ discourse and scrutinize it through the lens of academic debates on postsocialism and on travelling concepts to produce situated knowledge of Prague FMs’ boom which we confront with the existing academic discourse of AFNs and FMs. The paper concludes by the explanation of how adopting our approach would advance the AFNs scholarship.

2. Theorising AFNs: ambiguous conceptualisations and geographical knowledge gap

FMs are an increasingly prominent, both practically and academically,² manifestation of a diverse set of food initiatives which are commonly referred to as AFNs. The term denotes a diverse set of initiatives and practices dealing with food production, distribution and consumption and includes community supported agriculture (CSA), community gardens, FMs, farm shops and initiatives in fair trade, organic, regional or artisan produce. Over the last twenty years, these developments on the margins of the agrifood system have attracted growing numbers of scholars resulting in a diversity of often conflicting and contradictory conceptualisations of AFNs. While this scholarship is often concerned, explicitly or implicitly, with geography in terms of food re-localisation, to our knowledge it rarely adopts the approach to studying the AFNs and FMs that Lerner (2011) refers to as situated knowledge. In the following paragraphs we briefly reflect on the ambiguity of AFNs conceptualisations and then engage with this ‘geographical knowledge gap’ of AFNs.

2.1. The ambiguity of AFNs’ academic discourse

Among AFNs scholars, there seems to be a broad consensus about understanding AFNs as a response to the detrimental effects of the agrifood sector’s industrialisation and economic globalisation such as the growing corporate power of agribusinesses and supermarkets, price squeeze on farmers’ income, food scares and environmental degradation (Maye and Kirwan, 2010; Renting and Marsden, 2003).

However, when it comes to AFNs' ability to ameliorate or mitigate these issues, there is much less unanimity.

The considered virtues of agrifood system's relocalisation could be divided according to three components of sustainability. Among environmental benefits figure reduced carbon footprint (Schönhart et al., 2008), agricultural methods more sensitive to the environment as well as better animal welfare standards following the tendency to organic production methods (Gomiero et al., 2011; Reisch et al., 2013). Economic benefits are seen in improvements of small-scale producers' economic situation (Feagan and Henderson, 2009; Guthman et al., 2006) and retention of money in the local economy (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Tavernier and Tolomeo, 2004). Strengthened social cohesion and improvements in food access belong among the social benefits connected with AFNs (Kirwan, 2006). Considered are also indirect benefits related to consumers' learning and adoption of sustainable practices (Cox et al., 2008; Sundkvist et al., 2005).

On the other hand, critics have argued that AFNs are socially exclusive (Goodman, 2009; Guthman, 2003), defensive in nature (Winter, 2003), subject of conventionalisation (Guthman, 2004; Jaffee and Howard, 2010), reproducing neo-liberal values (Alkon and Mares, 2012; Eaton, 2008) and not reflexive of the wider context of the agrifood system (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Freidberg, 2004; Levkoe, 2011). Sonnino and Griggs-Trevarthen (2013) highlight AFNs' economic precarity and dependence on small groups of dedicated activists and external grant funding even in the relatively favourable context of economic affluence and history of social activism of the UK. Moreover, AFNs' socio-economic impacts can be ambivalent. For example, while promoting economic re-localisation that might be beneficial to smallscale producers, they might have exclusionary and elitist effects at the consumption end of the network (Hinrichs, 2000). Equally diverse and contentious was discussion on the extent to which AFNs constitute an alternative to the mainstream food system in economic, social and environmental terms.³

More recently, a consensus seems to have emerged according to which AFNs represent a complementary rather than a radical alternative or an adjunct to the mainstream agrifood system (Hudson, 2009; Sonnino and Griggs-Trevarthen, 2013). Conflicting conclusions regarding AFNs' impacts and alternativeness exposed the need to identify the sources of this variety. The categorisation of AFNs, formulated by Watts and his colleagues (Watts et al., 2005) has been influential in this realm. The authors based their categorisation on AFN's susceptibility to co-optation by conventional agrifood system. They identified (a) weaker AFNs which focus on product quality or re-localisation and therefore provide little guarantee for people's livelihood autonomy or against exploitative labour relations (see also Pratt, 2007) and (b) stronger AFNs which emphasise the revalorised, localised short food supply networks based on trust and face-to-face relations – in other words social 'embeddedness' (see also Hinrichs, 2000).

However, the categorisation should not imply new exclusive binary categories but rather an idea of continuum. The concerns regarding food quality and the growing interest in the broader impacts of food production and consumption combine in specific AFNs in distinctive ways and contribute to their complexity and diversity (Maye and Kirwan, 2010). Therefore, AFNs have been increasingly conceptualised as complex, diverse and hybrid entities in a mutually constitutive relationship with conventional agrifood systems (Maye and Kirwan, 2010).

How do these considerations translate into conceptualisations of FMs? In one perspective, they could be viewed as representing an example of a revalorised, localised short food supply chain based on trust, regard and face-to-face contacts, and hence as a stronger variant of AFNs (Watts et al., 2005). However, most authors have interpreted FMs as a 'weaker' type of AFN. Arguments for this interpretation have been threefold: first, studies in different contexts have repeatedly shown that consumers primarily perceive FMs as a source of fresh and high-quality food rather than as an opportunity to contribute to economic re-localisation and to family farmers' well-being (Lockeretz, 1986 cited in Hinrichs, 2000; Carey et al., 2011; Feagan and Morris, 2009; Spilková et al., 2013; Zepeda, 2009). Second, FMs are far from free of 'marketness' (the importance of price in the

transaction) and economically motivated ‘instrumentalism’ (Hinrichs, 2000). Third, FMs are primarily embedded within white urban middle-class communities which tend to express signs of social exclusivity and insufficient reflexivity of other actors’ needs and wants (Alkon, 2013; Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Guthman, 2008). Moreover, the stated aims of FMs can be de facto in conflict as is the case with socially just access to healthy food and support for family farmers which often translates into the higher prices of FMs’ produce compared to conventional retail (Guthman et al., 2006). Therefore, FMs have also been conceptualised as ambivalent and hybrid ‘third places’ (Gagné, 2011; Tiemann, 2008) representing both the opposition against conventional shopping venues and the celebration of entrepreneurialism, market principles and nostalgia for conservative values at the same time (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000).

To sum up, the prevailing conceptualisation of AFNs and FMs stresses complexity, hybridity and a mutually constitutive relationship with the conventional agrifood system. It has been informed by the diversity of AFNs initiatives, contradictory conclusions regarding their benefits and problems and variety of theoretical approaches engaged in AFNs research. We suggest that there is another type of variety which has not been acknowledged in an appropriate manner so far, namely the variety of geographies underlying the respective AFNs. In the following section we explore the geographical knowledge gap in AFNs scholarship.

2.2. Identifying the geography knowledge gap in AFNs scholarship

The above introduced relational conceptualisation of AFNs has an important geographical facet. It is the specific local variety of the conventional agrifood system which is constitutive of the respective initiative or practice. While the importance of local context has been acknowledged in AFNs scholarship (Allen et al., 2003; Holloway et al., 2007), we argue that it has not been fully explored due to the geographical bias in the production of AFNs’ academic discourse. Existing concepts and discussions are mainly based on the research conducted in North America and Western Europe (see Fig. 1a) i.e. in a rather homogeneous context (Maye and Kirwan, 2010). And this trend is even more pronounced in the case of FMs’ research (Fig. 1b). What does it mean for the relevance of academic knowledge on AFNs and FMs in other contexts?

In the last twenty years, FMs have been mushrooming in the Global North with researchers paying relatively little attention to the processes behind this proliferation. Nonetheless, the underlying assumption seems to be that FMs have spread in an uncomplicated process of diffusion without significantly altering their rationale. In other words, the literature suggests that FMs in ‘new’ places not only look the same but also have the same meaning. Indeed, referring specifically to Prague FMs, Lukáš Zagata concluded that ‘the development of the initiative followed patterns that were described in Western Europe about a decade ago’ and that ‘the Czech case does not produce many novel empirical findings’ (Zagata, 2012, p. 361).

We find this conclusion contentious. Patricia Allen, with colleagues, pointed out in 2003 that even though they look the same, AFNs in different contexts might not be the same. Based on a study of alternative food initiatives in California they concluded that:

‘Observers may be misled by the fact that different localities are manifesting commonalities of form (FMs, CSAs, short-supply chains, regional food sheds, and so forth) and may overlook important differences of circumstance. These differences are likely to affect the likelihood that these initiatives, however well intentioned, will be able to achieve their goals of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice locally or at a larger scale’ (Allen et al., 2003, p. 73).

Moreover, the concept of situated knowledge (Larner, 2011) warns against the application of theories and analytical categories produced in different empirical contexts because, ‘concepts and categories come to take particular shapes in particular places’ (Larner, 2011, p. 97). Paraphrasing Larner (2011, p. 91), situated knowledge assumes that the objects and subjects of AFNs scholarship, in this case,

‘have specific constitutions, emerge from multiple origins and travel in disjunctive circuits’. Therefore, Larner suggests building locally informed concepts and then confronting them with the existing academic knowledge to increase its cosmopolitan relevance (Robinson, 2003). We have been inspired by Larner’s work in designing our qualitative study of the boom of FMs in Prague, which we describe in larger detail in the next section.

3. Material and methods

Above, we explained that building situated knowledge of AFN in other than a western context has not been a common approach within AFNs scholarship. The same applies to studying the phenomenon of FMs’ boom at the citywide level instead of a single market. In the case of research methodology, the distinctive aspect was the focus on discourse of FMs’ organisers, an approach rarely adopted in studies of AFNs so far. However, this is curious, as organisers generate discourse as well as practice of FMs which then influences the media, public institutions, and consumers. To build the situated knowledge of Prague’s FMs’ boom, we needed to understand what happened, when, and how, but also why exactly this happened; why then, and why this way? Therefore, we used diverse methods of data collection and analysis including observations at FMs, interviews with organisers, surveys among representatives of municipalities, and analysis of media reporting and official documents analysis.⁴ In the following paragraphs we describe the process of data collection and analysis in greater detail.

Initially, the typology of FMs was constructed based on publicly available internet sources and initial visits to the markets. Consequently, thirty-three structured observations⁵ were conducted at the FMs during the spring and summer of 2011. The typology of FMs based on the type of organiser, type of space, location within the city, periodicity and the size of the market was created. Subsequently, respondents for interviews were selected so that all identified types of FMs were represented. Twenty interviews with organisers of 27 FMs⁶ were conducted from May to August 2011. The semi-structured interviews with FMs’ organisers constituted the core of the research methodology. Questions focused on organisers’ identities, motivations, aims and values regarding FMs, their evaluation of the broader context as well as their views on the involvement of farmers, consumers, local governments and other actors.

Following the interviews with organisers, important additional data sources concerning local governments, NGOs and state institutions were identified using the method of theoretical sampling. The data obtained by diverse research methods were analysed using content analysis. The data gathered from interviews and supplemental documents were subjected to discourse analysis. Both types of discourse analysis were used in the research: exploring how meaning comes into existence and revealing the distribution of power. In the next two sections, we first provide readers with the general description of the FMs’ boom in Prague and secondly, we represent the results of the organisers’ discourse analysis, which both informed the situated conceptualisation of Prague FMs’ boom. Finally, we confront our conceptualisation with those existing in AFNs literature and discuss their relevance.

4. The boom of Prague farmers’ markets in 2010–2011

In the autumn of 2009, food journalist Hana Michopulu, together with her neighbour, established a FM in the leafy Prague suburb of Klánovice as the first FM in the Czech capital. It was a spontaneous action of a food enthusiast who was frustrated by the slow development of Czech alternative foodscapes. The Klánovice FM failed to register with both the mainstream media and wider public. However, two NGOs – the civic association Archetyp and the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation (CEPF) – did take notice as they had been considering the idea of FMs for some time. Their approach to FMs was far more methodical and planned than that of the Klánovice pioneers. Archetyp and CEPF took several strategic steps to support FMs; they supplied Prague City Hall with a

study of feasible locations for FMs and gained tentative backing for organising FMs from several local authorities and from the Ministry of Agriculture. They also held a seminar for prospective FMs organisers, and worked with sympathetic journalists to promote the FMs initiative in the media. Their efforts bore fruit as a newspaper article informing readers about forthcoming FMs in Prague (published in February 2010) led to the launch of a Facebook group named 'We want farmers' markets in Prague', in which 3000 people joined within a week. After all this preparatory work, Archetyp launched its own FMs in several sites in Prague in May 2010.

However, yet another event ignited Prague's boom of FMs in the spring of 2010. It had occurred on the 20th March, when the FM 'Kulaták'⁷ took place for the first time. In this case, foodies and local politicians joined their forces. Its launch was a huge success and this market soon became Prague's flagship FM. According to the organisers, 15,000 people visited the market on the opening day (Organiser 1), and in the coming weeks, information about FMs started to appear in the media more widely. By autumn 2010, 24 markets were taking place in and around Prague on a regular basis. A year later, 41 farmers' markets were held in and around Prague (see Fig. 2).

While demand for an alternative food initiative was steadily building up in the circles of urban foodies in the late 2000s, the 2010–2011 boom of Prague FMs occurred due to a unique political opportunity – the autumn 2010 local elections. Political support at the local level was the key factor of such a rapid development of FMs in Prague. After the great success of the pilot 'Kulaták' FM, local governments in the majority of Prague districts⁸ actively sought to 'have their own farmers' market'. The means of support ranged from the local government's initiative to launch and run their own markets to material and financial assistance offered to other organisers of FMs. The unprecedented level of backing from the local governments at the time was undeniably related to the municipal elections which were taking place in autumn 2010. As a prominent Prague based food blogger put it:

'It looks like the Prague 6th district is the first one to take the support of FMs seriously. The pilot market is being held this Saturday at Vítězné náměstí square. The technical facilities will be tested as well as residents' interest and non-binding collection of political points will take place' (Kuciel, 2010).

The utilitarian interpretation of political support of FMs has been further endorsed by its significant decline in the post-elections period as reported by several organisers (Organiser 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). The unprecedented level of political support for FMs related to the 2010 Prague local elections and the enthusiastic response from consumers had an important impact on the dynamics of FMs development. The 'pioneers' – a bunch of foodies and food activists – were soon joined by other types of organisers including local authorities (often hiring a private company to organise the market) and even shopping malls, who realised the business potential of FMs (Organiser 9, 12). Therefore, in the case of Prague FMs, conventionalisation closely followed their formation.

As a consequence, organisers of Prague FMs represented a strongly heterogeneous group from the very beginning. Almost half of the markets (20 out of 41 FMs) was organised by commercial actors, often hired by local authority. Second biggest group of organisers consisted of civic society actors (16 FMs) and three local authorities decided to run the FMs themselves. This heterogeneity probably contributed to the failure of institutionalising efforts which would provide the initiative with an explicit, openly declared programmatic orientation. However, organisers also shared some practical concerns. For example, they all had to meet strict hygienic rules or respond to the negative publicity caused by the discovery of 'fake farmers' (i.e. resellers) at several Prague markets. In addition, they needed to address revelations about the unsatisfactory quality of some products. Nonetheless, both top-down and bottom-up attempts to develop a set of principles did not lead to a broader consensus.

First of all, the Code of FMs issued by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2011 was an example of a top-down initiative. The Code represented a non-binding recommendation aimed at the introduction of universal rules that would guarantee the quality of goods and the rights of customers. In developing the document, the Ministry consulted several organisers including Archetyp. Interestingly, most

interviewed organisers were rather sceptical about the Code. Symptomatic for the heterogeneity of FMs' organisers was the fact that while some of them found the Code too vague and irrelevant, others viewed the document as excessively prescriptive and unrealistic. For example, the content of the Code was questioned in the following way:

'I thought that Archetyp would invite us, other organisers, to join forces to secure better conditions, get rid of nonsensical penalties... but instead they formulated the Code and I realised that they are against us, in fact. I have my own code' (Organiser 7).

The second institutionalising initiative, the establishment of the Association of the Farmers' Markets of the Czech Republic in 2012, also promoted by Archetyp, failed to gain broader support and never had more than five members.

To sum up, although the initiatives of Prague foodies and food activists started earlier, the scale and dynamics of the boom were induced by the pragmatic political support connected to local elections in the autumn of 2010. The high level of interest from consumers and the media, unprecedented in Czech alternative foodscape, attracted commercial actors, including supermarkets, who quickly joined the trend and opened their own FMs. In other words, Prague FMs have been coopted by the conventional agrifood system almost from the start. This wild and chaotic development brought concerns about FMs' authenticity and provoked efforts at FMs' institutionalisations by some of the pioneering organisers. Due to the already existing heterogeneity of the organisers and their aims, they never achieved any significant impact. All this evidence inspired us to interpret Prague FMs not as a social movement, as suggested by some observers (e.g. Zagata, 2012), but rather as a niche occupied simultaneously by a set of heterogeneous actors pursuing diverse and often incompatible objectives, which we scrutinize in greater detail in the next section.

5. The organisers' discourse of Prague farmers' markets

Contrasting with the organisers' diversity and the failure of attempts at the institutionalisation of the FMs initiative, the majority of them agreed about the aims they were following by starting and running a FM. Most often they reported the goals of bringing quality food to consumers (85% of interviewed FMs organisers) and supporting family farmers (60%). We will now explore these two aims and their relationship in greater detail. Then we will introduce the 'family farmers paradox' to clarify the need for 'geographically informed' discourse analysis, which forms the last part of this section.

5.1. Unpacking the quality food concept

By quality, FMs' organisers mainly understood freshness, honesty⁹ and Czech provenance of food. The importance attributed to honesty and Czech origin can be illuminated by a look at the context-specific sources of FMs' boom. Seminal academic literature on AFNs often ascribes the rise of these initiatives to the consumers' concern with food safety and their dissatisfaction with the negative environmental, economic and social effects of the conventional agrifood system (Renting and Wiskerke, 2010), with food scares such as the 1990s BSE epidemics at the centre of these consumer anxieties (e.g. Tregear, 2011). However, in the case of Prague FMs, organisers usually linked their motivation to start a FM to the dissatisfaction with the quality of imported foods sold by western-owned supermarkets chains. As Organiser 3 put it: 'Lidl¹⁰ is like a swearword to me! I think that people do not deserve to eat such disgusting things just because they are cheap.' The phrase 'Czechia – the (food) dustbin of Europe' was coined by the mainstream media in the early 2010s (ČT24, 2012) and soon started to resonate with the public (Novinky.cz, 2017). It reflected the growing public concern that the quality of food products sold in these supermarkets in Czechia were inferior to identical brands available in the same supermarkets in west European countries:

‘I would say that there was a peak in public opposition to the quality of products imported by the retail chains. Some of the products might not be accepted in their home countries’ (Organiser 2).

Even though the poor quality of food was associated with supermarket chains, a high number of FMs’ organisers were not dismissive of the idea of supermarketisation of food itself:

‘I think that we need to raise public awareness, to teach people what is good and what is not. Definitely not all the supermarkets are bad, for example Globus¹¹ is doing a great job.’ (Organiser 1)

In the heterogeneous group of Prague FMs’ organisers, the most common interpretation of FMs was that of a complement to the conventional agrifood system, not an adjunct or a radical challenge to or a disruptor of the mainstream (Hudson, 2009). The specific interpretation of ‘food quality’ was superior to the social embeddedness, the feature of stronger AFNs according to Watts et al. (2005), as is evident from the case of family farmers’ support.

Almost two thirds of the interviewed organisers expressed a desire to help family farmers who were interpreted as losers of the conventional agrifood system. The narratives included ‘annihilation by the boom of supermarkets’ (Organiser 1), highlighting the organisers’ personal bonds with the countryside and farming and common-sense sympathies with ‘struggling farmers’. However, some of these organisers admitted that they have compromised on family farmer’s produce status to ensure the highest quality:

‘I prefer a larger company (as a supplier; authors’ note) because I know that if they don’t sell their goods here they sell it elsewhere... and next week they will have fresh produce; quality and freshness are a priority’ (Organiser 3).

The prevailing focus on product instead of the relations around its production and consumption can be further illustrated by the fact that many organisers evinced rather low reflexivity regarding the broader environmental and social context of food production and consumption. We will demonstrate it on the example of organic food and the affordability of FMs’ commodities. Organic food was repeatedly invoked as a questionable and undesirable concept:

‘We do not strive for organic food here... I think that it is just trying to get people’s money. It should utterly be about farm to fork, that’s all’ (Organiser 1).

Some organisers associated the consumption of organic products with affluent (Organiser 7, 8) or ‘extremist’ consumers to whom they referred to as ‘bio-fundamentalists’ or ‘fanatic bio-people’ (Organiser 2, 9). Instead, organisers of Prague FMs aimed at ‘ordinary consumers’ who valued food quality and were willing to pay a premium price for it. Importantly, the willingness to pay was framed as a more important factor than the ability to do so:

‘If I’m interested in my health, then I care about what I consume. I want to eat quality food, even if I don’t have enough money to afford it. I buy it as often as possible... One needs to realise that if he or she wants to live better, it’s necessary to do something about it... and eating well once every two weeks (periodicity of the market, authors’ comment) is not that much (to demand).’ (Organiser 10)

In summary, organisers have seen FMs’ as complementary to conventional retail chains, prioritizing product over the underlying relationships. The rather defensive conceptualisation of food quality was saturated by the dissatisfaction with the quality of imported food accessible through conventional retail chains. While the group of pioneering organisers sought quality food from family farmers, there was a significant number of organisers willing to sacrifice this aspect of food’s provenance for the sake of offering consumers the highest quality. In general, organisers were rather dismissive of the

wider consequences of food production and consumption as we demonstrated in the case of organic produce and the affordability of FMs' assortment for lower income groups. In the next section we will reveal another inconsistency of the organisers' discourse, which calls for further enquiry.

5.2. The family farmers paradox

While the narrative of willingness to help family farmers struggling under the supermarkets' dominance of the conventional agrifood system was common among Prague FMs' organisers, many of them also recounted how difficult it was to recruit vendors for their markets:

'I was so stressed out at the beginning that I thought I wouldn't survive it! The markets were about to start, we had a date, stalls, but no sellers. Farmers were afraid, couldn't imagine it or had no trust in it. Two weeks before the first market I had no greengrocers! I didn't sleep, I lost weight, I was sick. I regretted ever starting with the project' (Organiser 7).

In the first phase of Prague FMs, farmers' mistrust and scepticism probably played a substantial role; but after the establishment of FMs in Prague's foodscape and the ensuing FMs boom, the limits on the supply side came into question. As one of the pioneering organisers put it

'There is a problem these days, that there are literally more farmers' markets than farmers' (Organiser 1).

Based on the statistical data on agricultural holdings, Syrovátková et al. (2015) concluded that there were enough potential suppliers for FMs in Czechia, namely small-scale farmers with a suitable portfolio located close to large cities. However, on closer inspection, this claim looks problematic. In 2010 there were, in Czechia, 22,900 agricultural holdings with an average size of 152.4 ha; this is by far the largest average holding size in the EU (Coyette and Schenk, 2013). The size structure of the holdings was highly polarised with farms under 10 ha accounting for 66% of the number of holdings but only 2% of the agricultural land. Moreover, only a minority of farms under 50 ha participated in commercial agriculture (Syrovátková et al., 2015).

Researches showed that for consumers, fresh local vegetables represent the basic range of goods of FMs (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; Spilková et al., 2013). In 2010 in Czechia, there were 462 producers of market vegetables cultivating 8,584 ha, and selling 78% of their produce to supermarkets and hypermarkets (Buchtová, 2012). Syrovátková et al. (2015) define small farms by acreage (< 50 ha), which means that in 2010, there were 234 small farms producing market vegetables in Czechia (Buchtová, 2012). After two seasons of the FMs' boom, in autumn 2011, there were more than 170 FMs in Czechia (of which about 40 in Prague). To meet this newly emerged demand, a substantial share of vegetable producers would have had to change their market strategies. This is a crucial insight because becoming a FMs' supplier is not only about producing the types of food popular with FMs' customers. Besides the family farmer status, specific skills in direct selling, communication or marketing are needed (Andreatta and Wickliffe, 2002; Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Jarosz, 2008). This can be illustrated by the following quotation of a FMs organiser reflecting on farmers' marketing skills:

'For farmers, to produce the food is a gigantic performance and I understand that. But then they must put it in the car, drive to Prague and stay here and sell their goods... these are other disciplines. They will have to learn a lot' (Organiser 2).

Supplying FMs also required time investment and the willingness to take risk as the profits were not guaranteed. Therefore, those Czech farmers in search for new markets often sought other channels for selling their produce such as through farm gate sales, CSAs or farm shops and subscription systems which were either less demanding time and skills-wise and/or more predictable regarding sales (Fendrychová, 2015). Yet another strategy was the participation in multiple FMs: a prominent example of this was the Držkov bakery from northern Bohemia which was participating in 16 out of the 33 Prague FMs observed by the authors, putting the authenticity of respective FMs into question.

We argue that the ‘family farmers paradox’ points to the mismatch of the Prague FMs with the local context, namely the structure of Czech agrifood system. How should the boom of farmers’ markets ‘without farmers’ be understood? This is the point in which the analysis of geography behind the organisers’ discourse offers valuable new insights.

5.3. The hidden geography of the FMs organisers’ discourse

Not only were there no FMs in Prague until the autumn of 2009, but Czech variants of the English terms ‘farm’ (farma) and ‘farmer’ (farmář) were barely used in the Czech language. Traditional indigenous equivalents of the latter term were ‘sedlák’, ‘hospodář’ and ‘rolník’ (peasant). In west European countries, the food markets are mostly named in the local language – ‘Bauernmarkt’ in German, ‘Boerenmarkt’ in Dutch, ‘Le Marché’ in French. The term used in post-socialist Lithuania – ‘ūkininkų turgeliai’ is also a local language term (Blumberg, 2014). The fact that the Czech term for farmers’ market – ‘farmářský trh’ – is a direct translation from English offers an important segue to assessing the discourse of Prague FMs’ organisers. From where did the concept of FM come to Prague?

Our research revealed that the first source of the Prague FMs discourse can indeed be traced to a North American context. Its local promoters, the coalition of the civic society Archetyp and the CEPF, had strong ties to the US-based NGO Project for Public Spaces (PPS), which focuses mainly on the revitalisation of urban public spaces and local communities in the US.¹² FMs were part of its portfolio of activities and PPS offered to help with establishing new markets or an evaluation of markets’ performance. As stated earlier, Archetyp and CEPF were important and influential actors in promoting the idea of launching FMs in Prague. They were promoting the idea in the media, negotiating with local and state authorities and organising seminars for prospective organisers with the participation of PPS’s lecturers. The discourse they represented was disseminated and became institutionalised in the form of the Code of Conduct and the Association of Farmers’ Markets in the Czech Republic. Through all these channels, their concept of FMs influenced other organisers, but it was not the only source of the organisers’ discourse, as interviews revealed.

When asked about their inspiration for starting a FM, the organisers who pioneered the initiative referred to encountering FMs during their travels or while living abroad. Remarkably, they did not talk about the newly established FMs in the USA, the source of discourse which became institutionalised in the Code and the Association. Instead, they related to: (a) traditional food markets in France and other European countries and (b) metropolitan market places like Borough Market in London, Mercado Central in Valencia, Viennese Naschmarkt or Vásárcsarnok in Budapest:

‘Nashmarkt in Vienna, the markets in France every Saturday... there are markets in Austria, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, here it was like an island... One sees it, that it works elsewhere and then comes back and start questioning why it does not work here as well’ (Organiser 11).

The pioneer foodie organisers longing for their own Borough Market or a picturesque French Sunday Marche were therefore confronted with: (a) the Czech post-socialist reality characterized by a shortage of family farmers with relevant skills and traditional regional artisan foodstuffs and (b) the concept of FMs as introduced by the Archetyp- CEPF coalition which was rooted in the North American urban renewal context (see Fig. 3). As AFNs scholarship has not yet engaged with this kind of geography, we drew on the academic discussion of travelling concepts and post-socialism to produce the situated knowledge of Prague FMs, which we introduce in the next section.

6. Building and discussing situated knowledge of Prague FMs

Sonnino and Griggs-Trevarthen (2013) argue that in the case of localised AFNs like FMs, the potential for scaling-up is limited by the embeddedness in the locality and social relations. Therefore,

they consider replication to be the only expansion option for this type of AFNs. Importantly, the successful replication of AFNs is conditional on the ‘similarity of social, human and natural capital’ between the original and target context (Sonnino and Griggs-Trevarthen, 2013, p. 286). However, ideas and concepts such as FMs tend to also travel between significantly different contexts.

The theory of travelling concepts was formulated by Edward Said in 1983. According to Said, the process of concepts travelling consists of the original context, the final context and the distance between the two. These three aspects together influence the outcome of the travel, in other words, the form and acceptance of the resulting concept (Said, 1983). More recently, Wendy Larner (2011, p. 90) stated that ‘the geographical processes through which problems, knowledge, concepts, categories, actors, discourses, techniques and so forth travel and are translated are not smooth processes of diffusion from the metropolis to the periphery, but rather involve multiple and heterogeneous geographies’.

It has been mainly anthropologists who showed that in the case of western and post-socialist contexts, the distance between the original and final context is often inappropriately shortened (e.g. Chari and Verdery, 2009; Thelen, 2011). The mainstream discourse (academic as well as political) of the post-socialist developments as ‘catching up with the West’ (Eyal et al., 2001; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008) had important consequences as the ideas and concepts coming from the West were in general considered superior to local ones. Therefore, they often escaped critical scrutiny (Gille, 2010; Suchland, 2011). In other words, too little attention was paid to the ‘relevance’ of the concepts’ ‘translation’, which influences their acceptability (Derrida and Venuti, 2001).

The dominance of the so-called transitional discourse of post-socialism was manifested in the huge influence of western institutions and expertise in CEE transformation. Consequently, post-socialist societies have been, to a great extent, ‘developed from outside’ (Gille, 2010). Nevertheless, the agendas and approaches of western trained professionals were often distant from the everyday life of ordinary citizens (Sampson, 2002). The ‘distance’ of the original context as well as ‘the means of transport’ of the concepts made their public acceptance in the post-socialist context problematic as Guntra Aistara showed in a rare study of the understanding of fairness in relation to food consumption in Latvia (Aistara, 2013). To complete the picture of the ambivalent relationship between post-socialism and the West, Smith and Jehlička indicated that the public reactions to the importation of food related western innovations include irony, revisions and resistance – aspects largely neglected in the existing academic literature (Smith and Jehlička, 2007).

Building on the theories of travelling concepts and on the above insights concerning post-socialism, we conceptualised the boom of FMs in Prague as a process of travelling of multiple concepts from diverse (mainly, but not exclusively Western) contexts and their adaptation to post-socialist Czechia. The specific variant of FMs in Prague was a result of the interplay of these travelling concepts as well as their interaction within the local context. In other words, through the activities of their organisers and promoters, Prague FMs were simultaneously embedded in the locality and in (often) distant geographical contexts. Post-socialism had a twofold role in the process of FMs concepts’ travelling. First, it formed part of the ‘conditions of acceptance’ (Said, 1983). The size and ownership structure of agriculture, the ambivalent relationship towards the West and even actors’ aversion to engagement in formal institutions could be, at least partly, explained by the legacy of state socialism (Gille, 2010). The second role of post-socialism should be seen in the insufficient adaptation of the FMs’ concepts to fit the specific local post-socialist context, which was constitutive of the ‘family farmers paradox’.

Contrasting our situated knowledge with the existing academic discourse of AFNs/FMs (Table 1) revealed that Prague FMs differ from their western counterparts in several important aspects. (1) The contested aspect of the conventional agrifood system (more specifically, the retail sector) was the inferior quality of imported products sold by western-owned supermarkets. (2) This fuelled rather defensive and unreflexive conceptualisation of the quality based on food freshness, honesty regarding formula and processing, and of Czech origin. (3) The broader context of food production and consumption tended to be dismissed by the majority of the organisers as was the case with organic

food and the affordability of FMs' commodities for lower-income consumers. (4) The organisers' discourse was rather inconsistent regarding support for family farmers as illustrated by the compromises on the family farmers' food provenance for the sake of quality and by the reported lack of suitable FMs' suppliers. The categorisation of FMs as a weaker AFN is supported by the organisers' own interpretation of FMs as a complement to the conventional agrifood system as well as the early conventionalisation.

We suggest that the research of Prague FMs confirmed the interpretation of AFNs as complex, diverse and hybrid entities in a mutually constitutive relationship with the specific local version of the conventional agrifood system (Maye and Kirwan, 2010). However, acknowledging the embeddedness of FMs in the local context (Allen et al., 2003, Holloway et al., 2007) represented an important, yet not sufficient factor of their conceptualisation. To explain the paradoxes of the organisers' discourse and increase the relevance of our conceptualisation, we needed to explore the extra-local sources of the phenomenon and the geography of travelling concepts.

The analysis of the organisers' discourse revealed that their stated objectives were incompatible with each other, the practices 'on the ground' and the structure of the Czech agrifood system. Seeking to resolve these puzzles, we uncovered the complex geography behind the organisers' discourse. Through the sources of their organisers' inspiration, the Prague FMs were simultaneously rooted in a range of often relatively distant geographical contexts. The inconsistencies and paradoxes of the organisers' discourse originated in the interactions among these travelling concepts as well as of their encounter with the specificities of the local post-socialist context. Further, we argue that postsocialism played a twofold role in the process of conceptual travelling. First, as a part of conditions of acceptance, and secondly, as a factor responsible for the inadequate shortening of the distance travelled, and therefore the insufficient adaptation of the concept to the local context.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we set out to explore how food innovations travel and how our understanding of these processes extends the existing knowledge and its cosmopolitan relevance. The questions were induced by the unprecedented boom of FMs in Prague, Czechia and the geography knowledge gap identified in the AFNs scholarship. As the dominant academic discourse of AFNs remains embedded in the North American and West European contexts and the emerging research in post-socialist CEE tends to adopt it, the processes of AFNs diffusion in this region have been understudied so far. We seized the opportunity offered by the boom of FMs in Prague in the early 2010s to produce the situated knowledge of the formation of an AFN beyond the core area of their academic research. Our approach was inspired by the work of Wendy Larner (2011) in two ways. First of all, in the production of situated knowledge of FMs boom in the semi-periphery and its confrontation with the existing conceptualisations. Secondly, in acknowledging the nature and importance of concepts travelling for the conceptualisation of Prague FMs boom.

We have demonstrated that by studying FMs in the periphery from the periphery and by distilling the situated knowledge from geographically informed analysis of the organisers' discourse, we were able to produce novel and relevant conceptualisation of FMs in Prague. They represent a hybrid phenomenon, complementary to the conventional agrifood system and a weaker alternative, but they evince contextbased specifics. In addition to local embeddedness, wider geographical processes transcending the place and including the travel and adoption of the concept need to be taken into consideration to understand the outcomes of AFNs' diffusion into new and different contexts (cf. Sonnino and Griggs-Trevathan, 2013). Therefore, we argue that the spread of FMs outside of the Western 'core' should not be simply understood as an uncomplicated process of spatial diffusion of an 'innovation' from the centre to the periphery.

The upshot is that the research on FMs (and by extension on other variants of AFNs) in the periphery, i.e. outside the Western core, alerts us to the need to think about the ideas, structures, actors and

material flows in the FMs' place in relation to the flows of ideas that transcend this locality. Rather than considering these two dynamics in separation, we need to be mindful of them as working in conjunction and as mutually constitutive of the FMs in the given (semi-peripheral) locality. This has important implications for our understanding of the character of the relationship between FMs (or other food innovations) and the conventional food system, and for the assessment of the level of these innovations' alterity. At the practical level, we are convinced that this knowledge is an invaluable input into any considerations about the FMs' and AFNs' transformative capacity and would welcome further investigation into this problematic.

Endnotes

1. Several FMs which were an integral part of the studied phenomena were located beyond the city's administrative boundaries, within Prague metropolitan area (Ouředníček and Temelová, 2009). For the sake of comprehensibility, however, we refer to 'Prague FMs' in the rest of the text.
2. While in the 1998–2007 decade the Web of Science database listed 37 social science articles with the phrase 'farmers markets' in their topic (on average 3.7 per year), in the following 2008–2017 decade this number rose to 356 (on average nearly 36 per year), an equivalent of a 9.6 increase.
3. Detailed discussion of AFNs' alternativeness is offered in papers by Tregear (2011) or Forssell and Lankoski (2015).
4. Collaborating researchers and students engaged with consumers and producers research.
5. This represented 80.5% of all FMs.
6. This represented 64.5% of all organisers, or 67.5% of all FMs respectively.
7. Commonly used name for Vítězné náměstí square in Dejvice, a rather affluent, inner city neighbourhood in the 6th district of Prague.
8. Prague is divided into 22 administrative districts with their own town halls, each of which consists of one or more city section which respect the historical settlement structure. Altogether there are 57 city sections.
9. In this context honesty stands for a counterpoint to the adulteration of formulas and false information on products' ingredients associated with mainstream foods.
10. Lidl is the name of a German discount supermarket chain operating in Czechia.
11. Globus is the name of a German hypermarket chain operating in Czechia.
12. E.g. Project for Public Spaces 2010, <https://www.pps.org/article/the-benefits-of-public-markets>, retrieved on 5.6.2018.

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Table 1: Contrasting situated knowledge of Prague FMs with the existing conceptualisations of AFNs and FMs in academic literature.

Source: Authors' work based on research results and literature review.

AFN aspect	Dominant conceptualisation of AFNs and FMs	Situated knowledge of Prague FMs boom
Source of the phenomenon	response to detrimental effects of the agri-food sector's industrialisation and economic globalisation (growing corporate power of agri-businesses and supermarkets, price squeeze on farmers' income, food scares and environmental degradation)	response to perceived inferior quality of imported food sold in Western-owned conventional retail chains; political support connected to the municipal elections
Relationship with the conventional system	continuum ranging from complement to challenge to the conventional agri-food system	complement to the conventional agri-food system, specifically the retail sector
Level of alterity	stronger AFNs focusing on relationships within the network or weaker AFNs focusing on product attributes	weaker and defensive AFN with the focus on food quality
Conceptualisation	hybridity, ambivalence, mutually constitutive relationship with the conventional agrifood system	hybrid entity in a mutually constitutive relationship with the local variety of the conventional agrifood system, significant degree of conventionalisation
Geography	geographical bias in knowledge production – focus on the core; AFNs' local embeddedness acknowledged but diffusion understudied	extra-local embeddedness crucial aspect of FMs' diffusion; FMs outcome of travelling concepts' interaction with local context

Figures

Fig. 1. Geographical embeddedness of academic discourse of AFNs and FMs. Source: Authors' work based on the Web of Science data (analysis conducted in 2018). Description: Depicted are absolute frequencies of social science papers with the topic "alternative food networks" (a), and "farmers markets" (b), indexed on the Web of Science.

Fig. 2. Farmers' markets in the metropolitan area of Prague in the autumn of 2009 (left) and in the autumn of 2011 (right). Source: Authors' work based on the research data. Map source: 'Map of administrative divisions of Prague' by Alexrk2 – Own work, <http://www.geoportalpraha.cz/>. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license via Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 3. The geography underlying the discourse of farmers' markets in Prague. Source: Authors' work based on the research data. Map source: 'Europe countries' by Júlio Reis – Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons. Notes: The white arrows represent the academic discourse of AFNs based mainly in North America and in the UK. The grey arrow represents the discourse of the US-based NGO Projects for Public Spaces. Numbered pins represent the explicitly named sources of the organisers' inspiration: 1 – Borough Market in London, UK; 2 – Cabbage market in Brno, Czechia; 3 – Naschmarkt in Vienna, Austria; 4 – Vásárcsarnok market in Budapest, Hungary; 5 – traditional food markets in France; 6 – traditional food markets in Italy; 7 – Mercado Central in Valencia, Spain.