



Bringing Organisations & Network Development
to higher levels in the Farming sector in Europe

Agroecology Nights I. - The Big Picture

The Agroecology Nights event series is co-organized by Védegylet and the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy at the Central European University (CEU). Between November 2018 and March 2019 the four events tackle different fields of agroecology through movie screenings and roundtable discussion with local and international experts.

The **first event was held 15th of November, 2018 at CEU** providing a birds eye view on agroecology.

Agroecology calls for a paradigm shift in how we approach food production in its environmental, social and economic context; ideally resulting in a state of food production where the needs of communities and the integrity of the ecosystem are well balanced. Agroecological practices can contribute to strengthening local knowledge, experience and creating networks of producers, consumers, scientists and activists.

The events started with the screening of the movie "**Les Moissons du Futur**" (Crops of the future) by Marie-Monique Robin. The documentary takes account of the effects of industrial farming on soils, the environment and human livelihoods, as well as introduces examples from across the world why and how a paradigm shift in the food system is needed on an agroecological basis. The movie was followed by a roundtable discussion between our invited experts of organic agriculture, short food supply chains and responsible consumption in Hungary.

Logan Strenchock is an environmental scientist specialising in community based sustainability transition initiatives, short food supply chains, resilient agricultural systems and urban-rural connections. Logan is also an apprentice at the Zsámbocki Biokert, the first Hungarian organic farm operating on a community supported agriculture (CSA) scheme and one of the few places in Hungary where ploughing is performed with a horse.

<http://www.zsambokibiokert.hu/mission>



THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION'S HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT N° 774208

Dóra Drexler is a landscape planner, plant pathologist and the managing director of ÖMKI, the Hungarian Research Institute of Organic Agriculture. Since 2012, ÖMKI is running an innovative on-farm research network; which sets topics and goals for research together with farmers, making this approach truly participatory. Including the on-farm network, ÖMKI conducts research in a wide range of topics, such as vegetable landraces, organic breeding and seed production, viticulture and apiculture.

<http://biokutatas.hu>

Róbert Szűcs-Winkler is one of the founding members of the Felelős Gasztrohós (FGH-Responsible Dining Heroes). FGH is a Budapest based NGO helping farmers, restaurants and consumers develop environmentally and socially conscious changes in their food production, processing and consumption habits. They have their own certification badge for sustainable restaurants, help establish farmer-chef connections in their Gastro Date events and provide information about Hungarian super foods and seasonality to curious consumers.

<http://gasztrohos.hu/>

The roundtable discussion addressed the Hungarian food system - especially its shortcomings and advancements from an agroecological point of view. All our experts agreed, that during the recent years there is a **trend of positive change**. Dóra gave examples from the organic sector – a growing area is certified each year, for example a whole wine region will go organic next year. Róbert was also enthusiastic, but he was stressing that for change to happen, the whole food supply chain must slow down and change their attitudes : farmers, consumers and restaurateurs as well. People in Hungary do like to follow **gastronomic trends**, so it would be important that this sector **supports local and seasonal food**. Logan said Hungary is on a good track; no matter which district you live in Budapest, you will **have access to small scale, locally produced food- like a market or a box scheme**.

The invited experts pointed at **consumer consciousness and policy and financial support for market access** as needed incentives to boost sustainability in the organic and small scale local food chain. As Logan puts it, organic (certified or non-certified) production in Hungary is up to date, but marketing these products directly to consumers can be hard, for example finding a distribution point for community supported agriculture boxes. The other problem is, that **Hungarian consumers do not have as much disposable income**, and a high percentage (about 25%) is already spent on food, therefore premium price products have a slower growing market share. A question from the audience asked

whether vertical farming with aquaculture can be a solution to urban food distribution in a sustainable manner. When we talk about **long-term sustainability, rural livelihoods, employment, and local food security often stand in contrast with technological fixes and high mechanisation**, answered Logan. Dóra also added that there is a certain integrity to natural systems and organisms that should not be disrupted – such is the connection of plants with soil, therefore vertical farming cannot really be considered organic. As to connecting the urban population better to the concepts of food - Róbert suggests urban farming is a good start.

EU and national level policies should shift from an area based concept to supporting services provided by farmers; they should implement the True Cost Accounting - such as ecosystem conservation or landscape management, and support should also focus on helping small scale producers to access the market in a more efficient way - our experts agreed. Through the support to smallholder farmers we may be able to reverse the trend that the high quality, organic products leave the country and re-enter it after being processed and packaged – as it is happening in Hungary.