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**PATTERNS AND SPATIAL FEATURES OF SHOPPING  
COMMUNITIES IN HUNGARY**

**Theses of the PhD dissertation**

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# 1 THE BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE DISSERTATION

## 1.1 Justification and relevance of the research theme

From the second half of the twentieth century, the process of industrialisation of Agriculture and globalisation of food trade is taking place, which has created global problems today such as the background of small-scale agricultural production and consumption supporting local products. The global food chains are increasingly crowding out local producers and the resulting unequal forces are generating significant social tensions worldwide and are placing an increased environmental burden (RÉTHY-DEZSÉNY 2013). At the same time, counter-orders, initiatives and consumer groups that prefer conscious and sustainable food consumption based on Rousseau's idea of "back to nature, authentic roots" are starting to appear worldwide. There are many different trends, such as convenience, health and wellness, environmental-conscious, experience-finding, ethical consumer, time-conscious trends, etc. (TÖRŐCSIK 2007). A common cross-section of all these efforts is response to the deep mental, moral and cultural crises (SZALAI 2009) in addition to the rebellion against global trends and impacts and the economic crisis. Vigorous demand for authentic values is also an emerging trend in many areas of life on an international and domestic basis.

In view of the constraints of our land's capacity to sustain and the health problems and economic burdens caused by inadequate nutritional habits, the need for sustainable and health-conscious food production and consumption is increasingly being promoted. The various world organizations (UN, WHO, OECD, FAO), the European Union and Hungary also seek to promote sustainable food production and consumption through different policies and strategies (GYULAI 2012). The question arises whether the above initiative and regulation are sufficient to promote positive changes. In my opinion, there is a need for bottom-up initiatives and exemplary self-organized communities that are supportive and beneficial to conscious and healthy consumption. This type of initiative is the *Community-Supported Agriculture*, which is a specific approach and method of local food production and local sales. In the framework of community agriculture, farmers and their customers form a community based on Social Capital (cooperation, mutual trust and responsibility), establishing a direct distribution channel in such a way that cooperation benefits both the producer and the consumer. The main advantage of the producer is that it can establish a direct and long-term relationship with its customers, sell its products locally, thus enabling it to operate cost-effectively and optimally. The consumer has the advantage of obtaining his food from a healthy and secure source, contributing to the preservation of his health and the development of the local economy. In the wording of RÉTHY-DEZSÉNY (2013, p. 5): "In this relation, contrary to the

traditional economic approach, the parties, the seller and the buyer, are not interested in the opposite, but rather allies.”

The idea of Agriculture supported by the community started in Japan in the 1970s as a response to the negative consequences of agricultural development. The movement was named Teikei, which means “food marked with the farmer’s face” (HENDERSON 2010). By the mid-1980s, self-organized, community-funded and sustainable economies had already appeared in Europe and the United States. There are now around 6000 economies and related communities in the United States, and thousands in the western part of Europe, organized on similar principles. These communities are *spatially differentiated* and differ in size and organizational form.

Community farms and shopping communities put into practice the principles of sustainable food production and consumption, have community-building power, strengthen small farms and help to *maintain the rural area* (TVE 2017). These good practices can fundamentally reform increasingly globalised food consumer behaviour, strengthen identity and community spirit. These values are very important to me, so I consider it important to examine the patterns and spatial specificities of the Hungarian shopping communities. In addition, it is justified to pursue the subject by the integration of shopping communities as micro-communities into the new knowledge system of regional science into the so-called *System of Social Spatial Theory*. The study of these systems is rather novel and yet “...not rooted in Lefebvre “society-generated” space (LEFERBE 1974) or Malmberg’s human territorial theory (MALMBERG 1980), but the quantitative analysts have revealed a specific, rich and expanding Spatial Analysis tool system” (in: NEMES NAGY 2003, p. 4). LENGYEL in his study (2010, p. 20) states that “...concentration processes based on proximity in the neighbourhood are becoming increasingly important...the question of where spatial concentration, taking advantage of proximity can be observed and why?” In international literature, the concept of *relationship space* and *relationship proximity* also appears. The latter means the ability of an organization or community to facilitate interactions between members. Besides the examination of physical (geographical) space, it becomes dominant “...the examination of social relationships, which can be called relationship, network space (Regional Economics), relational space (Social Geography) or flow space (Sociology)” (LENGYEL 2010, p. 33). Along this theoretical line, I defined the Hungarian shopping communities and presented their spatial specificities. I would also like to highlight that shopping communities can be understood from a wide range of scientific aspects. This dissertation did not aim to carry out a full - scale interdisciplinary study; I only used a toolkits of disciplines (**agricultural marketing, consumer-sociology, local economic and community-development**) in my empirical research, which helped to map the attributes of the operational process of shopping communities in Hungary, the socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics of basket organizers, consumers and the examination of spatial realizations based on geographical location.

The research sought to highlight that there are still huge reserves in the development of local food systems and practices that are both sustainable from the point of view of the producer and the consumer.

## 1.2 Research objectives

The general purpose of my dissertation was to examine *the patterns and spatial differentiation of Hungarian shopping communities*.

- **C1:** Exploring the attitudes of consumers in the sample area (settlements with shopping communities) towards shopping communities, local and organic foods, and examining the behaviour of food buyers and consumers (e.g. quantitative and qualitative food consumption, factors affecting consumer behaviour, health awareness, dominant value system and lifestyle, etc.).
- **C2:** Based on the analysis of the food consumer and consumer preferences and the socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics of the members of the shopping communities, the formulation of proposals for rethinking domestic short food chains and developing new REL models.
- **C3:** Examination of the specificities and opportunities for development of the Hungarian shopping communities and drafting proposals for optimal operation of the shopping communities through strategic marketing-mix elements.

The direct, or up to one intermediate, sales channel of the shopping community type, which is typically organized on the basis of a consumer initiative, is an alternative selling option for small food-producing farms that are marginalised by global competition. In order to be able to describe the Hungarian characteristics of this sales channel and in order to develop a good model of the Hungarian shopping community by examining good practices, I considered to conduct a *modern marketing strategy study*. The marketing strategy seeks an answer to what product/service, what target group, what market and how a particular producer/service provider can sell. In my view, this issue is very relevant for today's small Hungarian producers, since in recent decades their competitiveness has decreased significantly and they rarely have this type of conscious business approach in order to re-position themselves in the Hungarian Food Market, and I consider it strategic to explore and consider as an alternative to selling the potential of local food systems supported by the community.

### 1.3 Research questions and hypotheses

In my complex research, I focused on a few key, concrete, empirical studies that can be supported, well-defined relationships in the description of spatial patterns and characteristics of Hungarian shopping communities:

- **Q1:** What knowledge and experience do consumers have about shopping communities?
- **Q2:** What are the differences and identities of consumers in settlements in case of existing shopping communities, their attitudes towards local food, their basic food customer behaviour and awareness of shopping communities?
- **Q3:** What are the significant links between their food consumer behaviour and their demographic characteristics in the case of members of the shopping community operating in each municipality?
- **Q4:** How can shopping communities be described in the interdisciplinary approach to regional science?
- **Q5:** A description of the model of shopping communities along the examined aspects.

In line with my research objectives and questions and on the basis of processed literature and secondary information, I have formulated the following *hypotheses*:

- **H1:** There is a significant difference between the behaviour of the residential and basket member respondents as food buyers.
- **H2:** The perception of local food among respondents is strongly dependent on income and education.
- **H3:** At least half of the population is familiar with the shopping community in the municipality.
- **H4:** Purchasing motivation among basket members is to support local producers, community development, health awareness, environmental awareness as well as reliability and control.
- **H5:** Basket members/consumers who prefer sustainable and conscious food consumption are, I believe, the most representative of post-modern ethical consumers representing the lifestyle of LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability).
- **H6:** Basket members/consumers do not form a homogeneous group according to their demographic characteristics, but their lifestyle characteristics and values.

- **H7:** Shopping communities are spatially differentiated and have different characteristics.

## 2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

In my dissertation, I chose the *deductive sorting* principle in the literature review and used a *mixed primary research methodology* to achieve research objectives and answer questions. In the following two logical matrices, I summarize the main parameters of my quantitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative *questionnaire analysis* focused on the analysis of the demand and alternative supply side of local food (*Table 1*). In addition to the Hungarian analysis (*Residential questionnaire, Questionnaire for basket members*), I also prepared a survey in Székely Land (*Székely Land questionnaire*), which I wanted to examine how the local food in an authentic, traditional space is viewed by the residents, in relation to local food marks, in relation to the experiences of the respondents in Hungary, in relation to their food customer behaviour and consumer behaviour, their value system and lifestyle. At the same time, the questionnaire themes were similar and differentiated according to target groups and test targets.

**Table 1. Quantitative research matrix (2016-2018)**

Questionnaire analysis	Target group	Method	Element number
<i>Residential questionnaire</i>	Population of settlements with shopping community	Standardised questionnaire, personal query involving students, random sampling	N=817
<i>Questionnaire for basket members</i>	Basket members and / or ad hoc customers	Standardised questionnaire, personal and online query, random sampling	N=297
<i>Székely Land questionnaire</i>	Population of Székely Land	Standardised questionnaire, online query, random sampling	N=114

Source: author own quantitative research

In-depth interviews, focus group interviews and participant observations (*Table 2*) I have received a more nuanced picture of the attitude towards local food, the principles, strengths and weaknesses of shopping communities, their development directions, their community-building activities, the experiences and opinions of the actors in the alternative local food chain (basket organizers,



producers, consumers). In some cases, several interviews have been conducted at one location.

**Table 2. Qualitative research matrix (2017)**

<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Target group</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Element number</b>
<i>In-depth interview with basket organizers</i>	Basket organizers	Semi-structured interview	N=26
<i>Participating observation</i>	Basket members and / or ad hoc customers Producers selling in baskets	Observation of 10 P, 4 C, 4 E	N=8
<i>Producer interviews</i>	Producers of Kesztlőc	Semi-structured interview	N=4
<i>Producer focus group interview</i>	Local winemakers of Kesztlőc	Semi-structured focus group interview	1 x 8 persons
<i>Focus group interview in Székely Land</i>	Students from Székely Land	Semi-structured focus group interview	1 x 10 persons
<i>In-depth interviews in Székely Land</i>	Specialists and producers of Székely trade marks, good practices	Semi-structured interview	N=7

Source: author own qualitative research

In the course of the primary survey I conducted questionnaire interviews among the consumers of six settlements (*Miskolc, Eger, Kecskemét, Esztergom, Érd, Csömör*), involving university students<sup>1</sup>, where shopping communities are already established. The aim of the research was to explore *how consumers in these urban and rural areas* with different territorial and demographic characteristics *relate to locally produced food* and how important the consumption and availability of these food products are to them in terms of their consumer behaviour. Local and close producers can buy high-value added products in shopping communities and therefore it is important information to explore their expansion/development potential, whether there is demand for these food products among consumers. Two of the sample areas – Érd and Csömör – are part of the Budapest agglomeration, which is crucial for the investigation. The focus of the research is whether these special areas have the right of the shopping communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Szent István University, Bachelor of Agricultural Engineer for Economic and Rural Development, second-year students

The survey was carried out in the spring of 2016 (Esztergom, Kecskemét, Érd, Csömör) and 2017 (Miskolc, Eger), with the participation of the second-year students in Agricultural Engineer for Economic and Rural Development at Szent István University. Sampling was arbitrary and unrepresentative but, as far as possible, targeted as heterogeneous as possible by demographic characteristics (gender, age, income situation, education). The number of evaluable respondents is 817, of which 63.0% are women and 37.0% are men. The 27.6% of respondents live in Csömör, 21.2% in Kecskemét, 16.3% in Esztergom, 14.4% in Miskolc, 12.2% in Érd and 8.2% in Eger.

*Among basket members*, I chose the form of personal interview and the method of query sent electronically to basket members by the organizers and the size of the sample is 297, of which 73.7% are women and 26.3% are men. The women in both samples were over-represented, but I achieved a varied pattern in terms of age, education, occupation and income levels.

In case of *the Székely Land survey*, I decided to use the online questionnaire, which I sent out and shared on the social media forums on student mailing lists in Székely Land. The demographic characteristics of the students participating in foreign training served as a good model, as the sample shows a heterogeneous picture along the personal characteristics. The number of evaluable questionnaires in Székely Land reached 114, the majority of the replies came from Hargita (72,8%) and Kovászna (21,1%), and a small number from the counties of Maros and Kolozs. The gender distribution in the Székely sample shows the over-representation of female respondents (64.0%), the pattern is diversified in terms of age, occupation and income situation, and, in the case of educational attainment, the respondents typically (85.1%) have tertiary education due to the sampling method.

The *participating observation and interviews with basket organizers, volunteers, producers, consumers* were recorded with the oral consent of the interviewees and analysed on my research questions. According to MASON (2005), the design of the research is important for qualitative research, but the research method should be flexible and contextual, taking into account the changing circumstances and situations in the interview situation, and therefore, as indicated in the summary table, I have also worked on *semi-structured* and sometimes *structured interviews* during the interviews. After replying the interviews<sup>2</sup>, I organized the qualitative data in a thematic way, and then carried out the content analysis in a number of ways, colliding with the answers given in each topic. As a basic sorting principle of qualitative data, I applied *thematic cross-*

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<sup>2</sup> The interviews were backed up by Monika Annušová and Kata Szilágyi.

*sectional and categorisation indexation*. I also used *verbatim quotations*, in addition to *interpretations* and explanations in an interpretive and *reflexive way*. In order to examine and describe the patterns of shopping communities, I have tried to contact the currently known shopping communities in several circles and, although the majority were open to my request and cooperating, they were interested in my research but some did not respond to several requests.

To process the questionnaire database, I used the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 statistical package. In addition to the general descriptor nature of the results, I sought to identify the dependency relationships between the individual criteria by using *cross-table analysis*. I used the *main component and cluster analysis* to identify consumer types based on their food customer behaviour (SAJTOS - MITEV 2007).

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 The results of the survey among population

Based on the results of my questionnaire **research** on consumer attitudes and awareness of shopping communities on local food, I highlight the need to develop local food systems of the “pouch community” type, which have been the focus of my interest in the dilemmas of the sustainability of current food supply systems and the background of small producers, while strengthening the conscious demand for food consumers.

From the point of view of my research, it was a cardinal issue to examine how the respondents relate to locally produced foods and how important the consumption of these foods is to them in terms of their consumer behaviour. Local and close producers can buy high-value added products in shopping communities and therefore it is important information to explore their expansion/development potential, whether there is demand for these food products among consumers. From the sample, for 42.8% of the respondents it was very important and for 33.9% of them it was important to have the opportunity to buy locally produced and processed foodstuffs. From the demographic characteristics the gender ( $\chi^2=24.304$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p=0,000$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.173$ ), the school qualification ( $\chi^2=50,002$ ;  $df=12$ ;  $p=0.000$ ;  $Eta=0.154$ ) and the occupation ( $\chi^2=81.470$ ;  $df=27$ ;  $p=0,000$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.183$ ) indicated a significant but weak correlation with the importance of availability of local food. In spite of my prediction, the perception of local food is unrelated to the income situation of the respondents (H2). Responses suggest that women are more committed to local food than men, as 82.5% consider it important for local foods to be accessible to consumers. By

contrast, 32.4% of men do not consider this important at all. Respondents with higher qualifications indicated higher demand for local food (85.6%). 40.6% of young students do not consider local food important at all, which is saddening, because in a few years they will be the largest part of the demand for food. For people staying at home with children it was important to buy high-value, healthy, traceable food, similarly to housewives, from whom 91.7% said the same.

Based on the responses received, it can be concluded that an increasing consumer segment is interested in quality, local food. Consumer behaviour can be explained by the criteria on which the customer makes his or her decisions to buy food and by the criteria he or she considers important in this process. Based on the averages of answers, it is not surprising that it is important for the respondents to have everything available in one place. This is the fast track of our world and our consumer society. Respondents are price-sensitive and they also care about the quality of food products. It also shows signs of increased consumer awareness that the respondents are concerned about Hungarian origin and health. On average, it is more important for their food purchases to be known as shops and food brands, recommendations of family and friends and environmental awareness.

Based on the results of the cross-table analysis I can see that the most important characteristic of their food buying habits is probably the awareness (H5). However, the most important characteristic of their food buying habits is probably the awareness. 33.99% of the respondents consider it very important, while 51.60% of them consider it at least important to have a grocery store in their area, where only local and Hungarian food products would be available. There is a considerable demand for local food, however, only 16.0% of the people are members of shopping communities in the settlement, and only 37.0% of them have heard of this initiative, but have never purchased food there. 47.0% of respondents have never heard of shopping communities (H3). The highest number of people among the respondents who knew about these communities' lives in Csömör and Esztergom. This is probably due to the fact that Csömör is a small town of 8,723 people where the fame of such a community is spreading more easily. Among the shopping communities in the settlements investigated, Esztergom performs intense online marketing activities, and its positive impact was supported by the results of the questionnaire. There is usually an NGO behind shopping communities, and most of them face resource shortages and infrastructure problems, so their survival and development largely depends on cost-effective online communication.

Most of the shopping communities in Hungary mostly advertise and manage themselves on an internet forum, which may not reach all potential consumers, but it is certainly forward-looking. It further nuances the picture that there is obviously

a segment that does not want or cannot change its food consumer behaviour. However, it should be noted that given the fact that these foodstuffs can be purchased almost directly from the producer, they can be obtained at relatively low producer prices. Consumers still have the stereotype that these foods are very expensive and priceless, but this is not necessarily true for the foods offered by shopping communities, as they are typically not profit-making.

Respondents (H4, H6) who buy in the shopping community are aware that, by deciding on local food, while receiving healthy, safe food, they support the local economy and local producers. Such communities also play a significant role in shaping local identity, as they also carry out community-building activities with their various programmes. The 69% of respondents buying in the purchasing community said that their membership of the purchasing community strengthens their sense of local identity.

I asked the respondents to tell how they felt being members of the community. The most commonly used adjectives were the followings: “*quality*”, “*confidence*”, “*local products*”, “*healthy*”, “*mutuality*”, “*community*”, “*friends...*”. *These buzzwords are totally in accordance with the principles of the agriculture supported by communities and that of the buying communities.*

The 35% of the respondents said that they would be willing to pay a little more for local food, while 32% would be willing to do so for certain food products. The 21% of respondents would not pay more for local food. In the case of fruit, vegetables, eggs, dairy products, meat and bakery products, 32% of respondents would be willing to pay more. *Typically, they would be willing to make this material sacrifice in the case of basic food.* 35.3% of the respondents are willing to pay more for local food while 32.3% of them are willing to pay more only for certain foods. 20.9% of them are not willing to pay more for local foods. The respondents who significantly prefer the opening of shops selling local food are willing to spend more money on basic foods such as fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy products, meats and bakery products

In the case of meat products and breads, different types of shops are still popular, and the market as well in the case of vegetables and fruits, eggs and acidified products. Regardless of the type of settlement, for the respondent Hungarian households it was usual to buy and prepare pickles and jams.

Based on the calculations of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office in 2014, with the increase in income, the proportion of purchased and self-produced foods decreases, and the proportion of workplace-, school- and restaurant meals is increasing. In the case of households in the top quintile, nearly three quarters of food expenditures are purchased, only 3.0% of their own production and about 23%

of out-ofhome meals. It was remarkable to find that in 2014 the structure of the food consumption of lower income categories has changed favourably, compared to comparable prices the purchased and in-house consumption expense as well as those living in better financial conditions, which resulted in the year 2013 more favourable rates for their food costs.

The 2017 survey of the GfK Hungária Market Research Institute showed that the larger commercial channels are more popular among the Hungarian population when buying daily consumer goods and according to their survey, the volume of independent retail shops, markets and other channels improved by a few percentage points by 2016 compared to the percentage of 2010.

With the help of the cross-table analysis, I examined whether there was a significant link between the sex, occupation, permanent address (independent variables) of the respondents and the answers to the questions of the questionnaire (dependent variables). Basically, there were weak links that could be identified, but I think they are definitely indicative. *During the food purchase, the judgement of food consciousness significantly depends on the sex of the respondents ( $\chi^2=31.464$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). The relation is moderately strong ( $Eta=0.253$ ) (H5).* In case of women, food consciousness is more important while buying food than in case of men; however, they consider it important as well.

Women respondents prefer buying in buying communities because by promoting local food they can contribute to the *support of local producers/farmers* ( $\chi^2=5.810$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.016$ ). The significant relation is moderately strong ( $Eta=0.268$ ). At the level of the examined towns the reputation of the buying communities are significantly different ( $\chi^2=77.617$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $p=0.000$ ) (H3). Based on the Cramer's V sample, the relation is moderately strong (0,281). The respondents of Csömör are the best informed about the buying communities working in their hometown, and even more, some of them belong to these communities. *The majority of the respondents of the other three towns have no information about the buying communities.*

### **3.2 The results of the survey among “Basket members”**

Surveying among the consumer community has brought the expected results, as by purchasing in a buying community, they are committed to high added value local foods. It is not surprising, therefore, that for 62.6% of respondents it is very important and for 34.0% it is partly important to buy locally produced food. Our hypothesis that purchasing communities, primarily those with a higher education qualification and households with higher than average income (H2), have been

certified since 70.7% of respondents have a higher education degree and have higher income than 250,000. The basket members could be labelled on Likert scale ranges from one to six (1-none at all ... 6-fully-characterized) that the motivations listed by us are characteristic of them when purchasing them in consumer communities. Based on the averages of responses, the main motivations of their community purchases reflect modern conscious consumer behaviours (**H5**), as it is important for them to get their basics from trusted sources (5.60), fresh (5.60) and healthy (5.47). At the same time, in addition to the individual interests, there is a strong emphasis on social responsibility in their purchasing decisions, as the motivation of the local economy (5.22) and local producers (5.20) is strongly emphasized by their purchases. This consumer segment also has an environmentally friendly attitude (4.97). In spite of the fact that this is a purchasing segment with a higher disposable income, it can be stated that they are somewhat price sensitive.

Contrary to our preliminary assumption, consumer communities do not yet fully fulfil the role of community development and identity in Hungary. Based on our empirical experience, currently few communities have the capacity to accommodate the food procurement and distribution system on this front and the consumer circle is not open enough for it either. Of course, one or two smoother and more organized and functioning communities such as the Budapest Szatyor Buying Community, the Esztergom Kiskosár Buying Community or the Miskolc Green Shopping Community. It is very difficult to “slow down” and “engage” the accelerated consumers of our time and give them a community experience. It was clear from the research that this form of purchasing was chosen because of health and environmentally conscious functional food procurement, rather than membership in the community or participation in community programs. However, it is clear that their consumer behaviour is the closest to the so-called LOHAS’s (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) behavioural pattern. The special character of the group is given by the environmentally and health-conscious consumer attitudes (KOTLER-KELLER 2006) and the buzzwords of consumers in the consumer community are reliability, traceability, health, freshness, environmentally friendly and local / neighbourly farmers.

The main purpose of the survey among basket members was to find out what kind of lifestyle characteristics were to be written along with these customer groups. Based on the averages of responses, the examined consumer segment has the lifestyle characteristics according to their responds. Personal demographic characteristics go beyond the lifestyle, as it generally shows the way people want to “lead” their lives and thus reveal a lot about their individual goals and goals

(TÖRŐCSIK 2007) and thus reveal the basic consumer habit. In the life of the respondents, on the Likert scale which ranges from one to six (1-not at all ... 6-fully-featured), the main priorities are health (5.68), family (5.64) and a calm, balanced life (5.48). They try to be autonomous (5.14) and live a secure life (5.31), they are eco-conscious (5.28), they are supporters of meaningful life (5.26), friendships are important to them (5.19), as well as spiritual development (5.18) and leisure time (5.02). Based on dominant lifestyle characteristics, they could be described best with the functional consumer behaviour (TÖRŐCSIK 2007). They show a pure consumer types, whose consumption is not motivated by symbolism, but by internal motivations, their own “well-being” (**H6**).

### 3.3 Results of the Székely Land survey

The objectives, research questions and hypotheses of the Székely Land survey were similar to the Hungarian residential questionnaire. Initiatives have already been launched to support local food sales in the region. The Council of Hargita County established the EU trade mark “Székely product” in 2009 and a little while ago the national trade mark “Székely Land product”. Finally, the trade mark “Székely product” brought the expected success despite the initial difficulties. The trade mark Transylvania Authentica, the Székely Fruit initiative and the Góbé family of products may also be mentioned. In addition to exploring attitudes to local foods and generalised food purchase preferences, I examined the awareness of “Székely products” and consumer experience, similar local good practices.

The attitude of respondents in Székely Land to the availability of local food is similar to the basket members, because 63% consider the availability of these products to be very important and 35% consider them to be partly important. This proves that in this region there is still a culture and value for handmade, local foods. They are motivated to support local farmers and farms and are considered to have access to fresh, healthy and secure food (**H4, H6**). Local products also play an important role in strengthening local identity. Trust is not complete, but rather high. The Hungarian origin of food depends on the age characteristics statistically ( $\chi^2=38.182$ ;  $df=25$ ;  $p=0.044$ ). The relationship is of medium strength ( $\text{Eta}=0,317$ ) and this aspect is particularly important for people aged between 25 and 54 years. This is also the case for the importance of the local origin ( $\chi^2=68.986$ ;  $df=25$ ;  $p=0.000$ ) and the relationship is more stronger ( $\text{Eta}=0.402$ ).

According to the average of the answers, the quality aspect is the most decisive factor in Székely Land respondents’ food purchases, and the least



influential factor is the knowledge of the shop and brand, and it is not essential that everything is accessible in one place. Traditional food purchases are popular among respondents and have a high proportion of home-made jams, preserves, honey (73.2%) and pickles (55.9%). They prefer local markets for vegetables and fruit, specialised shops for bakery, meat and dairy products that can be purchased directly from the producer.

After that, it is not surprising that 57.7% of respondents consider it very important and 38.7% consider it partly important to have food stores in their settlements where only local and domestic producers' food would be available. I also asked if they knew any of these types of shops in the area and what similar local initiatives, good practices they could mention and what experience they had and what their possible development proposals were. There have been a number of good practices mentioned, and some have criticised the fact that, for the time being, the income situation depends on who can afford to buy healthy local food. There are those who, although they think it's a good idea to have local food available, are currently producing and producing all the food they can buy. Development proposals were also put forward, in particular the expansion of the monthly fairs and the widening of supply.

Some said that the quality of foreign products is not necessarily comparable to the quality of local products and that they leave something to be desired from the point of view of food safety. It was also someone who said that the county council should strengthen local farmers, making the administrative side easier and more transparent for them. The most well-known local product in Székely Land is a trademark/brand which is generally well-known and many are regular (42,5%) or occasional customers (50,44%) of the Székely products. Most of these products are preferred by women aged between 25 and 54. They are satisfied with the quality of the products and the choice, although not completely because on a scale of 1 to 6, the quality has been assessed at 4.53 and the variety at 4.23. Prices are considered high (4.00), the availability of products (3.85) is not considered adequate and the number of fairs is not considered appropriate (3.62).

The more recent development proposal was that producers should be better supported by the involvement of municipalities, that they would consider it important to develop a well-structured marketing mix, socialisation and well-targeted advertising. A respondent pointed out that the name "Székely product" was not considered to be very fortunate, mainly because Romanian consumers also like traditional and local foods, but they are somewhat monopolised by that name. The criterion of the award of a trade mark would be strengthened in terms of quality and content, and the traceability of raw materials would also be considered

important, since in many cases the raw material comes from the other side of the country and only processing is local. They also consider it important to prescribe traditional local seasoning. Sales would also be extended beyond borders and even more intensified in various domestic and international fora.

### 3.4 Consumer types based on food buying behaviour

Among the responding population (Hungarian, Székely Land) and basket members, I was able to identify three types of consumers based on factors affecting their behaviour as food buyers.

Based on their behaviour as food buyers of the Hungarian population, I identified three clusters. The first is the *“Local Patriot-loyal Cluster”*, which includes 182 respondents. For those in this cluster, it is very important to buy local Hungarian food and it is very important for them to be familiar with the shop. The second consumer type is the *“Health and Environmentally Conscious Quality-oriented Cluster”*, with 379 respondents. Health awareness and environmental aspects are the main food purchasing aspect of the food buyer behaviour of this segment. It is also important for them to recommend chemical-free and natural origin as well as quality and reference persons. The third cluster includes 254 respondents, the *“Convenient and Price Sensitive Brand Loyal Cluster”*. Those in this cluster like to buy everything in one place, preferably at a low price and prefer the usual brands. Hungarian origin is not important to them at all. **(H1)**

In case of the Székely Land respondents, I considered the establishment of three clusters to be professionally justified, which was already outlined on the basis of the main component structure. Although the third factor shows a very mixed picture, the “health and environmental awareness” and the “natural quality” factor groups are distinct. The first Székely Land cluster (35 persons) can best be described as *“Health and Environmentally Conscious”*, as these aspects supersede all other factors in their food purchases. The second cluster (16 persons) was named *“Modern Classics”*, because for them the brand and shop knowledge, but also the Hungarian and local origin is decisive. Price is sensitive and comfortable; they like to buy everything in one place. The *“Hybrid Cluster”* is classified according to the preferences of the food buyers of half of the respondents (57 persons) in Székely Land. The basket members can be described in the same way as the group called by that name among the interviewees. **(H1, H5)**

Based on the food buyer behaviour of surveyed basket members, three clusters were identified. Contrary to my assumption, I cannot only talk about a homogenous consumer type in their case. Obviously, buying food in a buying

community does not mean they are fully committed to domestic food and reject retail brands from abroad. It should be noted that among the basket members, the issue was related to their general grocery behaviour and not just to the consumer community. There are 33 respondents in the first cluster (*“Conscious-locational Patriotic Cluster”*), and they are looking for purchases of foodstuffs of Hungarian origin, and food which is healthy and good quality. The 32 respondents in the second cluster, which is named *“Convenient and Price Sensitive Brand Loyal Cluster”*, have many similarities with the type of consumer cluster identified in the other sample, with the difference that for them the important thing is the fame of the shop and not that all the products should be available in one place. They stick to the usual brands, products and price sensitive. They are mostly adventurous or newcomers who are just getting familiar with local food and in their general consumer behaviour preferring local and Hungarian products is not as dominant. Also, price is more important for them than quality and health preference. The largest cluster (with 81 people) was named the *“Hybrid Cluster”*, because for them it is important to be able to buy all the products in one place, that the products are of Hungarian origin, health awareness and also environmental protection. They consider the price/value ratio and they are loyal to brands and products. Essentially, this cluster is the combination of the first two clusters. **(H1, H5)**

### 3.5 Spatial patterns and pattern model of shopping communities

**Table 3. Types and model of shopping communities**

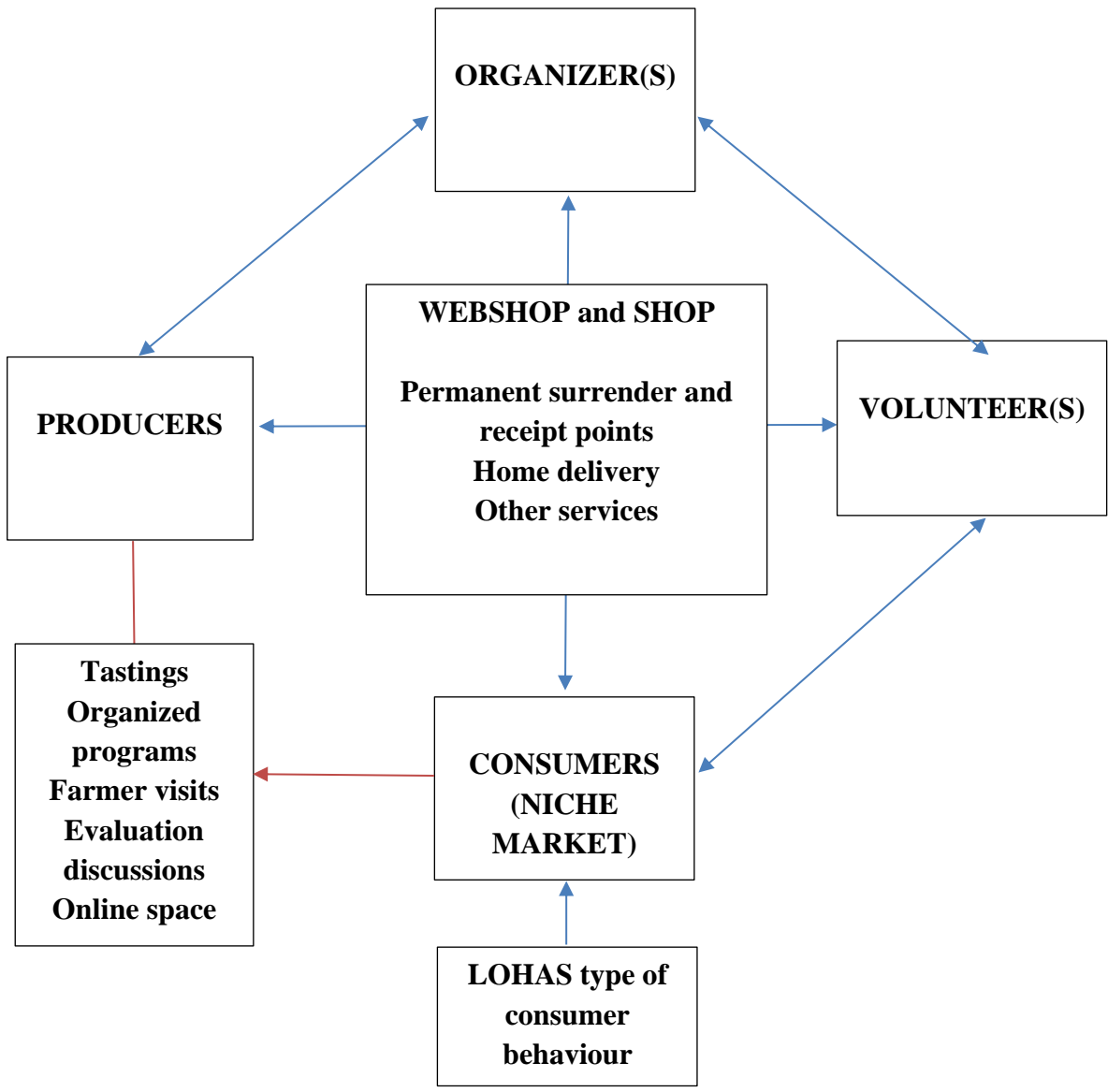
A. PERSONAL SYSTEM (LITERATURE & EMPIRIA)	B. COMMUNITY SYSTEM (LITERATURE & EMPIRIA)	
<p><b>Advantage:</b> direct link between producer and customer.</p> <p><b>Disadvantage:</b> it requires more space, more infrastructure. Less traceability of trade in goods, can shift the shopping community towards the market.</p>	<p><b>Advantage:</b> the transfer can be carried out at a smaller location, better monitoring of product traffic and administration.</p> <p><b>Disadvantage:</b> there is not always a direct producer-buyer relationship, furthermore a large voluntary stock and physical work is needed.</p>	
C. INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM (LITERATURE & EMPIRIA)	D. HYBRID SYSTEM (EMPIRIA)	E. BUYING GROUP ORGANIZED ON A SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITE (EMPIRIA)
<p><b>Advantage:</b> customers are concentrated. Customers are represented by an institution, an occupational group and the transfer can be carried out quickly in that institution.</p> <p><b>Disadvantage:</b> there is not always a direct producer-customer relationship, it requires a lot of volunteer work.</p>	<p><b>Advantage:</b> to reach a wider consumer audience, to provide a fixed delivery point. It combines the community system with a permanent take-over point/business where not only pre-orders can take over their food packages, but ad hoc buyers can also buy from a basic product range. They carry out more intensive approaches, community building activities and provide additional services (e.g. home delivery, cooking course, food and location ensuring for team-building events, etc.).</p> <p><b>Disadvantage:</b> the organizers must take the role of organizer/mediator in the form of legal frameworks, which requires capital intensive permanent staff.</p>	<p><b>Advantage:</b> the volunteer takes up the maintenance of the site, filtering content, but the transfer processes are coordinated between producers and customers. It requires a simpler organizational and infrastructure capacity.</p> <p><b>Disadvantage:</b> the community does not have the basic infrastructure necessary for the organization and operation of the permanent producer-shopping community, so an enthusiastic volunteer creates a community site/forum where local producers and customers can meet. It is more difficult to ensure and control quality and the community building function is lower.</p>
<p><b>For each type, it is necessary to adapt flexibly to the specifications and expectations of the local producer, customer and support medium when developing the niche marketing mix. The ideal operating sites of shopping communities are urban spaces.</b></p>		

Source: LÓRINCZ (Ed.) (2017, p. 56) and based on own research

Communities identified in my secondary and primary research *typically operate in urban spaces* and are concentrated among larger cities. The community types – personal system, community system, institutional system – which can be found in the literature and defined in 2017 by some basket organizers – have been confirmed by my own empirical research, and two more types – ***Hybrid System, Online Community Space System (H7)*** – have been identified. Overall, it can be concluded that communities operate on the northern axis of the country, where, as we have seen, latent solvency demand is also more decisive. The detailed description of each type was described above. In my fourth research question, I took up the description of the model of the Hungarian shopping communities. On the basis of the research results, it can be concluded that ***the five identified shopping community types can be considered as one model*** which must be adapted to the local characteristics, in particular to the specifications and expectations of the producer, customer and support medium. The short description of each type is summarized in the matrix of *Table 3*.

Based on my empirical research and taking into account the current legislative environment of shopping communities, ***“Hybrid Cluster”*** appears to be the most viable in the long run, so I consider it as a sample model. In order for the other forms to function, it would be necessary to refine the legislative background involved in the dissertation, as at present, the purchasing community organizers can only engage in payment transactions, for example, in the form of traders. It would be a great help even if small producers could be helped in sales by persons other than family members. The expansion of the territorial possibilities for sales would also be an incentive for existing and newly organized shopping communities. Support for the development of basic infrastructure and the work of organizers currently based on Vocation, Training of local producers, awareness and socialisation of producer-consumer systems would be needed for calls for proposals for shopping communities.

In *Figure 1*, I present the sample model of the “Hybrid System” shopping community. The direction of interaction between the actors is indicated by the arrows. The research has shown that shopping communities are currently supplying food needs for a consumer segment that is a narrower niche market. The key actors in the system are the organizers who bring together the actors. Through the webshop, the order can be efficiently carried out, and the shop serves as a permanent delivery point and gives room for personal interaction. The organizers shall organize and operate the processes involving volunteers. Producers and consumers are not in daily contact but have the possibility of direct and indirect interactions.



**Figure 1. The sample model of the “Hybrid System”**  
 Source: author own research

## 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 The results of the hypotheses testing

- **H1: There is a significant difference between the behaviour of the residential and basket member respondents as food buyers - partially confirmed.**

My first hypothesis was only partially confirmed, as in the questionnaire survey conducted among residential and basket member customers, the main component analysis and cluster analysis shows that similar types of consumers have emerged in all three samples (residential Hungarian, residential Székely, basket members) according to their behaviour as food buyers. However, the preference for local food is considered to be significant for basket members and Székely respondents. I was able to identify three-three different types of customers (*Table 4*).

**Table 4. Types of consumers based on food purchasing behaviour**

Hungarian population	“Basket members”	Population of Székely Land
“Local Patriot-loyal Cluster” (22.33 %)	“Conscious-locational Patriotic Cluster” (22.60 %)	“Modern Classics” (14.81 %)
“Convenient and Price Sensitive Brand Loyal Cluster” (31.16 %)	“Convenient and Price Sensitive Brand Loyal Cluster” (21.92 %)	“Health and Environmentally Conscious” (32.40 %)
“Health and Environmentally Conscious Quality-oriented Cluster” (46.50 %)	“Hybrid Cluster” (55.48%)	“Hybrid Cluster” (52.77 %)

Source: author own research

- **H2: The perception of local food among respondents is strongly dependent on income and education - partially confirmed.**

The hypothesis was not confirmed in the case of residential respondents, as a significant but weak link can be found in respect of gender, education and occupation among the demographic characteristics, so the perception of local food in this consumer segment is independent of the income situation. In the case of basket members, however, the hypothesis was confirmed because households with

higher education (70.7%) and higher than average income (above 250 000 HUF) buy in shopping communities. The interviews with the organizers and the observations of the participants confirmed this.

- **H3: At least half of the residential respondents know the shopping community in their municipality - confirmed.**

There is a significant demand for local food among the population, however, only 16.0% of the shopping communities in their town are members and 37.0% of them have already heard of this initiative but have never bought there. The awareness of the shopping communities shows a significant difference at the level of the settlements examined. Among the respondents in Csömör and Esztergom, most of them knew the shopping community in their settlement. This is partly due to the fact that behind shopping communities there is usually a civil organization and that most of them are short of resources and infrastructure problems and cannot spend much on marketing.

- **H4: Purchasing motivation among basket members is to support local producers, community development, health awareness, environmental awareness, as well as reliability and control - confirmed.**

Basket members are aware that, by deciding on local food, while receiving healthy, secure-source food, they are supporting the local economy and local farmers. It is very important for the respondents to support narrower housing, strengthen local economic development and thus strengthen local strength lines, values and emphasize the characteristics of the place. At the same time, the personal experience is also a great “attraction”, the presence of a sense of “home”, the purchase from familiar people is extremely important for the respondents.

- **H5: Basket members/consumers who prefer sustainable and conscious food consumption are, I believe, the most representative of post-modern ethical consumers representing the lifestyle of LOHAS - confirmed.**

My examination has shown clearly that the consumer behaviour of basket members is closest to the behaviour pattern of LOHAS's (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) presented in my literature review. Based on empirical research, call phrases such as reliability, traceability, health, freshness, eco-friendly and support for local/surrounding farmers make them buy in the shopping community.

- **H6: Basket members/consumers do not form a homogeneous group according to their demographic characteristics, but their lifestyle characteristics and values - partially confirmed.**



I have prepared the lifestyle characteristics of the members of the shopping community and found that they can be characterized by functional consumer behaviour from among the consumption categories of TÖRÖCSIK (2007) on the basis of their dominant lifestyle characteristics.

- **H7: shopping communities are spatially differentiated and have different characteristics - confirmed.**

On the basis of the research results, it can be concluded that the five identified shopping community types can be considered as one model which must be adapted to the local characteristics, in particular to the specifications and expectations of the producer, customer and support medium.

#### **4.2 Suggestions for practical applicability of the research and future research directions**

I think it is important to point out that, in the current context, the alternative local food systems examined (Community-Supported Agriculture, shopping communities) are not suitable to replace large-scale food supply systems and are not intended to replace them. They are only functional in addition to these systems.

For sustainability reasons, it is important both from a supply and decision-making and legislative point of view to get to know this niche consumer group and to develop and support supply systems according to their consumer needs. On the basis of my primary research results, the demand for high-value and safe-source producer food is currently mostly due to women with young children and high school qualifications. In the case of local food systems, it is very important for the marketing mix to be made strong online marketing by the basket organizers and to develop their marketing mix in such a way as to attract the conscious but modern consumer segment. Further exploratory research is recommended.

In the course of interviews with the basket organizers I was able to get to know the types and main operational mechanisms of the Hungarian community and the limitations (lack of legal capacity, lack of expertise, limited basic infrastructure for operation, lack of funds, etc.), which hinder the placing on the market of local small producers and the optimal functioning and development of shopping communities. At present, the majority of small domestic producers do not have the necessary expertise, knowledge of food safety and legislation, the ability to enforce and apply. The majority of basket organizers can help producers in their community, but it would be appropriate to provide training/educational materials for small producers to provide this kind of knowledge. Furthermore, an aid scheme would be needed that would respond specifically to the problems of shopping communities and provide financial and professional assistance. The local support context is also crucial (municipalities, local press, local LEADER/HACS groups, tertiary institutions, etc.). Targeted support schemes for these communities

would be needed with minimum funding and the creation of a cooperation framework supported by the government with institutions or with the aim of connecting suppliers to mass caterers. By organizing cross-country professional information forums, promoting the development of trade marks and brand could also contribute to the development of shopping communities. These would be better positioned and differentiating local products on the market and in consumer awareness. On the part of the basket organizers there is a need for organic organization, networking and small gatherings where it is possible to exchange experiences, learn from each other, or think in joint applications and events.

The results of my empirical studies, the models presented by the shopping community, can be indicative for decision makers and local food system operators and organizers. The model “Hybrid System”, which I have defined, can be adapted to the specifications and expectations of the local producer, customer and support media, most notably in urban areas, when developing new communities. In case of the other four types of shopping community (personal system, community system, institutional system, online community system), it would be necessary to refine the legal environment (e.g. small producer products can also be supplied by a private individual entrusted by the producer, the expansion of the territorial possibilities of supply, sales by his own taxable amount in producer shops, etc.) in order to ensure optimal functioning, these community types have been brought to life by consumer needs and are also sample taxes.

The problem of vocational education has also been raised, which typically only describes students and future farmers according to some basket organizers with conventional forms of farming. In this type of training, the professional knowledge of small-scale farming and short food chain channels should also be integrated more strongly, thereby facilitating the opening of young producers out of training to community-supported agricultural type sales channels.

In Hungary, several organizers see opportunities for development. Producers' shops and shop networks have practices in several European countries (e.g. France, Poland, Székely Land, etc.). According to the basket organizers, local and organic products would be available throughout the week for a wider range of customers at producer prices. On the basis of the French model, the producers could divide among themselves the sale of the store on a given day, thus leaving more time for farming and maintaining direct contact with consumers.

On the policy side, in addition to the instruments already in place, there should be further ways to promote the importance of small - scale food production and consumption, which can bring the countryside and the city closer, directly and indirectly, and contribute to the development of the local community and economy, to placing producers out of the global market. This promotion and awareness-raising activity would be particularly important for young people, as my questionnaire study also confirmed that young people do not really prefer local foods. This generation was born into the multicultural world and the taste and mood of healthy rural food is unknown to most of them. While there are efforts on the

part of the government to channel food from local and eco-farming into canteens, I believe that even stronger efforts are needed to shape young people's attitudes, as they will determine food demand within a few years. Through educational frameworks and various thematic events, young people could be made aware of the positive effects of local and organic food consumption, such as health, environmental, social and economic impacts.

Local food products and traditional and novel (e.g. shopping community type shops) short supply chains that promote their sale can directly and indirectly contribute to rural tourism and to the transmission of local values. I hope that the targeted support of these channels and their actors will be decisive in the forthcoming EU programme period.

My research results can be used both for *local communities and for decision-makers in creating new short food chain models, rethinking and modernising the current ones*. The collection of further good practices and primary research among relevant actors can be used to optimise the "Hybrid System" model of the shopping community as outlined in my research results.

## 5 NEW AND NOVEL SCIENTIFIC RESULTS

1. In an interdisciplinary approach, I have reviewed and organized the basic concepts related to the interpretation of agriculture supported by the community, along the available national and international literature, and along the deductive principle, the genesis, development history, spatial realization and manifestation of shopping communities.
2. In my comprehensive empirical research, I have carried out a unique analysis of the operating mode and demand side of the shopping communities operating in Hungary and I have prepared a survey in Székely Land using mixed primary research methods (questionnaire analysis, participatory observations, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews). As far as I know, this less researched topic has not yet been studied in Hungary in this approach, such a complex methodology and spatial aspect.
3. I have examined the patterns of the Hungarian shopping communities and I have completed their typing and I have developed a model of the Hungarian shopping community adapted to the territorial conditions. The community types – personal system, community system, institutional system – which can be found in the literature and defined in 2017 by some basket organizers – have been confirmed by my own empirical research, and two more types – Hybrid System, online community space system – have been identified. On the basis of the research results, it can be concluded that the five identified shopping community types can be considered as one model which must be adapted to the local characteristics, in particular to the specifications and expectations of the producer, customer and support medium. The investigated shopping communities typically operate in the northern part of the country and in urban areas.
4. I have prepared the lifestyle characteristics of the members of the shopping community and found that they can be characterized by functional consumer behaviour from among the consumption categories of TÖRŐCSIK (2007) on the basis of their dominant lifestyle characteristics. They show a picture of a mature, clean, no-frills consumer type, motivated not by symbolic food consumption and visibility to the outside world, but by internal motivations, self – “well-being”.
5. My examination has shown clearly that the consumer behaviour of basket members is the closest to the behaviour pattern of LOHAS’s (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) presented in my literature review. Basket members/consumers who prefer sustainable and conscious food consumption

can best be characterized by the type characteristics of postmodern ethical consumers representing the hybrid lifestyle and not by their demographic characteristics, but by their lifestyle characteristics and values they form a homogeneous group. They are driven to buy in the shopping community by calling words such as reliability, traceability, health, freshness, eco-friendly and support for local/surrounding farmers.

## 6 LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

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Alternative Local Food Shopping Communities in Hungary

PROBLEMS OF WORLD AGRICULTURE: SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL OF WARSAW UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES 19: 2 pp. 7-21., 15 p. (2019)

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