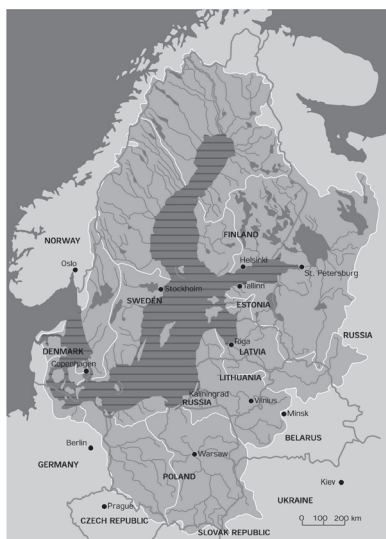




EKOLOGISKT LANTBRUK NR 47 • DECEMBER 2005

APPROACHES TO SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS

Sumelius, J. & Vesala, K.M. (eds.)



Baltic Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Society (BERAS) No. 6



Centrum för uthålligt lantbruk



Ekologiskt lantbruk – 47
Approaches to Social Sustainability in Alternative Food Systems.

Centrum för uthålligt lantbruk
SLU
Box 7047
750 07 Uppsala

Ecological Agriculture – 47
Approaches to Social Sustainability in Alternative Food Systems.

Centre for Sustainable Agriculture
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
S-750 07 Uppsala

Authors are responsible for the factual contents of the report.

ISSN 1102-6758
ISRN SLU-EKBL-EL--29--SE
ISBN: 91-576-6885-X
Antal sidor: 69

Ämnesord / Key words: Organic farming, Organic food, Local food, Sustainability, Resource management, Food systems, Rural development

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS VIEWED THROUGH ACTOR ARGUMENTATION

Abstract

The method of the study was qualitative attitude research, which is based on the generation and analysis of argumentation. The material was produced by presenting selected statements concerning different aspects of social sustainability to the interviewees, asking them to comment on the statements. Thus the material comprises of argumentation, where the actors' attitudes and experiences on the alternative food production were displayed. The interviewees represented different actor positions in the food chain.

According to the data, the attitudes towards alternative food systems were generally positive. The local and organic food production were seen more ecological, better for the economy of rural communities and more fair towards the farmer. They were also seen to produce safer food. However, the picture was rather multifaceted. The material also revealed threats to the social sustainability of the alternative food systems. It was considered unclear whether the alternative production is profitable enough, or whether the consumers are willing to pay extra for it. Alternative distribution chains were also regarded as laborious and difficult to manage. Also the point was raised that similar inequalities characteristic to conventional food system may also be present in the alternative food systems. However, the identified threats should be seen as challenges to be met in order to make the alternative food systems socially more sustainable.

*Marko Nousiainen
and Päivi Pylkkänen
University of Helsinki
Ruralia Institute
Finland*

*Kari Mikko Vesala
Department of Social Psychology
University of Helsinki
Finland*

Introduction

The liberalisation of international trade and global competition have led to increasing vertical integration of the food chain. This trend, as well as environmental concerns, have raised critical voices towards the mainstream agrifood system. However, the dominant industrial and vertically aligned agrifood system has been blamed, for causing various kinds of damage to the environment, for its failure to provide wholesome and nutritious and safe food, inability to supply food for low-income people, as well as for various other social problems. (e.g. Vorley, 2003; Scialabba &

Hattam, 2002; Flora, 1995; Reganold et al., 2001; Allen, 1999) In consequence, alternatives to conventional food systems – such as organic production; local food initiatives, community supported agriculture or food circles – have become subjects of increasing interest. In some cases, such alternative food systems have been suggested as solutions to the shortcomings of the industrialised and increasingly global food systems.

In the Baltic Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Society Project (BERAS) alternative food systems in the Baltic Sea region are put under an empirical study. The ultimate rationale for the project is pollution of the Baltic Sea, which, to a large extent, follows from intensive farming around the Baltic geographical area. In addition to ecological dimensions, the BERAS project also examines the economic and social aspects of alternative food systems.

What are alternative food systems?

The environmental awareness of the 1970s lies behind the interest in the alternative food systems. (Beuss & Dunlap, 1990, pp. 592). Alternative food systems, AFS, have their roots in organic farming. Historically organic farming has been characterised socioeconomically as being: local or community controlled, embedded economically into the local community/region (i.e. most products are grown and consumed locally), and structured to promote the interaction of producers and consumers (locally) in ways that familiarise each with the wants and needs of the other so that they promote cooperation, trust and social cohesion (e.g. cooperatives) (Saunders, 2004, pp. 5). In reference to the recent growth of organic production, its institutionalisation and industrialisation Saunders argues that organic farming in fact is being incorporated into the systems of finance, management and distribution of conventional agriculture (i.e. global distribution channels). In other words, convergence with conventional agriculture is resulting in a subsequent loss of 'localness', community values and control of organic farming. We understand in this study, that organic farming means, in its essence, a mode of production regulated by legislation and regulations at the EU level whereby separate regulations apply to plant production (EC Regulation 2091/91) and to organic animal husbandry (1804/99). Organic farming may, or may not, bear other features such as locality, but this is not by definition necessary.

Locally-produced food as a concept places emphasis on the spatial dimension of the whole chain related to food. The concept of food chain refers to a value-added, consumption continuum from primary production through processing to consumption (Seppänen, 2004, pp. 5-6). The food system refers to the entity of the food chain from the systemic perspective going beyond the

production-consumption chain by adding the use of inputs as well as the consequences for the natural environment as topics of interest. We understand in this study that local food involves, by definition, no restriction on the mode of production, such as the use of non-organic and external inputs. Hence, in essence, the local food system is an alternative to a globalised system with regard to the channel of distribution. By introducing a local and short connection between the production, distribution and consumption of food, a horizontal alternative is created as opposed to the conventional, vertically-structured food chain.

The above-established mode of production (organic/conventional) and the mode of distribution (local/vertical) may or may not overlap as depicted in Table 1. This study will illuminate how different actors perceive and value the two suggested alternatives: organic and local food, and their possible combinations.

Table 1. Mode of production and mode of distribution.

		MODE OF DISTRIBUTION	
		Horizontal	Vertical
MODE OF PRODUCTION	Organic	Organic food, horizontal (local) distribution	Organic food, vertical distribution
	Conventional	Conventional production, horizontal (local) distribution	Conventional production, vertical (global) distribution

Aims and approach

A study under work package four (WP-4) of the BERAS project aimed to clarify the social aspects of the two alternative food systems from the perspective of social sustainability. From the various conceptions of social sustainability in connection with agrifood systems as discussed for example by Saunders (2004), we chose to study social sustainability under two topics: equity (or fairness) between the actors and viability of the local communities. Equity was studied from the perspective of distribution of power and control, and the distribution of benefits. According to previous research, the conventional agrifood system has negative implications for both equity and viability. Our intention was to study how the organic and local food systems would compare to the conventional food system under these themes.

Since the social reality of any food system is something that is made up of actors involved in these systems, and the relations between the different actors and the wider social context, we thought it reasonable to approach AFS through the perspectives and perceptions of the involved actors. Hence, we interviewed actors involved in alternative food systems in the municipality of Juva in Finland. First, our questions concerned, the ways in which different actors viewed AFS in terms of social sustainability. Secondly, we were interested in the similarities and differences between perceptions of different actors of the food chain.

Our approach in studying the actor perspectives draws from rhetorical social psychology (Billig, 1996). According to Billig's approach, social reality is essentially argumentative. Taking stands and argumentation on controversial issues are everyday activities in both social interaction and individual thinking. By studying argumentation it is possible to generate an understanding of how the social world, including different actor perspectives and relations, is being constructed.

Attitudes may be approached also through argumentation (Vesala & Rantanen, 1999). Attitude refers to the ways people value ideas or items. Viewing something positively or negatively is typically a matter which is processed and constructed in argumentation. Thus, our question was: how do the involved actors evaluate AFS in terms of social sustainability? What kinds of attitudes are being constructed when the actors argue on the issues related to the social sustainability of ASF?

We conducted 20 interviews which included farmers, public kitchen matrons, food traders, food processors, local politicians and consumers as informants. In the interviews we asked the interviewees to give their view on selected aspects of social sustainability that were formulated in the form of predetermined arguments. In each interview eight statements were presented one by one to the interviewee who, after each statement, was asked to comment it. The role of the interviewer was to encourage the interviewee's own speech by asking for accounts, clarifications, examples and so on, but to refrain from expressing his/her own view on the statement.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim (i.e. word for word). The analysis involved two stages. At the first stage all the stands each interviewee took on the statements were identified and grouped into categories. The justifications supporting interviewees' stands were also identified and categorised. In this way it was possible to develop an overall picture of the comments on each statement. The unit of the analysis at this stage was a single comment, not an interviewee. In many cases one and the same interviewee presented several comments and took different stands on the same statement. At the second stage

the comments were analysed by interpreting the attitudes constructed in the argumentation: what is actually under evaluation in the comments? Quotations from interviews are used in the forthcoming analysis to illustrate typical or informative comments and attitudes of the respondents.

Findings

General attitudes toward the organic and local food

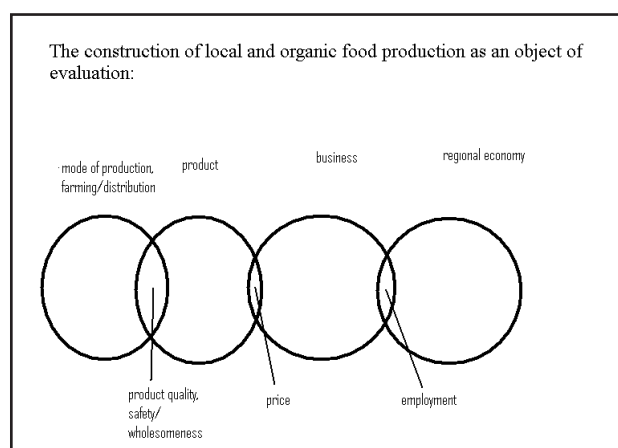
The first two statements that were presented to the interviewees, were:

1. In my opinion, organic food production is a good thing
2. In my opinion, local food production is a good thing.

These statements introduced the topic of discussion at a very general level, in other words, on a general positive-negative scale. The statements were formulated in the first person, calling for the personal involvement of the interviewees.

On the whole, the comments were positive. Most of the individual stands on the statements were in agreement with them. Every interviewee presented also at least one justification for their view. About one third of the interviewees brought up also arguments with disagreements or reservations, even though none of them ended up taking a clearly opposing stand on either statement. Reserved comments were in most cases expressed as potential counter arguments towards the positive stands, or they were introduced as perceived opinions of some other actors.

When looking into the justifications the interviewees presented for their stands, it appeared that AFS were constructed as at least four kinds of objects of evaluation. Some of the comments focused on the production method related aspects of the AFS; others focused on end products (foodstuff); some saw AFS as business strategies, and still some others looked upon AFS as a part of the local economy (Figure 1).



These objects of evaluation – in other words attitude objects – partly overlap in the data. In any case they show a considerable qualitative variation among the comments. This variation demonstrates that AFS can be approached from many perspectives. The statements as such did not suggest these perspectives, but the interviewees constructed them through their comments.

In the first case AFS were evaluated according to what kind of products they produce. In quote 1 the respondent talks about the quality of organic products and thus constructs the product as an object of evaluation.

Quote 1.

"e2: Yeah, I think in the organic food pesticides have not been used in the production, and that is why organic products are safer to use. And my own experience is that they remain fresh for a longer time and they are tastier. They are a bit more expensive though, but then again the quality is good." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, e2)

Another way to give meaning to alternative food was to examine it as a mode of production. In these evaluations, it was common to argue what kinds of impacts organic or local food were perceived to have on the environment. The most common (and also expected) argument of this type was to form a positive attitude toward organic food production on the grounds that it causes less damage to the environment. Farmer v7 pondered the question like this:

Quote 2:

"v7: In my opinion, organic production is a good thing. And of course, I subscribe to that statement, because I'm an organic producer myself. And the reason why I consider it a good thing is because it is an attempt towards more environmentally-friendly food production. Of course it isn't always a success, and there are studies that claim that organic production may be even more harmful for the environment, ... but organic production is a good thing really, because its aspirations are to minimise the production inputs, as efficient nutrient production in the farm as possible, and, in general, efficient use of nutrients in the farming, and that is, of course, an advantage compared to conventional production. And another advantage, that may be even more important, is that no pesticides are used. Because of the diversity of nature, and water ecosystems, people's safety and farmer's occupational safety is a really big thing." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v7)

A third way to construct the attitude towards AFS was to discuss them as a business strategy. A common argument dealt with the toilsomeness or difficulties that accompany alternative food production. In quotation 3, the interviewee uses this approach to evaluate local food production:

Quote 3.

"v4: Well ... Of course, the first thing to come into a producer's mind is the marketing question.

interviewer: Yes.

v4: For us it is a good thing that this theme comes up. If these issues appear in the headlines, it just opens up markets for us. In our farm, for example in vegetable production, we have tailored our selection in view of the local market. The same thing goes for small bakery etc." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v4)

The fourth way in which to construct alternative food systems as an object of evaluation was to emphasise their impacts on the local community. The most common argument of this type in the material evaluated their economic impacts. For example, in quote 4 the food processor j2 discusses the potential of local food production to improve the economy in the region:

Quote 4.

"j2: Well, if we think about the welfare of the regions, the regions are better the more there are healthy business activities. At least here in Juva we have a lot of food production, and we members of the community should use the services of these businesses, because that's the way we'll secure the jobs, which of course is a crucial thing for the viability of our municipality." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, j2)

The most common way to support organic food production was to claim that organic production is environment friendly, and it does not risk the health of people living and working on farms. Also local food was associated with the protection of environment in some comments for the reason that it involves less transportation and hence decreases pollution. Despite a couple of sceptical comments the positive impacts of the AFS on environment and health seemed to be taken for granted among the interviewees. Also ethical issues were brought up in some of the comments that focused on the production method.

The negative aspects of alternative food systems related to the workloads of producers and/or processors. In a couple of interviews organic production was viewed to be laborious and difficult to master, not least because of the many regulations concerning production and processing. In a few interviews the local

food system was seen to demand very much effort in marketing and delivery. Both arguments are relevant also for the business aspect, of course. Only farmers expressed such reservations.

There were several comments suggesting that organic products as foodstuff are healthy, clean and secure. In the case of local food, freshness was also mentioned. In a couple of critical comments a particular producer or a group of producers were said to be responsible for delivering occasionally low-quality products. However, the overall tone was very positive regarding the quality of products.

The question of price connects food to business. There were clearly divergent comments concerning this issue. Two of the interviewed farmers made a comment that organic food is a positive thing for producers and processors as it offers an opportunity to get a higher price for the products. On the other hand, a merchant, a consumer, and a processor claimed that the high price pursued by farmers decreases the sales of organic products making the overall business less profitable. These opposing views form the most prominent demonstration of the controversial nature of the issue within the data generated by the first two statements.

In the case of local food, on the contrary, farmers as well as consumers and merchants viewed the lower price of local food as a strength and an opportunity for business. The lower price was seen to follow from the shortened market chain and lowered transportation costs, and therefore it would not decrease the profit of farmers. The local food system was also praised for giving opportunities to farmers to establish new markets. However, counter arguments were presented as well. For example, according to one interviewed farmer, the markets for local food are very limited, and according to another, only small farms are really able to benefit from them.

Among the comments on the first statement, there were two referring to AFS as a part of the local economy. One was given by a local politician, according to whom the organic food system had had many important positive effects on the local economy of Juva, as well as on the community's public image, over a decade. The interviewee was referring to the organic production in general. One of the merchants also referred to the positive impact of organic food in the local economy, but he was speaking explicitly and exclusively about local organic food.

When commenting positively on local food instead (the second statement), three out of four interviewees referred to its positive impacts on the local economy. The difference is striking. Only one politician, who considered the municipality as a whole due to his position as a mayor, associated organic food production as such with positive implications for the local economy. While the rest of the interviewees did not make this connection

with regard to organic food, most of them did connect local food with the local economy. Employment opportunities as well as tax incomes for the municipality, along with some other benefits associated with money circulating within the local area, were mentioned as justifications in this context.

In all, the comments on the first two statements constructed an attitude in which AFS were viewed as beneficial for the environment and health as well as for the quality of food. AFS were also considered to be good for the local economy, but most of the actors constructed this attitude in relation to local food, not in relation to organic food as such.

Farmers and other actors constructed opposing attitudes towards the organic food system as a business. Especially the higher prices pursued by the farmers came up as a controversial issue. The local food system was viewed as a positive business strategy in a more consensual way than the organic food system, both by the farmers and other local actors. The key argument in this context was that negative effects and constraints associated with the vertical food chain could be overcome by the local food system. However, there were also perceived constraints to the local food system, such as increased workload, and the limited size of local markets.

Empowering the Farmer?

The topic presented in the next two statements was farmers' personal control, i.e., the chance for farmers to control and influence the success of their business. Instead of approaching equity as a general question covering all actor relations within the food chain, we decided to focus on the position of farmers. This has been the most widely-discussed issue regarding the social sustainability of AFS in terms of distribution of control.

The comparison between AFS and conventional food systems was made explicit in the statements. The statements were:

3. In organic food production, the farmer has more chances to influence his/her own performance than in conventional production.
4. In local food production, the farmer has more chances to influence on his/her own performance than in conventional production.

The interviewees took two different kinds of stands on the statement: They either subscribed to the statement or rejected it. A further distinction could be made among those who took a critical stand: some claimed that farmers' prospects are in fact worse in

AFS than in the conventional system, and some that there is no difference between the different food systems in this respect.

There were two types of justifications given for the stand that did not see a difference in farmers' personal control between alternative and conventional food systems. The first was to claim that the farmer is in both cases at the mercy of external factors like vertical chains, market forces, and authorities that regulate production. In these comments the farmer was viewed as an actor with altogether very little personal control over his/her performance. The second was to argue that the individual farmer remains always responsible for his/her own success, and the chances to influence depend on his/her capabilities and attitudes regardless of the nature of the food system.

Only farmers presented the former comments, emphasising the missing personal control and external constraints. It is also worth noting that these comments were all expressed as a response to the third statement concerning the organic food. When, in the fourth statement, attention was drawn to local food, such pessimistic comments no longer arose.

In several comments the farmers' chances were viewed to be even worse in AFS than in conventional production. Top-down regulations or vertical markets were seen as problems of the organic food production. Difficulties in local marketing or distribution were mentioned as problems of local production.

When discussing farmers chances to have an influence as an organic producer, in quote 5 a farmer used this argument in support of his reserved stand. In his comments he recognised the demands that the organic mode of production and its regulations mean for a cattle farm:

Quote 5.

"v5: Well, if we think in a realistic way regarding this question, in conventional production there are no such limitations for farms, there are no limitations on animals and so on. In other words, one can increase the number of animals, if one specialises, for example, in beef production. In conventional production there is no requirement regarding the self-sufficiency of fodder, and no other such limitation, as long as one can spread the manure somewhere. And in principle it is fair enough if the animals are taken care of well, it leaves no room for complaints." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v5)

It was also possible to see that some aspects of local production make the alternative food chain more difficult for a farmer to control. An example of this is evident in quote 6 by a farmer.

Quote 6.

"v2: -- But then again, in this area the markets for local products are so small that the ceiling comes quickly. One cannot sell large volumes, even if a farmer could get a better price for his products. In the local markets there are no possibilities for bigger profits. There are two sides to this. Through the wholesalers one can sell greater volumes, but the price is, of course, lower." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v2)

However, the most prevalent comments in the data were those in favour of the statements. Almost all the interviewees took a positive stand, even though some of them also made critical or sceptical comments. Product quality was often seen as a factor enhancing farmers' chances to influence his/her own performance in organic and in local production. The most common argument was that farmers have a more equal negotiation position with their customers in the local food system than in the conventional one. Instead of one buyer in a vertical chain, the farmer has several channels of distribution in the local market arena, which increases his/her freedom of choices.

In quote 7 a farmer uses this kind of an argument:

Quote 7.

" v2: Well it could be, that if locally-produced food is marketed in the neighbouring area, the price can usually be kept higher. -- Well, of course there are more chances to have an influence, if one supplies many buyers or shops. If there is one wholesaler who buys all the products, the wholesaler dictates pretty much what the price is, and when ... one is supposed to sell the crop." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v2)

Curiously, in many of the comments supporting the third statement it was assumed that organic farming increases the farmers' personal control over performance, provided that organic products are marketed and distributed locally. This, again, demonstrates the crucial role that the mode of distribution has as a premise that shapes the construction of attitudes in the comments. Organic food is viewed positively in many respects, but the vertical distribution chain was thought to eliminate the positive effects the organic farming could otherwise have on the farmers' personal control. Acting locally was considered a solution to this problem.

For example, in quote 8 a consumer saw the horizontal food chain as a precondition for taking a positive stand. This stand was expressed in commenting on statement number three that dealt

with organic production, and explicit comments regarding the food chain were not asked in the statements:

Quote 8.

“a1: Well, if the production chain is such that the food goes, from the producer through a short chain to the buyer, the chances are of course, better. Conventional producers, those who produce for big corporations, have fewer possibilities to influence. But if we think of this kind of local food production and organic food, then it works, as long as the farmer knows what he / she is doing.” (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, a1)

A further observation pointing in the same direction concerns the role of the end product in the argumentation. When the end products were mentioned, they were usually presented to justify a positive stand on the statements. Organic products were considered more wholesome or safe, but so were local products, regardless of the production method. According to some interviewees, food is safe as long as it is produced in the local community.

The difference between the alternative and the conventional systems came up when modes of production and distribution were discussed. When the farmers’ means of control were attributed to the food chain, local or horizontal markets were seen as a precondition for the farmers’ increased possibilities to gain control over the system. This was taken up by the interviewees when they discussed both statements. The discussion on the statement that concerned local production revealed weak spots that cause difficulties also for local food. The limits of the local markets and laboriousness were arguments that were used to justify sceptical stands regarding the farmers’ chances of control. These seem to be the downsides of local food that are often referred to throughout the data.

An interesting observation is that the farmers seem to be quite critical about the alleged chances to influence in the AFS. Other actor groups also doubt the outcome, but the farmers were among the most critical. The farmers also justified their positions with credible arguments that contained detailed descriptions of the regulations of organic production in connection to statement 3, and the difficulties of local marketing in statement 4. It seemed that the farmers have the most disillusioned view of the impact of the AFS on the farmers’ power position.

Equity considerations on the distribution of benefits of AFS

With statements 5 and 6, we focused on the distribution of benefits in the organic and local food chains as compared to the conventional food chain. Earlier research literature (Vorley, 2002) has reported problems particularly in farmers’ positions in

the conventional, vertically structured food chain. Our research question in this connection was to study whether the distribution of benefits is perceived as more equitable in the AFS than in the conventional food system according to different actors in Juva.

The statements we asked the interviewees to comment on were:

5. In organic production, the distribution of profits is no more equitable than in conventional production.
6. In local food production, the distribution of profits is no more equitable than in conventional production.

The respondents' views on the two statements can be divided into three categories according to what kind of a comparative evaluation they show. First, there were views that valued alternative food systems as more equitable than the conventional production and food system; second, there were stands that valued them as less than the conventional system, and third, there were views that saw no difference between the food systems.

Only a few actors considered alternative food systems more equitable when organic production was concerned, while the majority presented this view when the discussion turned to local production.

It appeared rare to consider the organic food chain as more fair than the conventional one. Just one farmer was of that opinion on the grounds that farmers get higher prices for organic products than for conventional ones. In all other comments respondents made either an implicit or explicit assumption that organic production also implies local processing and/or sales, in other words, the horizontal food chain, which makes it, at least potentially, more fair towards the farmer. This kind of a spontaneous assumption regarding local processing can be seen clearly in a consumer's quote 9:

Quote 9.

"a1: That must be related to processing, I guess. The question is who is the one that processes. Small producers, for example typically a honey producer or an organic grain producer has a lot of processing involved at the producer level. [Yes] So in that way the profit goes more to the production level [Yes] up to the primary producer. [Just so] But if it is of large scale, like Felix organic ketchup, I do not believe that in that case the distribution would be any more equitable. So it is only a matter of the scale of activities." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, a1)

It is remarkable that the producer's own processing and/or marketing of his/her production is the argument that is used to justify

the perceived greater equity of the organic food system. In other words, the interviewee attributed the more equitable distribution of benefits to the horizontal food chain. By refereeing to organic ketchup at the end of the comment, the respondent made it clear that he would not consider the regular large scale organic food chain as such any more equitable than the conventional one.

When the discussion turned to local food production, the distribution of profits was considered frequently to be more equitable than in the conventional food chain. The majority of those interviewed (14/20) were of the view that local food production is in fact more just than conventional food production.

The view that local food is more equitable was justified with various different arguments. The locally-sold product's higher end price or the farmer's larger share of the profit of the product were the most common reasons to evaluate the local food chain as more just than the conventional food chain. The farmers' greater share of the profit was seen to follow from fewer transportation costs as in quote 10 or from the shorter chain (understood as lack of intermediaries, i.e., wholesale traders' coverage), as in quote 11.

Quote 10.

"v1: What suddenly occurs to me is that perhaps the local food is a bit more equitable then. At least with local food there are fewer of certain expenses, or some are transferred to the producer, for example the freight. At least in my case, it went so that I delivered the products by myself so there were no external costs related to freight. In this regard the producer can get a bit more..." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v1)

Quote 11.

"v3: Here the chain usually gets shorter, in other words, as the organic food can also be local food [Yes], so, in this case the chain is getting shorter in which case the farmer perhaps gets a better price for it " (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v3)

In addition, in some other justifications attention was paid to better product quality that allows higher pricing, and to consumers' willingness to pay more for products whose origin is known (quote 12).

Quote 12.

"a1: - - And on the other hand, people are ready to pay more for local food. It is the same as in the organic food, that people who know that it is either organic or local food, they do not care if the cost is even 50 % higher. The difference in price means nothing, especially if we talk about products that one buys once a month, or once a week - -" (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, a1)

Quote 13.

p2: -- As a consumer I would not mind if a local product would cost three times the production costs. So if, for example, if there were two cauliflowers in the shop, and on one it reads "From the Sappio farm, Juva", I would buy that one even if it was more expensive. Not the one without the label..." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, p2)

While most arguments dealt with the distribution of benefits (profits) of the local food, some actually referred to the distribution of negotiation power or the means of control as a source of perceived greater equity. In the latter case justifications were related to the possibility of negotiating with the traders face-to-face, or to the possibility of having an influence on how the products are marketed (quote 14).

Quote 14.

"v4: Well, in this case, I'd say that here is something that one can affect; there is a social side to it, even though I know that merchants have their own stress and they have to make a profit. But despite that, since we mix in the same circles and pay taxes to the same municipality, when we sit down and discuss (local food) the merchants also seem to accept that the interest of both parties must be considered. This means also the producer's interest. Therefore, I would in fact disagree with this statement." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v4)

The farmer's share of the profit, and its perceived fairness, was the predominant ground for valuing food systems. This interpretation of fairness applies even to many actors that are not farmers themselves. A way to sympathise with the position of the farmer is reflected in quote 15.

Quote 15.

"e3: Well, isn't it more fair anyway [yes] that there are fewer intermediaries in play, so that the money goes to whom it belongs in the end" (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, e3)

In other words, the above cited interviewee who represents an institutional kitchen, both a potential, and also an actual buyer of local food, constructed equity exactly in the same way as many of the farmers. The explicit view of the interviewee is that a larger share of the profit "belongs to the farmer". All in all, in the data several actors other than farmers seemed to assume that the position of the farmer is unfair in the conventional food chain. Likewise there was a common view that a local food system would improve the position of the farmer. Only a couple of

respondents considered the alternative food systems less equitable when local food production was considered, while some one third of the interviewed reflected this view when organic food was concerned.

The retail trade's high share of the price was the most widely stressed justification for the view that alternative food systems are less equitable than the conventional one. As in quote 16 it was often felt that the retail traders take an unfairly large share of the price of organic and local products and by doing so limit consumption with their high prices.

Quote 16.

"v6: Yeah, it isn't. In fact, it feels quite crazy, that traders take a higher margin for organic products, or they take more margin because it is organic. For example, when we sold meat, minced meat, the price that the shop paid us, was only one third of what the meat cost to the consumer. I really don't know the pricing basis, or how they count it. Maybe this kind of special product has a greater risk to remain unsold. But at least it won't increase the consumption of organic products, or any other products, if the margin is really high." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v6)

This type of an argument was frequently used by farmers who in most cases were able to draw on their personal experience in the organic food trade. A tension over margins between organic farmers and retail traders can easily be identified in the data and the level of retail margin is the most common ground for perceived injustice by the farmers. The notion of unfair treatment of farmers by traders is also known to third parties, such as consumers, although they do not necessarily always subscribe to it. It is notable that none of the actors who considered organic food production less equitable saw that they possessed any means of influencing the distribution of benefits in the food chain.

In another type of argument to support the claimed unfairness of organic food production reference was made to the regulations regarding organic production. For example, the control regulations applicable to organic food processing make it, in the opinion of the quoted food processor (quote 17), an unprofitable activity in which the real costs are not compensated by the somewhat higher grinding fees for the organic grain. From the point of view of the food processor this was considered an inequitable state of affairs:

Quote 17.

"j2: Well, it is also quite difficult to say. Let us think that I speak about our own activity. If we grind organic grain its' grinding is a bit more expensive than the regular, but it involves much more work for us, so I say that we wont get any more money. It may be

even less in the end, considering the excess work, as the difference (in grinding fees) is not very high. In our case we don't get any more; it is rather the other way round. I mean rather less, because there are the control fees and all you have to pay for the organics, so our net profit is less." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, j2)

About half of the interviewed actors concluded, sometimes implicitly, that there is effectively no difference in the food systems in terms of equity when organic production was discussed, and about one third when local production was discussed. There were actors in all the positions of the food chain who took this seemingly "indifferent" stand.

Stands that made no connection between organic production and equity were commonly justified with "the logic of the market system" that would treat all products in the same way. The market system was assumed to operate in the same way in any circumstances, and a free market must be procedurally equitable by definition. Quote 18 shows is an example of a typical comment in this category:

Quote: 18.

v2: " I do not think that there is any difference. The same market laws apply. That is, the buyers are the buyers whether they buy organic or conventional, or any. They purchase on the price that they can then add their own profit, and get things sold. So, there is no difference in the distribution of profits between the organic products, and the conventional – "(BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v2)

Besides referring to market logic, the argumentation behind a neutral stand on equity revealed counter arguments for those that criticised the "unfair margins of the retail trade level". Such arguments display understanding or justify the legitimacy of the higher than usual margins for organic products, as in quote 19:

Quote 19.

"v1: Well, it has been said that the retail trade takes too large a share from the price of organic products. [Mmm] I don't know whether it is so. It is true that the trader also has expenses: small quantities stay there on the shop counters. There is a lot of loss, the external quality is sometimes uneven as some deliver stuff that is below the market classification boundaries..." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v1)

The above actor, an organic farmer himself, identifies some reasons behind the behaviour of the retail trade, and shows a willingness to consider the position of the trader when conclud-

ing on the equity. He demonstrates a certain trust towards the retail trade, even though there is always a possibility for conflict of interest.

The interviewees representing the retail trade themselves came up with arguments to explain the behaviour of the trade as just or equally fair as in any trade, be it organic or conventional, as in quote 20:

Quote 20.

"k2: I do not think that it (organic food) is by any means being discriminated against. One should use the same marketing measures as for other products; it would not be rational to put extra price on it compared to some other product. If one wants to sell it the price has to be reasonable. At least I have come to this conclusion- -" (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, k2)

In quote 21, another trader is a bit more vocal in arguing that it is unfair to point the finger at the trader when it comes to high prices or the distribution of profits in organic trade when one could rather find the reason for high prices of organic goods in the producers themselves:

Quote 21.

"k1: I don't know exactly. Many questions come to mind. It is depending on the perspective from which one looks into it. Namely, according to my thirty years of experience in the retail trade, I can say that organic products are the least profitable business to the trade. And usually shopkeepers have kept organic products in their selection because of the image consumers associate with them. They have been available because of those values. And I feel, that at the production end of the chain, farmers have given them too much weight so that once they convert to organic, they can get a much higher price. In my opinion this is where something has gone wrong. The ideal situation would be if the price were the same for both organic and conventional products. There must not be a significant difference in price if one wants to increase volumes. It is not useful to explain the process by the costs of organic production, or smaller yields or other this kind of argument. The consumer just won't pay too much for organic products." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, k1)

In taking a seemingly neutral stand on the question of equity in the beginning, the trader gradually arrives at the conclusion that organic trade is not a lucrative business to the retail trade at all. It is in fact the farmers' expectations to earn more from organic products that turns unprofitable towards the farmers themselves

as the consumers are not seen as ready to pay for them and thus sales volume remains low.

When the discussion turned to local food, the “neutral” or reserved stands on equity were justified, besides the above discussed market logic argument, also with reference to extra work and other costs posed by local food processing and/or marketing. The price of local products is higher to compensate for the extra costs. This made some actors conclude that the distribution of profits in local food is no more equitable than it is in the conventional system, as discussed by a farmer-processor in quote 22:

Quote 22.

”j1: I would have the same opinion as before: local food does not come free, even if it is not, for example in our case, transported to the slaughter house. Yes, those expenses are out, but then we are running small volumes, and also relatively manually, as we cannot really afford any machinery investments so that we could automatise some stages of the work. And, I am not sure whether we even want to produce local food with a maximum efficiency, with huge machinery. [Mmm] - - So, the expenses will remain, meaning that if we get a better price for the pork when we produce it like this, even so when we do the final accounting we get the same amount as any pork producer. It won't change into anything more profitable.” (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, j1)

All in all, the most common interpretation of fairness in the distribution of benefits was to consider the farmer's share of the price even if this was not suggested in the given statements as such. Most of the arguments deal with the farmer's share, which shows that especially the farmer's position is widely seen as problematic as regards the distribution of benefits in the food system.

The fairness of the distribution of benefits in alternative food systems is a controversial question in the material. Whereas there appears a prevalent attitude that the local food system would seem more equitable than the conventional one, this does not go for organic food production as such. The organic food chain is considered more equitable, apart from one exception, on the condition that it is also localised. This reveals a significant aspect on the perception of equity in the food systems: the mode of distribution seems to be more relevant in this respect than the mode of production.

The price of the products at the retail stores, or the trader's share of the price, were the most common arguments according to which the equity of organic production was criticised. In this respect the local chain was often seen as better. However, the notion of unfairness or potential conflict of interests between

the farmers/processors and the traders was presented also in connection to local food.

The question of distribution of benefits and the distribution of the means of control showed to become deeply intertwined. Besides distribution of profits, many actors discuss their chances of having a say in decisions-making processes. In other words, the perception of fairness may follow as much from procedural involvement as from the desired distributional result. However, mere direct contacts between the producer and the retail trade levels did not result in a feeling of justice. It requires that both parties' interests be represented and taken into account. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the only farmer who was satisfied with the conventionally-organised organic food chain brought out elsewhere in the interview that there were ways for him to influence the pricing of his products.

Alternative food systems and the viability of local communities

With statements seven and eight we aimed to study how alternative food systems relate to the viability of local communities as viewed by the interviewed actors. The conventional and vertically organised food system has been seen to fail the communities that support it (Vorley, 2003; Ikerd, 2002; Flora, 1995). In conventional systems of food production the role of rural communities is often only the production of raw materials for the food processing industry. When large-scale, mechanised industrial farming requires ever less local labour, and the food-processing plants are situated outside the communities, this leads the local communities to become impoverished. Challenging this global trend, horizontal food systems have been seen to return the money or the sources of improved livelihood to the local communities. Our aim was to study whether the alternative systems are seen to impact Juva in the same way.

The statements the respondents were asked to comment on were:

7. Organic production enhances the viability of local communities.
8. Local production enhances the viability of local communities.

Both of the statements provoked two kinds of stands: those that agreed with them, and those that questioned their validity. The comments that supported the statements were clearly a majority in both of the statements, while only about half of them presented any reservations. None of the interviewees ended up clearly

opposing the statements; however the reservations are worth considering seriously.

Looking at the justifications for the positive stands on alternative food systems we can distinguish two broad types of concerns: economy and community. These are the prevailing ways to approach viability. It is important to notice, that no definition of viability was given in the statements as such, i.e. the actors constructed these meanings spontaneously. This kind of construction of AFS as an attitude object could also be seen in the first two statements, which indicates that the question of viability of local communities is especially relevant in the case of Juva.

The impact on the local economy was the most obvious reason for which the local and organic food productions were seen to have positive consequences for the viability of local communities. In the comments concerning the economic state of the local community, the respondents' reasoning related the economic performance of the farms or companies producing, processing or selling local and organic food. Another important concern was employment. Organic farms were often seen as better for local employment since they require more labour than the ordinary farms. As a response to the statement dealing with local food production (and once in a statement related to organic food) defending local use and circulation of money was an important ground for a supportive stand. This kind of argument was used, for instance, in v7's comments (quote 23):

Quote 23.

"v7: - - And of course, it (the local production) can enhance (the viability of local communities) so that money doesn't flow outside the community. It doesn't go to the wholesale firms in the south or in the investors' pockets or to the transport firms, but it continues to circulate in the village. Thus, it can well enhance." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v7)

Here the interviewed actor saw that local production enhances viability if it helps to keep the money spent in the local area within the local community. This notion suggests that the point of local production is the enhancement of the local economy. This sort of defence of the local community in terms of economy is one of the most repeated attitude objects according to which alternative food production is evaluated, (even in other parts of the interview). This emphasis resembles so-called 'defensive localism' discussed in the research literature (e.g. Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003). On the other hand, it may indicate that the lack of sources of livelihood and related impoverishment of the community is considered an acute problem in Juva, and the (re)localisation of the food system is expected to alleviate the problem.

The second major topic of argumentation was social interaction, cooperation or networks within the community. About half of the interviewed actors saw this as a positive consequence of alternative food systems in both of the statements. In other words, both organic mode of production and local distribution can be seen to increase social interaction or cooperation among the actors. In the organic mode of production the exchange of experiences and information among farmers was seen to be more common than in conventional production. On the other hand, local marketing or distribution of food was seen to increase the interaction between farmers and consumers i.e. the members of the local community. Both alternatives can be seen to build up social networks in the communities and thus help create social capital.

In a farmer interview (quote 24) increased cooperation was used to justify a positive opinion:

Quote 24.

"v2: Well, of course it has been enhanced. We have here in the village area six or seven farms, of which at least five are organic. It has enhanced the community spirit in our village because we have field exchange and a contract for manure delivery with one farm. I don't know whether there would be this kind of cooperation if we did not have organic production, the joint use of machinery and all that.

--

v2: Well, here in the village we mix more often with these neighbours, particularly with those who have a hand in organic farming; we do communal activities, also activities that have nothing to do with farming." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v2)

Above the interviewee associates improved cooperation between farmers and organic mode of production with each other – cooperation seems to be the consequence of organic production. In v2's point of view the cooperation within the community goes beyond farming. Thus, organic farming seems to greatly enhance viability.

In addition to these two types of arguments, the image of Juva municipality as a community famous for its organic production, as well as the role of some organisations related to organic production were also emphasised. The local resource of argumentation is visible in these comments.

Reservations were also presented with regard to this type of argument. In these comments the actors discussed some conditions under which these positive impacts may not apply. In some cases the productivity of local or organic farms or companies was

questioned, with consequences to economic viability of local communities. Other similar arguments used to justify sceptical stands questioned the consumers' willingness to pay extra for alternative products. The third kind of reservation dealt with different lines of production in agriculture, whereby some lines were not seen as beneficial as the other.

In the following a farmer's typical reservations were expressed about the potential employment impact of organic farming (quote 25):

Quote 25.

"v7: But I don't see that in organic production as such. If, for example, there is no demand for organic products, or if only some organic grain is produced, or on an organic dairy farm, it doesn't employ any more people than a conventional dairy farm. I don't see the difference in the viability of local communities. ... How would it enhance any more than if there was a vital conventional farm in its place". (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v7)

In quote 11 the interviewed farmer made a distinction concerning different lines of production. Even though he sees that organic production may generally enhance the viability of a community, this does not apply to milk or grain production.

Also arguments concerning social interaction received counter-arguments in the data. These, too, were explanations of conditions under which social interaction or network forming may not follow from alternative food production. For example, a small scale was presented as a necessary precondition for increased social interaction, or organic producers' willingness to participate in cooperative activities would be challenged.

An interesting (but human) reservation to the interaction-argument was presented by one of the interviewed food processors. In her comments on the statement dealing with local production the processor questioned its impact on social cohesion. The community might not always be supportive of the work of the entrepreneur, but rather envy him or her (quote 26). These comments are interesting also because the interviewee draws on her personal experience, a resource of argumentation.

Quote 26.

"j3: But we should be able to cooperate more, and to appreciate our own work more. In my opinion many lack the ability to appreciate their own work, to be proud of our own products, and if they are really good, be happy about it. There is a problem that one can't be very happy about one's success, because then envy starts to appear.

interviewer: Is it a real problem then?

j3: Well, yes it is. At least we have experienced that, especially if you have been publicised in the newspapers, some neighbours don't seem to know you anymore. I'd say that one should be happy about one's success, but it must happen somewhere else than here." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, j3)

According to j3, success can provoke envious feelings in the neighbourhood. The same kind of argument was used in the only comment in which alternative food production was seen to have potentially negative impacts on the viability of communities. A farmer argued that the controversial nature of organic production may in fact rather divide the community into those for and against it, rather than unite it as one with trust and social capital (quote 27).

Quote 27.

"v1: - - On the other hand it (organic production) can a bit diminish it (the viability), because some people on the conventional side are so totally against the organic production. And they may not even be (conventional) farmers. At least here in Juva, some are against organic production, so it can even diminish it so that the people as split [int: into two groups] into the organic people and the ordinary people." (BERAS WP-4 interviews 2004, v1)

Despite the above criticism, on the whole the attitudes towards AFS' possibilities to enhance viability of local communities were very positive. Even the farmer (v1) who presented the above comment did not take a clearly negative stand, but pondered the different aspects. All other reserved comments were reservations about some assumed positive impacts.

Local and organic production were seen to improve the employment and economic situation on the local scale thus enhancing viability. In addition to this, AFS were seen to increase local interaction in various ways, thus enhancing the accumulation of social capital. The consequences of local food seem to be clearly better than those of conventional.

On the other hand, there were also perceived threats to the positive consequences. Alternative food production was considered to be an ambiguous business strategy – the local markets in the Juva region were regarded as small or the consumers were indifferent about the viability by means of personal consumption choices. The enhancement of local interaction might be slowed down by opposition or envious feelings among the community members. Sometimes interaction was seen to increase only within a small scale activity, which is a constraint to the growth of business. Even though AFS on the whole could be considered more sustainable than conventional production, the risks or threats are

worth considering. They indicate learning challenges that have yet to be met in order to make AFS socially more sustainable.

Conclusions

All in all, both the alternative mode of production (organic food) and alternative chain of distribution (local food) have better prospects regarding social sustainability than the conventional food systems, according to the food system actors in Juva. If we look at all the data, most of the discussion on AFS was positive with regard to the dimensions of social sustainability chosen for the case study. The AFS are associated with environmentally-friendly production, improved safety of farmers' living and working conditions, more wholesome or safer food, more successful business strategies or improved welfare of the local communities in terms of economic or social viability. In other words, these perceived consequences of alternative production and/or distribution are grounds for the positive attitudes towards alternative food systems.

The principally positive argumentation is not surprising – all of the interviewed actors in this study are in one way or the other involved in organic or local food systems. To get a fuller picture of the potential contrast between attitudes it would have been interesting if actors representing only the conventional food systems were interviewed. However, since the aim was to increase understanding on the AFS the data and approach chosen in this study are relevant, the interviewed actors have experience in these systems. Also the argumentation tells about the relevance of the data: the interviewees draw often from their own experiences which is a credible rhetorical resource, and they also comment on the subjects at different levels and as different objects of evaluation. The material reveals not only a repetition of similar isolated arguments, but also some consistent patterns of argumentation. All things considered, the material can be argued to give a credible picture of the socially sustainable view of organic and local food production.

Despite the overall positive attitudes towards alternative food systems, also some criticism and reservations were presented throughout the data. When assessed critically the AFS were characteristically viewed as business strategies, not as end products. Organic production was blamed for its strict regulations, while the viability of local food production as a business strategy was questioned for its labour intensiveness as a result of farmers' wider roles in marketing and/or processing. In addition, the limited size of markets for local food was identified as a constraint. A point was also made that alternative food production can turn into a socially dividing factor in the community, as enviousness can emerge towards those active in the local production, processing

and marketing, and from the general phenomenon that organic production in particular divides the people into those for and against it.

Notwithstanding the promising implications of the AFS in terms of social sustainability, the AFS is not a panacea to improved social sustainability. The identified limitations of the AFS are particularly valid views from inside as they come from actors who draw from their personal experience and have a generally positive attitude towards AFS. The perceived limitations and bottlenecks translate into challenges to be duly managed if promoting AFS as strategies for environmentally and socially sustainable development. Similar conclusions were drawn by Kakriainen (2004, pp. 39) in a report related to the practical initiatives for the alternative food systems of the BERAS project.

Some interesting observations can also be made regarding the differences in perceptions concerning organic and local food production. The evaluation of local food production was always a bit more positive than the evaluation of organic food production. At several points local distribution was also set as a precondition for taking a positive stand on organic food production. This was the case, for example, in the merchant's comments on statement 1 where he associates the local and organic food as one object of a positive evaluation. Another example of this was in the discussion regarding statement three where several actors thought that a short (horizontal) distribution chain would increase the organic farmers' possibilities to influence their own performance. Further, this pattern appears consistently in connection to statement number six where the most common way to construct a positive attitude towards organic production, to consider it more fair than conventional production, was to assume that its mode of distribution is horizontal. In other words, attention was paid to the mode of distribution instead of the primary production. We also noted that conflicts among the different actor groups seem to be a bit rarer within the local than in the organic food chain.

The difference between local and organic production demonstrates the significance of the mode of distribution. Many of the critical assessments of organic production concern actually the distribution channel that does not have much to do with the actual production. If the perceptions of restrictive regulations of organic production are set aside, the main argument used in support of reserved or negative stands related to the vertical food chain. The farmer's position in the vertical food system was considered especially difficult. This pattern is most clearly visible in the question related to the distribution of benefits where only one actor attributed a positive assessment of the distribution of benefits to the vertical food chain. The most common suggestion towards a more equitable situation was localisation. The difficult

and inequitable position of the farmer in the vertical food chain appears to be a common notion among the actors and this to a large extent explains why local food in turn provokes such positive views.

Another difference concerns the notions of the viability of local communities. The most common argument according to which the local food was evaluated positively was to assume that it protects the rural community from flaws caused by the centralising food system. The local food chain was expected to offer more jobs and welfare to the rural communities which, in the conventional food system, would provide just raw materials for a processing industry outside the community. In comparison, the organic mode of production as such was rarely seen to improve the economic conditions of the community. However, when the economic impacts were discussed in connection to organic food, these were attributed to Juva's positive image as a pioneering municipality in organic production.

An important reason to support local food production was to assume that it protects money from flowing outside the community. The point here was to defend the viability of the local community. This idea resembles the notion of *defensive localism* by Hinrichs (2003) in her study on local food initiatives in Iowa.. When the promotion of locally-produced food turns into defensive localism it seems to function as an exclusive mechanism that is used to mark social divisions and to produce antagonism and opposition towards "outsiders" and their demands, as well as create cohesion and solidarity within the in-group (Hinrichs, 2003, pp. 6–7). Protecting the local community or defensive localism as a point of local food system is also noticed elsewhere. Winter (2003) in his study on rural localities in England and Wales has made observations similar to those that appear in the Juva material. In a way, defensive localism is present also in the case of Juva, there seems to be strong solidarity among the members of the community and the vertical chain outside the community is seen as a threat, at least in economic terms. But when we look at the situation of the vertical chain, the rural community may in fact be an underdog that actually needs protection from the vertical integration and centralisation of the food system. Looked in this way, what may seem as "local patriotism" in one context may, in another context, appear as empowerment of the abused. Also Marsden & Smith (2004, pp. 6) have made similar observations about the local scale action improving the condition of impoverished rural communities.

While the actors' defensive solidarity in Juva should not be interpreted as narrow-minded defensive localism in the sense of Hinrichs, it is yet noteworthy that the alternative food systems were occasionally seen as sources of social divisions also in our

data. According to two respondents, involvement in the alternative food systems could provoke envy in the neighbourhood and division into opposing groups, either for or against the AFS. This should be counted as a risk which in the worst case may lead into actual, narrow-minded defensive localism.

Finally, one can summarise the differences between the actor positions in the study. All of the actors in the study were interviewed as representatives of certain positions, i.e., either as farmers, processors, merchants, public kitchen matrons, local politicians or consumers. The differences in attitude construction are relatively modest between the different actor groups. On the contrary, the interviewees seem to be quite a homogenous sample. The coherence of the argumentation may also indicate small spatial and social distances between the different levels of the food chain in Juva. Also the solidarity between the actor-groups (for example the matrons' and the customers' willingness to support the local farmers) suggests this. Nevertheless, there are still some differences between the actor groups. First of all, the farmers seemed to be the most pessimistic group regarding their own power position in the food systems. At some points, as when discussing the farmers' chances to influence their own performance in organic production, this pessimism suggested that farmers have faced real problems, particularly as the general attitude towards alternative production was positive among the farmers. The view that the farmers in general have few chances to influence their own performance – regardless of the type of food system – was conveyed solely by farmers. This was the only clearly positionally-determined stand. The second positional feature in the argumentation was that the matrons were more concerned about the quality of the products, which is by no means a surprise, although respondents of other positions also used product arguments.

Another interesting finding related to the actor position was a conflict of interest between the farmers or processors on one hand, and the merchants on the other. The higher price of organic products was considered a positive factor among the farmers, but among the merchants the extra price of organic food was considered an obstacle to expanding organic business – what was considered an opportunity by the farmer, a bottleneck by the merchant. The same conflict of interest was present in the question of equitable distribution of benefits. Many of the farmers or processors accused the merchants of reaping unfair benefits at the cost of the organic farmers, while the merchants defended themselves from such accusations, even though the respondents were not aware of each other's comments. This indicates that these contrasting positions on the question of equity are part of a commonly-shared discourse among the food chain actors in

the Juva community. In this sense AFS can also be seen to cause some social division within the local community.

The mode of distribution seems to explain many of the conflicts of interest. The conflict was brought out more often when discussing organic production which is usually distributed in the vertical food chain. Also, the feeling of injustice was more often expressed in the context of the conventional rather than the local chain. In other words, when the local food chain was discussed the conflicts and feelings related to unfairness did not come up so often, even though they were occasionally present also in the context of local food production. The actors' chances to have an influence on the food system seem to be a key to understanding the conflict between actor groups. If the actor felt that there were some chances to influence the distribution process, the actual distribution was never considered unfair. The same would apply the other way round, if the respondents felt that the distribution of benefits was unfair, he/she saw no chances to influence the processes such as how and at what price his/her products were being sold to the final customer. The intertwined nature of the distribution of benefits and the distribution of the means of control showed in the discussions concerning horizontal and vertical chains. Most of the mechanisms that the actors felt can be used to improve the means of influence, and thus the feeling of justice, can be attributed to the short (horizontal) distribution chain. For example, the farmer's multiple marketing channels or possibility to negotiate with the buyer face-to-face were seen as such empowering processes. In both cases an actor has a say about what happens to the product after it leaves the field or the processing plant. Although personal contacts between the producer, the trader and the consumer were not always seen as equitable, both of the mentioned require a horizontal chain of distribution. This suggests that despite the counter arguments at the local level, there are better possibilities to resolve conflicts in a fair and sustainable manner in the horizontal system, provided that all parties' interests are taken into account.

References

- Allen, P 1999. Reweaving the food security net: Mediating entitlement and entrepreneurship. *Agriculture and human values* 16: , 117-129.
- Beuss, C. E. & Dunlapp, R. E. 1990. Conventional versus Alternative Agriculture: The paradigmatic Roots of the Debate. *Rural Sociology* 55:4. 590-616.
- Billig, M. 1996. *Arguing and thinking: a rhetorical approach to social psychology*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- Flora, C.F. 1995 *Social Capital and Sustainability: Agriculture and Communities in the Great Plains and Corn Belt*. *Research in Rural Sociology and Development. A Research Annual* 6: 227-246.
- Hinrichs, C. 2003. The practice and politics of food system localization. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 19:1. 33-45.
- Ikerd, J. 2002. Sustainable Farming: Reconnecting with Consumers. http://www.ssu.missouri.edu/faculty/jikerd/papers/HawaiiSA.html#_ftn1 (accessed 15-Mar-2004).
- Kakriainen, S. 2004, Juva, Finland – Developing local food with common goals and projects. In Seppänen, L. (ed): *Local and organic food and farming around Baltic Sea*. *Ekologiskt Lantbruk/Ecological Agriculture* 40. CUL, Uppsala. 27-44.
- Marsden, T. & Smith E. 2004, *Ecological entrepreneurship: sustainable development in local communities through quality food production and local branding*. *Geoforum*. In print.
- Reganold, J.P., Glover, J.D., Andrews, P. & Hinman H.R., 2001. Sustainability of three apple production systems. *Nature*. 410: 926-930.
- Saunders, F. 2004. The Sustainability and Social Equity of Alternative Agri-food Systems. *Maaseudun uusi aika*. 12:4, 57-70.
- Scialabba, N. & Hattam, C., 2002. *Organic agriculture, environment and food security*. *Environment and Natural Resources Series*. UNEP.
- Seppänen, L 2004. Introduction. In Seppänen, Laura (ed.): *Local and organic food and farming around Baltic Sea*. *Ekologiskt Lantbruk/Ecological Agriculture* 40. CUL, Uppsala.
- Vesala, K. M. & Rantanen, T. (1999). *Pelkkä puhe ei riitä. Viljelijän yrittäjäidentiteetin rakentumisen sosiaalipsykologisia ehtoja*. [Mere Talk Is Not Enough. Social Psychological Conditions for Constructing Entrepreneurial Identity Among Farmers] Helsinki: Yliopistopaino
- Winter M., 2003 *Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism*. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 19: 23-32.
- Vorley B. 2003 *Briefing paper: Producers Module Benchmarking and tracking supermarkets terms of trade with primary producers*. *Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Programme, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)*