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alternative food networks on the dominant food system

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Abstract (English)

Alternative food networks (AFNs) emerged in the 1990s as a reaction to the unsustainability of conventional farming and the disconnection of consumers from food production. Over the years, AFNs developed around the promotion of small-scale and sustainable agriculture, organic production and consumption, long-term producer-consumer relationships, and fair prices. Nowadays, AFNs are common in many countries around the world and receive a lot of academic attention, especially from researchers in the United States and Europe. Nevertheless, most of the European research on AFNs is concentrated on Northern, Western and Southern European countries, leaving Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) behind.

For this reason, the present thesis aims to explore the development of AFNs in Bulgaria during the corporate food regime, as introduced by the food regime theory, and more specifically, the strategies Bulgarian AFNs use to influence the conventional food system, and the difficulties they face in their work. After conducting a literature review on the development of the Bulgarian agricultural sector during the corporate food regime, as well as seven interviews with members of four prominent Bulgarian AFNs, the findings showed that Bulgarian AFNs employ a variety of strategies to change the mainstream food system. Some AFNs work directly with state representatives by holding meetings with them, as well as participating in the writing of numerous national plans for development of agriculture in Bulgaria. Some work within the traditional food system, creating new food channels where producers can sell their products and consumers can buy directly from them, as well as where people can grow their own products. Others try to engage civil society in initiatives aimed at developing sustainable and organic agricultural practices in Bulgaria. All AFNs included in the research face numerous challenges in their work, especially when working with state officials. Despite this, AFNs in Bulgaria have a significant impact on the country's corporate food regime, either by challenging it or working within it. This implies that Bulgarian AFNs have the potential to change the traditional food system in the country.

Keywords: Food regime theory, Corporate food regime, Alternative food networks, Central and Eastern Europe, Bulgaria

Abstract (Deutsch)

Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) entstanden in den 1990er Jahren als Reaktion auf die mangelnde Nachhaltigkeit der konventionellen Landwirtschaft und die Trennung der VerbraucherInnen von der Lebensmittelproduktion. Im Laufe der Jahre entwickelten sich AFNs zur Förderung einer kleinbäuerlichen und nachhaltigen Landwirtschaft, der ökologischen Produktion und des ökologischen Verbrauchs sowie langfristiger Beziehungen zwischen ErzeugerInnen und VerbraucherInnen und fairer Preise. Heutzutage sind AFNs in vielen Ländern der Welt verbreitet und erhalten zunehmend akademische Aufmerksamkeit, insbesondere von ForscherInnen in den USA und in Europa. Dennoch konzentriert sich der größte Teil der europäischen AFNs-Forschung auf nord-, west- und südeuropäische Länder, wobei Mittel- und Osteuropa vernachlässigt werden.

Aus diesem Grund zielt die vorliegende Arbeit darauf ab, die Entwicklung von AFNs in Bulgarien während des corporate food regime zu untersuchen, wie es durch die food regime theory eingeführt wurde. Insbesondere stehen hierbei die Strategien im Fokus, mit denen bulgarische AFNs das konventionelle Lebensmittelsystem beeinflussen, ebenso die Schwierigkeiten, mit denen sie bei ihrer Arbeit konfrontiert sind. Nach einer Literaturrecherche zur Entwicklung des bulgarischen Agrarsektors während des corporate food regime sowie sieben Interviews mit MitgliederInnen von vier prominenten bulgarischen AFNs zeigten die Ergebnisse, dass bulgarische AFNs verschiedene Strategien zur Veränderung des traditionellen Lebensmittelsystems anwenden. Einige von ihnen arbeiten direkt mit VertreterInnen des Staates zusammen, halten Treffen mit ihnen ab und beteiligen sich an der Ausarbeitung nationaler Pläne für die Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft in Bulgarien. Manche arbeiten innerhalb des konventionellen Lebensmittelsystems und schaffen neue Lebensmittelkanäle, in denen ProduzentInnen ihre eigenen Produkte anbauen und direkt an die VerbraucherInnen verkaufen können. Andere versuchen, die Zivilgesellschaft durch Initiativen zur Entwicklung nachhaltiger und ökologischer Landwirtschaftspraktiken in Bulgarien einzubeziehen. Alle in die Forschung einbezogenen AFNs stehen vor zahlreichen Herausforderungen, insbesondere bei der Arbeit mit StaatsbeamtenInnen. Trotzdem haben AFNs in Bulgarien einen erheblichen Einfluss auf das corporate food regime des Landes, indem sie es

entweder in Frage stellen oder ein Teil desselben sind. Dies impliziert, dass bulgarische AFNs das Potenzial haben, das traditionelle Nahrungsmittelsystem im Land zu verändern.

Schlagwörter: Food regime theory, Corporate food regime, Alternative food networks, Mittel- und Osteuropa, Bulgarien

Table of contents

List of Abbreviations	ix
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Background of the study.....	2
1.2. Research problem	4
1.3. Research questions.....	5
1.4. Methodological approach	5
1.5. Structure of the thesis	6
2. Theoretical framework	8
2.1. Food regime theory	8
2.1.1. First food regime	11
2.1.2. Second food regime	11
2.1.3. Third food regime	13
2.2. Alternative food networks (AFNs).....	16
2.2.1. Definition of AFNs	17
2.2.2. Examples of AFNs	18
2.2.2.1. Community-supported agriculture (CSA)	18
2.2.2.2. Community gardens.....	20
2.2.2.3. Farmers' markets.....	21
2.2.3. Previous research on AFNs and approaches to analyzing them	21
2.2.3.1. AFNs in North America and Western, Northern and Southern Europe	22
2.2.3.2. AFNs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)	28
3. Methodology	32
3.1. Literature review and expert interviews	32
3.2. Data analysis: Qualitative content analysis by Mayring	34
4. Case study	37
4.1. Bulgaria in the second food regime	37
4.2. Bulgaria in the corporate food regime	38
4.2.1. Transition from socialism to capitalism.....	38
4.2.2. Accession to the European Union	40
4.2.3. Bulgarian organic agriculture (OA)	42
4.3. AFNs in Bulgaria	45
4.3.1. Bioselena	45

4.3.1.1. Strategies.....	46
4.3.1.2. Challenges.....	51
4.3.1.3. Warrior, Builder, or Weaver?	54
4.3.2. For the Earth	55
4.3.2.1. Strategies.....	55
4.3.2.2. Challenges.....	60
4.3.2.3. Warrior, Builder, or Weaver?	61
4.3.3. Hrankoop	62
4.3.3.1. Strategies.....	63
4.3.3.2. Challenges.....	66
4.3.3.3. Warrior, Builder or Weaver?	70
4.3.4. Root	71
4.3.4.1. Strategies.....	71
4.3.4.2. Challenges.....	73
4.3.4.3. Warrior, Builder or Weaver?	75
4.3.5. Integrating Warrior, Builder, and Weaver Work.....	75
5. Discussion	77
6. Conclusion	83
References	84
Appendix	90

Table of tables

Table 1.....	26
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List of Abbreviations

AFNs - Alternative Food Networks

SFSCs - Short Food Supply Chains

BCP - Bulgarian Communist Party

BSP - Bulgarian Socialist Party

CAP - Common Agricultural Policy

CEE - Central and Eastern Europe

CSA - Community-supported Agriculture

EC – European Commission

GATT - General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GMOs - Genetically Modified Organisms

IMF - International Monetary Fund

IFOAM - International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

OA – Organic Agriculture

ITO - International Trade Organization

TNCs – Transnational Corporations

UDF - Union of Democratic Forces

UN - United Nations

WTO - World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

Agriculture plays an important role in capitalist, state, and societal relations, as most of the world's population today depends on agriculture for survival. The agricultural sector is central for many countries and its performance strongly influences their overall development. Over the years, the world's agricultural sector has often been transformed by the emergence of new technologies and machinery, with some countries being more affected by these changes than others. When looking at the development of the agricultural sector in the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in recent years, there is evidence of strong influence from the socialist era. Due to the socialist regimes in the CEE countries, the development of the agricultural sector was very different from that of other European countries, mainly because of the collectivization of individual farms, i.e., their integration into state-controlled ones. After the fall of socialism and the transition to capitalism in 1989/90, CEE countries entered the global economy and local food producers had to compete with foreign ones. As many of them were unable to compete in the new market economy, they turned to alternative networks of food production and consumption, known in the literature as AFNs.

AFNs emerged in the 1990s as a response to the unsustainable nature of industrial agriculture, the consumers' detachment from food production, and the hardships faced by small farmers due to the significant influence of economic liberalism and free-market capitalism on agricultural policies. Over the years, AFNs developed around the promotion of food self-sufficiency, fair prices, long-term producer-consumer relationships, food security and sovereignty, and small-scale farming, as well as the production of high-quality local and organic foods and support for local farmers through various initiatives. AFNs are now common in many countries around the world and receive great academic attention, particularly from researchers in the United States and Europe. Nonetheless, most of the European studies on AFNs address Western, Northern and Southern European countries, while little research is conducted regarding CEE countries.

For this reason, the current thesis aims to explore the development of AFNs in Bulgaria, an Eastern European country that underwent significant transformations in its agricultural sector after the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989/90 and after

the country's accession to the European Union in 2007. The thesis seeks to reveal their impact on the country's dominant food system, thus contributing to a better understanding of the agricultural sector in CEE countries and their development dynamics.

This chapter provides an introduction to the study, first discussing the background of the study, followed by the research problem, the research questions, and the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background of the study

Agriculture plays a major role in capitalist, state, and societal relations, as pointed by Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael in the most prominent work on agriculture in capitalism - *Agriculture and the State System. The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to present*, published in 1989. In their work, Friedmann and McMichael defined two food regimes of capital transformation since 1870. In the so-called first food regime (1870-1914), Britain created an "empire of free trade" (McMichael, 2013, p. 26) through agricultural imports from settler colonies. In the second food regime (1950-1970), the United States transformed agriculture around the world by sending food provisions to the newly-formed Third World countries, which needed cheap products to boost their industrialization processes (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). The concept of the third food regime emerged later (see McMichael, 1992) and though researchers argue whether the regime is fully consolidated or is still being formed, it is clear that the third food regime is different from the first two, mainly in that there is no international currency which controls trade, as in the previous two regimes - the British gold standard and the US dollar. The third food regime is associated with processes of growing influence of transnational companies; transformation of producer-consumer relations worldwide; globalization and economic liberalization through international organizations such as the WTO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank; and market-oriented agricultural policies.

At the same time, the third food regime is linked to food networks and initiatives that oppose the globalized character of agriculture and trade and point to their unsustainability and harmful effects to people and the climate. As many AFNs and scientists claim, the negative impact of the globalization of agriculture on the

climate is mainly related to the rapid burning of fossil fuels, leading to high amounts of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which cause high temperatures and overheating of the planet. The harmful consequences for people, in turn, are particularly related to the emergence of the WTO and the entry into force of its Agreement on Agriculture in 1995, which made states lose their protectionist power over local production leading to the disempowerment of local producers but also their mobilization against big international agribusinesses. Farmers around the world created various AFNs dedicated to the restructuring of agriculture and markets, such as the international food networks Fair Trade, Slow Food, and La Vía Campesina, as well as local food initiatives such as community gardens, community-supported agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, online grocers, and so forth. Through these networks, they emphasized the importance of fair prices; food quality, security and sovereignty; and the benefits of small-scale farming, consumer activism, and good producer-consumer relations. McMichael (2005, p. 275) called this period of major economic transformations "corporate food regime" due to the impact of large agro-food corporations on agriculture around the world.

Bulgaria is one of the countries that, along with other CEE countries, has seen the emergence of AFNs as a result of numerous economic changes over the years. Following the fall of the socialist regime, the country experienced many political and economic changes, which had a significant impact on the agricultural sector. The two most significant transitions took place right after the collapse of the socialist system in 1989/90 and after the country's accession to the European Union in 2007. Due to the stiff competition from more developed European economies, as well as the growing worldwide popularity of sustainable agricultural practices and organic farming, many Bulgarians started looking for alternative means of production and consumption. Food self-provisioning and ecological ways of living became popular among both producers and consumers in Bulgaria, which led to the creation of various AFNs. Nowadays, Bulgarian AFNs are concerned with encouraging alternative methods of agricultural production, which seek to be more eco-friendly and healthier, as well as to support local production.

1.2. Research problem

In general, most European research on AFNs focuses on the countries of Western, Northern, and Southern Europe, with only a small proportion examining AFNs in CEE (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019). Despite the relatively few studies considering their emergence (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019, p. 583), there are various AFNs in CEE countries such as food cooperatives, the Slow Food movement, CSA, and food delivery initiatives, etc. (Goszczyński, 2019, p. 276). The general characteristics of AFNs in CEE are largely related to their common past and present, namely the collectivization of farms as an attempt to reproduce the Soviet agricultural model during the socialist regime; as well as the low average income and low consumption of high quality products in the period after 1989/90 (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019). After the fall of socialism, the markets of the CEE countries integrated into the world economy, which drastically altered their domestic sectors, including agriculture. When the CEE countries opened their economies to the world and international products entered their markets, local producers began to face many challenges because they had to compete with large agribusinesses and corporations. This made them look for alternative food practices to provide them with secure markets.

AFNs in CEE usually differ from their Western, Northern, and Southern European and American counterparts. They do imitate them to a large extent, (Bilewicz, 2020, p. 765) but they do not replicate them as they are region-specific initiatives (Goszczyński, 2019, p. 276) with their own history, culture and development patterns. Various authors noted that despite the similarities, alternative food practices in CEE are generally perceived differently from Western, Northern, and Southern European ones (see e.g., Smith & Jehlička, 2013; Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019; Sovová & Veen, 2020). They are usually regarded as backward and embarrassing and are associated with poverty (Smith & Jehlička, 2013; Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019). In contrast, Western, Northern, and Southern European AFNs are distinguished by their progressiveness and modernity. This indicates that AFNs in CEE are not only an underresearched phenomenon, but also that they are perceived differently from other similar initiatives in the world, particularly other European countries. The former is true for Bulgaria - despite the increase in the number of AFNs over the years, research on AFNs in Bulgaria is very scarce.

1.3. Research questions

This study aims to shed light on the previously underresearched AFNs in Bulgaria. I will thus analyze four prominent Bulgarian AFNs which contribute greatly to the development of environmentally-friendly agricultural practices in the country, namely Bioselena, Hrankoop, For the Earth, and Root.

The study addresses the following research questions in particular:

- Main question: How do Bulgarian alternative food networks try to change the corporate food regime in the country?
- Sub-question 1: What are the characteristics of the corporate food regime in Bulgaria?
- Sub-question 2: Which strategies do Bulgarian alternative food networks use in order to change the corporate food regime in the country and which difficulties do they face in their work?

This thesis assumes that the development of the corporate food regime in Bulgaria has been strongly influenced by the political changes in the country over the past 30 years, which have led to many reforms in the agricultural sector. Two specific transitions in the country's politics, namely the fall of the socialist regime in 1989/90 and Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007, have largely affected all its sectors, including agriculture. Despite the challenges, which are largely related to the political and economic transitions, many AFNs have emerged in Bulgaria over the years, which have a significant impact on the corporate food regime in the country, either by confronting it or by working within it.

1.4. Methodological approach

In order to answer the research questions, the following methodological approaches for collecting materials are applied:

- First - Literature review, including scientific articles, books, reports, news articles, and other publications on the development of the Bulgarian agricultural sector over the corporate food regime (in order to answer the first sub-question of the research); In particular, the literature review includes books and articles on the transition of Bulgaria from socialism to capitalism and its integration into the European Union by authors such as Curtis (1992), Keliyan (1994), Ivanova et al. (2007), Frye (2010), Bachev (2011), Medarov (2013), Rangelova & Vladimirova (2017), Grouiez & Koleva (2018), and others. In addition, the literature review discusses the origins of organic agriculture (OA) in Bulgaria and its development over the years referring to authors such as Todorova & Ikova (2014), Dzhabarova (2015), Slavova et al. (2016), Stoeva (2016), Aleksiev et al. (2019), and others.
- Second - Seven semi-structured interviews with experts from four AFNs in Bulgaria on their activities, strategies, and difficulties (in order to answer the second sub-question of the research), following the guidelines of Blatter et al. (2018) for conducting qualitative expert interviews.

The interviews are interpreted using the qualitative content analysis methodology developed by Mayring (2014). In particular the inductive category development is employed, in which only some parts of the interviews are considered for analysis and analytical categories are developed to interpret the results.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 explains the theoretical approach for examining the role of agriculture in the development of the global capitalist economy, i.e., the food regime theory by Friedmann and McMichael (1989). Chapter 2 provides further information on the different types of AFNs and the approaches used to analyze them. In addition, Chapter 2 discusses the alternative food practices in CEE and explains the different approaches used to study the strategies AFNs employ to counter the mainstream food industry, namely “Warrior”, “Builder”, and “Weaver”, as introduced by Stevenson et al. (2007).

Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach adopted for this research, i.e., a literature review and interviews for the collection of materials and the qualitative content analysis by Mayring (2014) for the interpretation of the collected materials.

Chapter 4 analyses the results of the material collection in relation to the proposed research questions. The chapter presents an explanation of the Bulgarian agricultural sector's development during the second food regime (1946-1990) for a better understanding of the transition process from socialism to capitalism. The chapter then provides information on the evolution of the agricultural sector during the corporate food regime (1990-now). The main characteristics of the Bulgarian agricultural sector are identified in conjunction with a discussion of the strategies used by Bulgarian AFNs to change the corporate food regime in the country, as well as the difficulties associated with achieving this.

Chapter 5 discusses the results in relation to the literature, particularly the food regime theory by Friedmann and McMichael (1989), the previous studies on AFNs in CEE, as well as the Warrior-Builder-Weaver approach by Stevenson et al. (2007).

Chapter 6 describes the conclusions of the research in regard to the findings. Furthermore, it outlines the limitations of the study and gives recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter explains the theoretical approach taken to examine the role of agriculture in the development of global capitalism, i.e., the food regime theory, introduced in 1989 by Friedmann and McMichael. It further discusses the various types of AFNs and the approaches used for analyzing them. In addition, it gives an overview of the alternative food practices in CEE countries and explains the approaches to studying the strategies they use to change the traditional food system, namely “Warrior”, “Builder” and “Weaver”, as introduced by Stevenson et al. (2007).

2.1. Food regime theory

The food regime theory stems from Friedmann and McMichael’s seminal work *Agriculture and the State System. The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to present*, in which they explored the role of agriculture in the evolution of the capitalist world economy, and in the history of the state system (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 93). In their paper, they proposed two food regimes of capital conversion since 1870, the first of which spanned the late 19th century, when Britain was the main economic power. The second food regime took place in the late 20th century, when the United States (US) became a global economic power.

As the imperial power of the 19th century, the British Empire dominated world trade during the first food regime (1870-1914), controlling the economies of many regions of the world and thus regulating much of the international trade routes (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). Its leadership was maintained through the export of various agricultural products from colonized countries, with which they supplied European empires with grains and meat between 1870 and 1914, contributing to the maintenance of their economies (McMichael, 1992, p. 345). The British Empire retained its industrial and financial power until the end of World War I, after which its leadership and the first food regime collapsed due to a number of political and economic factors, including processes of decolonization and the creation of new states, leading to the emergence of a second food regime in which the United States was a global hegemon (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989).

The second food regime began after World War II, a period marked by the decline of the European colonial empires and the rise of the Soviet Union (USSR) and the US (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). As one of the new world leaders, the US imposed its economic priorities on other countries and sought to develop a global free trade system. This goal led to the creation of the Bretton Woods system in 1944 as the new international monetary management system, based on the US dollar tied to gold. With the creation of new international monetary policies, financial power shifted from the United Kingdom (UK) to the US. The British pound was replaced by the US dollar as the de facto new world currency. The US used its economic power to influence newly decolonized countries by providing them with food aid to stimulate industrialization, which made them highly dependent on cheap imported products (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 104; McMichael, 1992, p. 345). The aid generally took the form of dumping of wheat surpluses, which led to a price advantage of imported US wheat over domestic grains, thus affecting and displacing local agricultural production (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 104). As a result, US policies greatly influenced the global agricultural sector.

The US maintained its political and economic leadership until the 1970s, but as US President Richard Nixon introduced new economic policies due to high unemployment and inflation, the gold standard was suspended, which eventually led to the fall of the Bretton Woods System, as well as the end of the second food regime.

The early 1970s were marked by “a hiatus” in the world food and trade order (McMichael, 1992, p. 346). Some authors (see McMichael, 1992; Burch & Lawrence, 2005) argued that a new (third) food regime has emerged after this break, whereas others (see Friedmann, 2009) suggested that it is still in formation.

McMichael (1992) introduced the concept of a third food regime in his essay *Tensions between National and International Control of the World Food Order: Contours of a New Food Regime*. He claimed that after the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, international economic stability gave way to anarchy in world markets. Food production and markets became globalized, and national agricultural regulations were replaced by global ones. The growing influence of various transnational corporations (TNCs) operating in many countries across the world led to the transformation of producer-consumer relations worldwide and the emergence of a new international food regime to meet their impact (McMichael, 1992, p. 343).

McMichael (2005) further developed the concept of a third food regime in his work *Global Development and the Corporate Food Regime* by introducing the term “corporate food regime”. He associated the corporate food regime with globalization and economic liberalization through a supermarket revolution, global market-oriented agricultural policies, and organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as the emergence of food movements, which oppose the corporate character of the new food system.

Similarly, Burch and Lawrence (2005, p. 2) argued in their paper, *Supermarket Own Brands, Supply Chains and the Transformation of the Agri-Food System*, that a third food regime has already emerged and is "characterized by flexible manufacturing and high levels of innovation, as supermarkets restructure the agri-food supply chain". According to them, these changes have occurred to satisfy more customers with a range of new agri-food products (Burch & Lawrence, 2005, p. 2), meaning that the new food order is highly dependent on big food companies. Burch and Lawrence (2009, p. 267) further discussed the emergence of a third food regime in 2009 and suggested that it was affected by "the increased influence of finance capital on the agri-food system", coining the term financialization to describe this.

Compared to McMichael's (1992, 2005) and Burch and Lawrence's (2005, 2009) arguments for a consolidated third food regime, Friedmann argued in 2009 that if the "international monetary system is not stabilized", that is, if there is no hegemonic international currency that controls trade as in the previous two food regimes, a new food regime cannot be said to have emerged yet (p. 338, 339). She called the third food regime corporate-environmental due to the environmental movements emerging in opposition to the corporate character of the regime, and argued that it is still in development has not yet been fully realized (Friedmann, 2009). In contrast to Friedmann, McMichael (2013, p. 15) noted that neoliberalism, linked with economic liberalism and the free market economy, “displaced currency-regulated trade”, meaning that a new food regime has already emerged, even without the presence of a hegemonic international currency.

The discussion about whether or not a third food regime has already taken place continues. For the purposes of this study, I will adopt and focus on the concept of the corporate food regime introduced by McMichael in 2005.

The three food regimes will be explained in more detail in the next sections.

2.1.1. First food regime

The first food regime, which spanned from 1870 and 1914, was based on European imports of wheat and meat from settler nations and exports of capital, labour, and goods (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 95). During this period, settler states provisioned the European empires with luxury tropical foods, which resulted in the rise of "Britain's empire of free trade" (McMichael, 2013, p. 26) and the emergence of a new type of trade within the international order. Friedmann and McMichael (1989, p. 96) suggested that this period saw the peak of colonialism as European states sought to expand their domains of formal colonial power "in a final scramble for empire". Britain moved "investments and trade both into tropical colonies, and more significantly into settler states such as Canada and Australia" (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 96).

Settler nations, on the other hand, established representative governments that controlled their national economies, making their relations to European states and economies "the basis for the first international system" (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 96). However, over time, as settled countries became more competitive, they developed nationalistic reactions to Britain's economic power (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 99). Similarly, competition from settler agricultural exports prompted European states to protect their national agriculture (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 99). These factors resulted in the decline of Britain's hegemony in the early 20th century, turning the first food regime into a period of decolonization and creation of new nation-states.

The colonial-diasporic food regime, as Friedmann (2005) called it, collapsed after World War I due to economic depression, urban unemployment, and "a broad agricultural crisis in Europe resulting from cheap overseas grains", which led to far-reaching protectionism in the European states (McMichael, 2013, pp. 31–32).

The interwar period can be described as a transitional period between the first and the second food regime, as the latter occurred after World War II.

2.1.2. Second food regime

The second food regime emerged after World War II when the world economy started operating under US leadership (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 103).

During this time, former colonies became independent nations and aimed to create national economies (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 94, 104). The US had an economic interest in integrating these new states into international trade, especially due to its "ever-increasing wheat surpluses" (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 104), which is why it provided them with food aid. New states accepted US commodities, in particular wheat as foreign assistance, and implemented cheap food policies as part of their industrialization strategies (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 104). As a result, industrialization and proletarianization in the developing countries happened at the detriment of domestic agriculture due to the price advantage of imported American wheat (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 104). New nations and their economies became increasingly dependent on capital whose power to transform agriculture undermined state policies, which were formerly the reason why agriculture remained a national objective. (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989, p. 95). This led to the disempowerment of local farmers. As noted by Friedmann (1993, p. 32), in the postwar food regime, "mercantile practices had to be used to dispose of the surpluses and to prevent a flood of imports into the US". Referring to the mercantile practices and the promotion of industrialization of agriculture, Friedmann (2005, p. 240) named the second food regime, "mercantile-industrial".

The US sustained its power and influence until the 1970s. After the introduction of new economic measures by US President Richard Nixon in 1971 in response to rising inflation and high unemployment rates, the US was forced to give up on the Bretton Woods system, which made the US dollar vulnerable as its convertibility to gold was suspended (McMichael, 2013, p. 38). This eventually led to the demise of the international monetary order, as well as the end of the second food regime. As a consequence, there were no clear laws regulating the international political economy after the 1970s, leading to global economic uncertainty, "new patterns of capital accumulation", and "growing flexibility in systems of production and circulation" (McMichael, 1992, p. 346). Thus, the early 1970s marked a period of global economic restructuring as "international stability gave way to increased anarchy in world markets" (McMichael, 1992, p. 346).

2.1.3. Third food regime

In 1992, McMichael suggested that the post-1973 era of global-economic transformation foreshadowed a new food regime, the foundations of which are the processes of globalization of the food supply and trade and “the substitution of global for national regulation” (pp. 344–345). He posited that, in the new (third) food regime, “agriculture is severed from its local origins”, a process strongly influenced by the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which played an important role in “consolidating a global regulatory framework that uses states as local enforcers of a global laissez-faire system” (McMichael, 1992, p. 345). Thus, for agriculture, the new regime meant national agricultural deregulation by removing farm subsidy schemes that promoted overproduction, as well as destabilized international markets (McMichael, 1992, p. 356).

For a better understanding of McMichael's arguments, it is worth noting what led to the emergence of GATT and the consequences of its entry into force.

At the end of World War II, the United Nations (UN) was established to maintain international peace and security. The objectives of the UN included cooperation between member states regarding different matters, including world trade, which is why in 1947 the organization held a Conference on Trade and Employment (UNCTE), during which it drafted the Havana Charter for an International Trade Organization (ITO) (Stoll & Schorkopf, 2006, p. 12). The Havana Charter envisaged “higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development” (United Nations Conference on Trade and Employment, & United States, 1948, p. 14), but was rejected by the US Senate, which led to the failed attempt to establish the ITO (Stoll & Schorkopf, 2006, p. 12). Following this attempt, the GATT, which had “originally been set up as a merely interim arrangement, became a permanent institution” and evolved into a de facto organization (Stoll & Schorkopf, 2006, p. 13). The GATT was originally signed in 1948 with the aim of shaping the post World War II economy through controlled tariffs and the implementation of other trade regulations (Rosset, 2006, pp. 19–20). Between 1947 and 1994, the GATT held several rounds of negotiations on tariff reductions, subsidy regulations, “countervailing duties, technical barriers to trade, import licence procedures, public procurement, and anti-dumping” (Stoll & Schorkopf, 2006, p. 13).

During the eighth GATT Round, which took place in Uruguay and lasted from 1986 to 1994, it became evident that the Agreement's regulations were no longer applicable to the dynamics of international trade, particularly the growing importance of trade in services (Stoll & Schorkopf, 2006, p. 13). Moreover, its power was undermined by the emergence of agreements between individual member states, by its ineffective consensus-based dispute resolution process, and by unilateral trade restrictions (Stoll & Schorkopf, 2006, p. 13). As noted by Rosset (2006), the GATT had little enforcement power, covered only trade in commodities - as compared to trade in services and intellectual property rights, and a sizeable portion of the world's states were not GATT signatories (Rosset, 2006, p. 20). Additionally, agriculture was excluded from the GATT due to "food security concerns" (Rosset, 2006, p. 20). The topics related to services, intellectual property, and agriculture, which were excluded from the GATT, were discussed during the Uruguay Round, which led to the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO emerged in 1995 as a new global trade institution, making the old GATT "an enforceable global trade code" (Rosset, 2006, p. 20). Stoll and Schorkopf (2006, p.1) noted that the establishment of the WTO and its entry into force in 1995 constituted "a turning point in the development of international economic relations". As they indicated, the WTO was "an important pillar of the world trade order, which mainly builds on the principles of the liberalization of trade and non-discrimination" (Stoll & Schorkopf, 2006, p. 1).

Every two years, the WTO holds regular ministerial conferences at which decisions on the organization's future are made (Rosset, 2006, p. 21). In 1999, when the Third Ministerial of the WTO was held in Seattle, tens of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against WTO's policies. This event marked the beginning of public recognition of the impacts of globalization (Rosset, 2006, p. 22). After the Seattle Conference ended in failure, trade talks were planned for the next Ministerial Conference in 2001 in Doha, Qatar.

The Doha negotiations began in November 2001 and due to the larger influence of developing countries in determining the Doha course of action, the new round became recognized as the Doha Development Agenda (Fergusson, 2008, p. 3). At the meeting, trade ministers adopted three documents. One of these documents, the Ministerial Declaration, aligned the ongoing agriculture and services talks with a wider agenda (Fergusson, 2008, pp. 3–4). Mandelson (2008, p. 10) thus described the Doha Round as "the first round to treat agriculture seriously". Despite

resolving several issues during the talks, particularly in agriculture, negotiations were slow, lacked progress in important matters, and were characterized by “persistent disagreement on nearly every aspect of the agenda” (Fergusson, 2008, p. 3).

In 2005, McMichael examined the “institutional tensions in the Doha Development Round associated with the pursuit of global development” via the concept of the food regime (McMichael, 2005, p. 266). He renamed the third food regime, “corporate food regime” and called the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture, which was negotiated during the Uruguay Round, one of its main drivers (McMichael, 2005, p. 273). McMichael (2005, p. 275) described the corporate food regime as a regime characterized by conflicts between global agriculture and politics of food sovereignty. He argued that it was the outcome of the 1986 GATT Uruguay Round, i.e., the signing of the Agreement on Agriculture in the WTO, that led to the “institutionalization of the corporate food regime” (McMichael, 2005, p. 274). Under this agreement, states no longer had “the right to food self-sufficiency as a national strategy”, which indicates that the site of food security was shifted from the nation-state to the world market (McMichael, 2005, pp. 276–277). As noted by Friedmann (1993, p. 39), as early as the 1970s, “transnational corporations outgrew the national regulatory frameworks in which they were born, and found them to be obstacles to further integration of a potentially global agro-food sector”. Thus, after exposing their domestic markets to the world market in the 1980s-1990s, nation-states subordinated their agricultural sectors to the corporate model (McMichael, 2005, p. 277). Hence, local farmers around the world were disempowered while big agribusiness companies gained influence (McMichael, 2005, p. 278). In short, the third food regime is marked by global market hegemony and neoliberal policies dedicated to providing transnational chains of money and goods (including food) and turning smallholders into a global labor force for capital (McMichael, 2013, p. 3).

As McMichael (2005, p. 286) posited, only a small proportion of the world's population benefits from the regime, leading to the emergence of opposition movements dedicated to the social restructuring of markets. After the initial mobilizations against the WTO's policies in Seattle, more protests followed in different regions of the world, organized by farmers and trade unionists (Rosset, 2006). One specific event demonstrates the significant impact of the WTO on farmers around the world. This event was the suicide of Lee Kyung Hae, a farmer leader from South Korea, who stabbed himself in the heart while holding a *WTO Kills Farmers*

sign, on 16 September 2003, during protests against the WTO in Cancun, Mexico, where the fifth WTO Ministerial negotiations took place (Rosset, 2006, p. 1). After joining the WTO, many farmers in South Korea committed suicide, when they understood that, “because crop prices couldn’t cover the payments on their crop loans, they would be the first in their family history to lose the farm inherited from their ancestors to bankruptcy” (Rosset, 2006, p. 2). The United States and India experienced a similar phenomenon, which Rosset (2006, p. 2) described as “an epidemic of farmer suicides”.

Since the founding of the WTO, many protests against its policies have taken place around the world. In addition, mobilization has led to the emergence of many international, national and local food groups, organizations, and initiatives, which oppose the WTO’s principles and accordingly the corporate food regime. They will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.2. Alternative food networks (AFNs)

In several of their works, Friedmann and McMichael (see e.g., 1989) identified that each food regime entails counter-movements, which challenge the dominant food and trade system and seek a different model of food production and consumption. These opposition movements can be the conditions for a change in a food regime and/or its decline.

Friedmann (2005, p. 228) noted that social movements, along with states and big agrofood businesses play an important role in what she introduced as the emerging corporate-environmental food regime. According to her, environmental and other social movements emerged in the second food regime's interstices and led to the development of a green environmental regime (Friedmann, 2005, p. 229, 230). Friedmann (2005, p. 249) suggested that a new (third) food regime is emerging due to new social, political, and ecological issues, such as "quality, safety, biological and cultural diversity, intellectual property, animal welfare, environmental pollution, energy use, and gender and racial inequalities". These issues have led to the formation of various food initiatives that oppose the corporate character of the new food order. According to McMichael (2009, p. 147), transnational food movements such as Food Sovereignty, Slow Food, and Fair Trade, which call for support for local agri-food businesses, emerged in opposition to what he termed the “food from

nowhere” regime referring to the rise of large agro-food corporations around the world and the unprecedented growth in trade and sales of food coming from different countries. As pointed by him (2009, p. 147), in the corporate food regime there is a contradiction between a global agriculture ruled by agro-food businesses (food from nowhere) and local agro-ecological practices proposed by transnational, national, and local agrarian social movements (food from somewhere).

In the literature, opposition food movements are most commonly referred to as AFNs, but authors use different terms to describe them, for instance: alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs) (Goodman, 2003), short food supply chains (SFSCs) (Renting et al., 2003), civic food networks (CFNs) (Renting et al., 2012), cooperative alternative food networks (Anderson et al., 2014), and so forth. The current research will adopt the term AFNs for the analysis, but I will discuss the aforementioned terms in conjunction, as they are interchangeable in many contexts.

2.2.1. Definition of AFNs

AFNs represent new methods for food production, distribution, and consumption. Their most important features, as described by Tregear (2011, pp. 421–422), include their "anchoring in a particular locale", "orientation towards economic viability for the actors involved", "basis in ecological sustainability, represented by reduced food miles and carbon emissions", and "social justice", i.e., bringing producers and consumers in a closer relationship. Forssell and Lankoski (2015, pp. 66-67), suggested that AFNs' characteristics fall into three categories – background (participants' values and goals such as morality and sustainability), core (requirements for products to be traditional, local, of high quality and without additives; reduced physical distance between producers and consumers, transparency and information; new forms of market governance such as CSA, co-ops, etc.), and outcome (strong relationships, visible through trust and social embeddedness in the group).

Examples of AFNs include: 1) community gardens, community food cooperatives, 2) CSA, 3) direct sales initiatives such as farmers' markets, box schemes, etc., and 4) specialist retailers such as online grocers (Venn et al., 2006, p. 256). People who engage in alternative food projects are typically both farmers and consumers who care about the environment, the biodiversity, and the food safety.

Consumers join such networks to help small farmers and their local economies, as well as for health purposes, while producers need a steady market and dedicated consumers who purchase their goods regularly. Thus, in AFNs, producers and consumers work together for a better future for food and farming. Together, they change their relationship with the food system and begin to value food beyond its meaning as a “mere commodity and object of economic transaction” (Renting et al., 2012, p. 290).

In these new forms of food networks, consumers play an active role (Renting et al., 2012, p. 290). They are not just passive end users, but have power over the organization and function of food processing, delivery, and consumption processes (Renting et al., 2012, p. 296, 298). In this way, the traditional difference between producers and consumers is gradually becoming obsolete (Renting et al., 2012, p. 301). What made consumers active is the awareness of the importance of the quality of local food, the support for the local economy, and the promotion of sustainability (Waltz, 2011, p. 3). Buyers are even often the main initiating force of AFNs (Renting et al., 2012, p. 290). For farmers, on the other hand, such networks mean a change in the way of production, i.e., that agricultural processes go from “farming as merely the selling of raw materials to the food industry to an activity that revalues and reincorporates various elements of food provisioning in a wider social and political meaning” (Renting et al., 2012, p. 290), which means that farmers began to understand the importance of connecting with their consumers and the benefits that such connections bring them.

To get a clearer idea of what AFNs are, the following section will discuss in more detail the three most common examples of AFNs found in the literature, which are also relevant for the empirical part of the thesis as some of the Bulgarian AFNs analysed in the study represent these examples.

2.2.2. Examples of AFNs

2.2.2.1. Community-supported agriculture (CSA)

According to Schermer (2015, p. 122), the best known version of AFNs are types of CSA. In the classic CSA, a farmer and a group of dedicated customers work together to establish a local food supply network (Diekmann & Theuvsen, 2019, p. 734). Typically, consumers register for a share of the CSA and agree to pay a certain

amount of money to fund the agricultural business, and in return the producer distributes the farm's goods to the customers in the group (Diekmann & Theuvsen, 2019, p. 734). What different CSAs and CSA-like initiatives have in common is that consumers can have a direct impact on the mode of production, while the production risk for farmers is mitigated through contractual agreements between them and the consumers (Schermer, 2015, p. 122). In such networks, "consumers are committed to sustaining farm activities, both financially and otherwise, e.g., by paying in advance, sharing production risks, and in some cases contributing to tasks on the farm or even becoming co-owner of the farm land and resources" (Renting et al., 2012, p. 300).

CSAs around the world share common values such as cooperation, solidarity, eco-friendly farming methods, biodiversity, high quality food, education on food and farming, and continuous development (Volz et al., 2016, p. 5). Diekmann and Theuvsen (2019, p. 734) suggested that CSAs belong to movements such as Slowfood (an international organization that promotes local and traditional food) and Fairtrade (an international movement of organizations, committed to providing economically marginalized producers in less developed countries with a trade partnership, based on fair prices). CSA provides an alternative for small farmers, who face difficulties, caused by the corporate food system, in which "supermarkets, convenience, packaged processed foods entice modern consumers – and then undermine their health" (Volz et al., 2016, p. 5).

CSA originated in Japan and Europe in the 1970-1980s and later gathered momentum in the U.S. (Ostrom, 2007, p. 99). In the U.S., the CSA concept was initially prominent in a few farms in the Northeast and later became known in hundreds of farms across North America (Ostrom, 2007, p. 99). In Europe, the first European CSA, *Les Jardins de Cocagne*, was founded in 1978 near Geneva, Switzerland (Volz et al., 2016, p. 9). Several other CSA initiatives were launched in Europe in the late 1970s and 1980s, but it was around the turn of the millennium when the European CSA movement gained great popularity (Volz et al., 2016, p. 9). Today, in many European countries, CSA is in its early stages of growth and is usually driven by a specific group of "young urban, well-educated, socially-conscious people" (Volz et al., 2016, p. 10), whereas in the U.S., "tens of thousands of consumers, known as farm members, or shareholders, are eating food produced and distributed by these [Northern] farms" (Ostrom, 2007, p. 100).

According to Volz et al. (2016, p. 5), each group that adopts the CSA model “shapes it differently to suit its own historical circumstances and each individual CSA is site-specific, modeled to fit the producers, their land, their beliefs, their customers and markets.” However, the common goal among them is to build local connections between food production and consumption based on new civic-minded economic relationships (Ostrom, 2007, p. 100).

2.2.2.2. Community gardens

The term "community garden" is well-known in studies examining AFNs (Firth et al., 2011, p. 556). In 2018, Cumbers et al. (2018, p. 135) argued that there is an ongoing debate about the emerging phenomenon of community gardens in big cities across North America and Western Europe. Cumbers et al. (2018, p. 137) pointed out that such AFNs have a long tradition, but their recent growth occurred in the backdrop of neoliberal policies and urban decay, which led to communities trying to "reappropriate land for public and communal use". According to them, by their very existence, community garden groups challenge the dominant urban objectives (Cumbers et al., 2018, p. 140).

Community gardens provide people from local neighborhoods with a place where they can grow their own food. Each garden emerges in response to the needs of the surrounding community (Firth et al., 2011, p. 556). They usually differ in size and may include "small wildlife gardens, fruit and vegetable plots on housing estates, community polytunnels or large city-based community gardens" (Firth et al., 2011, p. 556). Some of the larger gardens function as community centers, providing not only a green space, but also educational and training facilities (Firth et al., 2011, p. 556). The majority of community gardens are developed and maintained by community associations, but a growing number receive assistance from outside organizations (Firth et al., 2011, p. 556).

Community gardens provide alternative ways of living and encourage citizens to have meaningful interactions with food and nature, as well as to develop “a sense of value and identity around carrying out productive work, which gives a sense of ownership and empowerment” (Cumbers et al., 2018, p. 142). They result in community empowerment, health benefits, the acquisition of skills and experience, and the creation of a positive feeling of self (Cumbers et al., 2018, p. 144).

2.2.2.3. Farmers' markets

Farmers' markets are another form of AFNs. These are places (or events) where local producers sell their agricultural products directly to consumers, which usually take place on a certain day of the week. Many small producers aspire to become part of farmers' markets because they find it difficult to compete with large commercial producers, and farmers markets provide settings where they are more likely to sell their products and make better profits due to the lack of intermediaries in distribution processes. In addition to that, farmers appreciate the direct contact they have with consumers at farmers' markets because through it they receive up-to-date information on consumer trends, which is essential for the economic stability of farmers' markets (Govindasamy et al., 1998, p. 3). Consumers choose to buy products from farmers' markets for a variety of reasons – better quality, wider variety, lower prices and freshness of the products; direct contact with farmers; and support for the local economy (Govindasamy et al., 1998, p. 23). Farmers' markets are thus important for both small farmers and consumers, as they offer the former the opportunity to stay in business and build strong relationships with buyers, and the latter the possibility to buy higher quality food products.

In today's market economy, in which big agribusinesses control the majority of agricultural production at the expense of small producers, and customers are confronted with low quality goods on a regular basis, alternatives such as CSA, community gardens, and farmers' markets are crucial for them. Although there are many types of AFNs, they typically have the same objectives, namely production and consumption of high quality (organic) food, better relations between producers and consumers, and support for local sustainable small producers.

The next section will discuss previous studies on AFNs and approaches to analyzing them, with particular emphasis on the strategies that AFNs use to impact the conventional food system.

2.2.3. Previous research on AFNs and approaches to analyzing them

Most research on AFNs comes from North America and Europe. While the present study will not go into detail on the North American studies on AFNs, it will provide a brief overview of several articles discussing the characteristics, activities,

strategies, and difficulties European AFNs face. To better understand the nature of European AFNs, studies comparing European and North American AFNs will be discussed first. Scientific papers comparing European AFNs, which provide information on the differences between such initiatives in Northern, Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe, will then be reviewed. Particular attention will be paid to the AFNs in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, as the topic of the study is related to Bulgaria.

2.2.3.1. AFNs in North America and Western, Northern and Southern Europe

Overall, studies show that North American and European AFNs differ greatly from each other and so does the research on them. For instance, in his paper, *The quality 'turn' and alternative food practices: reflections and agenda*, Goodman (2003) identified the trend that North American studies on AFNs traditionally focus on the opposition status and socio-political transformational potential of such practices. Conversely, European research addresses the potential structural improvements and policy responses to such initiatives. In addition, European research on AFNs typically centers on topics such as food safety, agricultural policy reforms, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). On the other hand, North American literature on AFNs emphasizes issues concerning the ability of AFNs to influence corporate agribusinesses and create an alternative food system.

Similarly to Goodman (2003), Kalfagianni and Skordili (2018) identified that there are significant differences between AFNs in the United States and those in Europe in their book - *Localizing Global Food: Short Food Supply Chains as Responses to Agri-Food System Challenges*. Comparing several AFNs studies from different regions, they found out that in the United States, AFNs are predominantly oppositional, influenced by the strong social movements of the 1960s, while Western and Northern European research on AFNs is mostly concerned with topics such as environmental sustainability, food safety, nutritional value, and the origin of the food. In addition, Kalfagianni and Skordili (2018) argued that Mediterranean Europe differs from Western and Northern Europe in that food culture and traditions play the most important role in AFNs there.

Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2003) made similar discoveries in their work, *Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply*

chains in rural development, in which they studied AFNs in seven European countries, namely the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Spain, and France. They found out that short food supply chains (SFSCs, a term they use instead of AFNs) are the most developed in Mediterranean countries like Italy, France, and Spain, and also in Germany, while they are much less developed in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Ireland. Moreover, in Italy, Spain and France, the development of SFSCs is largely linked to quality production and direct sales, which are based on “long-lasting cultural and gastronomic traditions”, while in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and, to some extent, Germany, the development of SFSCs is more often based on new definitions of quality, emphasizing topics such as environmental sustainability or animal welfare (Renting et al., 2003, p. 406). Overall, Renting and his colleagues (2003, p. 398) concluded that there is a strong evidence that new AFNs are emerging all over Europe but “it is still too early to judge their viability and efficiency in delivering goals of sustainable agriculture and rural development” which is due to the lack of empirical data on the topic, as well as because such initiatives are still in the early stages of development. There is a comprehensive overview of only one type of SFSC at European level and that is organic farming, while for all others (e.g., regional, artisanal, etc.) there is not enough data available, which is an obstacle to a proper analysis (Renting et al., 2003, p. 402).

Using the available data on European AFNs, Venn et al. (2006) conducted a thorough review of the European scientific studies on AFNs in their paper *Researching European ‘alternative’ food networks: some methodological considerations*. They found out that since 2000, over 56 papers examining AFNs in Europe have been published in seven prominent journals. The majority of the empirical studies examined the specific social, ethical, and geographical features of AFNs, comparing them with those of more traditional food networks. The results of the studies demonstrated that in addition to food production and distribution, many AFNs use other ways to connect food producers with consumers, such as diet and nutrition courses, educational training, skills sharing, and others.

Instead of comparing AFNs with traditional food networks, Lutz and Schachinger (2013) conducted research on how AFNs operate within the traditional food system. They explored how the Austrian local food network *SpeiseLokal* operates within the dominant food regime using the transition theory, Multi-Level

Perspective, according to which niche innovations such as SpeiseLokal can be key factors in changing the mainstream food system. Their findings show that there are many challenges that local food initiatives face in their efforts to promote a transition in the current food system, which hinder their further development. Lack of training on organic farming, non-promotion of AFNs, insufficient funding, not enough research and innovative technology in small-scale agriculture, no agricultural education, as well as no flexible and reflective teamwork are some of the difficulties encountered by small organic farmers and alternative food organizations operating within the dominant food regime (Lutz & Schachinger, 2013). Personal engagement is at the core of local food networks, and it remains a necessary factor for them to continue to function; however, as pointed by Lutz and Schachinger (2013), action is required to create meaningful change within the mainstream food system and move beyond the realm of niche organizations; personal commitment alone will not suffice.

Numerous studies examining the ways AFNs operate within the traditional food system have focused on the strategies they use to influence it and the challenges they face. For instance, in his work, *From "Food from Nowhere" to "Food from Here:" changing producer–consumer relations in Austria*, Schermer (2015) applied the so-called "Warrior-Builder" approach in his analysis of the Austrian food system within the third food regime (as introduced by McMichael in 1992). Referencing Friedman and McNair (2008), he used the term "builder" to describe a non-conflicting approach to social change as opposed to the term "warrior", which illustrates a confrontational approach. He examined the different strategies used by Austrian social movements concerned with food production and consumption during the third food regime and found out that most strategies employed fall into the builder approach (Schermer, 2015, p. 122). For example, the 1988 Austrian eco-social agricultural policy, introduced in response to the anticipated restructuring of the agricultural sector after Austria's entry into the EU "appropriated" direct traders, such as farmers' markets, and biological pioneers as "builders" (p. 130). With regard to the current strategies of Austrian AFNs, Schermer (2015, p. 130) argued that they are also part of the builder approach as they are working in cooperation with retail chains, which means that they operate within the mainstream food system. Schermer (2015) pointed that this process can even be called a "neoliberal appropriation".

The Warrior-Builder approach has also been used by other researchers on AFNs. For instance, in their work, *Whose Rules Rule? Contested Projects to Certify*

'Local Production for Distant Consumers', Friedmann and McNair (2008) explored the potential of AFNs to transform the mainstream food system. They discussed the agrarian social movements Slow Food and La Vía Campesina (an international peasant organization, which aims at defending the rights of farmers and advocates for small-scale sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty) and argued that the former exemplifies the builder approach, whereas the latter demonstrates the warrior approach. According to them, the Slow Food movement aims to support agri-food systems by “re-embedding” them in their cultural and environmental contexts by providing alternatives to dominant production and consumption patterns, which is a “non-confrontational approach to social transformation” (Friedmann & McNair, 2008, p. 427). La Vía Campesina, on the other hand, is an international organization that both “defends small farmers and diverse agroecosystems in the North and South, and fights specific threats to them, such as genetically modified crops, intellectual property and trade rules favouring access by capitals to land and other resources”, which is a confrontational approach to social change (Friedmann & McNair, 2008, p. 428). In addition to the two global food projects, Friedmann and McNair (2008) examined two local food initiatives, namely the Cojote Rojo ecolabel in Michoacán, Mexico, and the Local Food Plus label in Ontario, Canada. They discovered that both movements are loosely related to a global change in food-related practices, and that they both exemplify the builder approach.

The Warrior-Builder approach was developed further in the analytical framework of Stevenson et al. (2007), who suggested that AFNs use three types of strategies to influence the mainstream agrifood system, namely “warrior”, “builder” and “weaver”. They explained that warrior work is “work of resistance”, which actively challenges many of the corporate spheres and also works mainly, but not entirely, in the political sector (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 34). Examples of the warrior work include “situation-specific networks of organizations for public protests”, “policy advocates within/outside established political structures”, and others (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 42). Builder work, also called “work of reconstruction”, aims at creating alternative food initiatives and networks and works primarily, and often less controversially, in the economic sector (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 34). Examples of the builder work include new agrifood initiatives such as food co-ops, farmers markets, CSAs, and others (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 45). Lastly, weaver work, labeled as “work of connection”, seeks to develop strategic relations within and

between the activities of warriors and builders and works in the political and economic sectors, but is also very important for the mobilization of civil society (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 34). Examples of weaver work include "nonprofit and voluntary organizations and networks", "university-based extension programs", "movement professionals", and others (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 42). Warrior, builder, and weaver approaches use different strategies and methods but are similar to one another as they all try to change the dominant food system (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 34). Prominent examples of the three approaches, as described by Stevenson et al. (2007, p. 24, 50), include: 1) the public demonstrations in September 2003 in Cancun, Mexico at the WTO's Fifth Ministerial (Warrior work), 2) the Fair Trade movement as an "alternative model for world trade", involved in the Cancun Ministerial (Builder work), which, in turn, was 3) "the product of a coalition of civil society groups from Mexico, Canada, and Switzerland" (Weaver work).

To better understand the warrior, builder, and weaver approaches to social change, Table 1 will summarize their most important characteristics, as noted by Stevenson et al. (2007), and will include examples of these approaches, as pointed by Friedmann and McNair (2008) and Schermer (2015).

Table 1

Warrior-Builder-Weaver approach

	Warrior Approach	Builder Approach	Weaver Approach
Main task	Resisting the corporate food system	Creating new/alternative agrifood networks	Developing strategic and conceptual linkages between the other two approaches
Strategic orientation	Resistance; Often confrontational; Public protest and legislative work; Draws attention to issues	Reconstruction; Less confrontational; Entrepreneurial economic activities building new collaborative structures	Connection; Linking warriors and builders; Coalition building; Communicating messages to civil society
Main goals	Policy changes; protection of territory; mobilizing civil society;	Inclusion of goals such as sustainability, equity, health,	Building movements to change the food system; engaging

	opposing or hindering economic concentration or unsustainable production activities	regionality in the economic sector; work within established political systems to develop alternative public policies	civil society; creating and strengthening coalitions within and outside communities to change the food system
Main target	Political; civil society	Economic; political	Civil society; political
Examples of actors	Situation-specific networks of civic opposition organizations; reform activists inside and outside of existing political institutions	Individual and collective economic enterprises; policy advocates; agricultural researchers and farmers experimenting with new production systems	Nonprofit and volunteer groups and networks; university-based extension programs; movement professionals
Challenges	Difficult to sustain mass mobilization; difficult to fund policy work	New business, economic, and political models are fragile; new food businesses often need some form of protection from the government or civil society	Lack of resources for grassroots and other groups; difficult to maintain food issues resources
Relationship with civil society	Gathers supporters from civil society, by drawing attention to the problem; mass mobilization for protest actions	Civil society protects alternative economic spaces through consumption choices and public policies	Connects advocates and involved participants in the public sphere; potential to ensure the participation of less involved members of civil society
Organizations / Types of organizations that usually adopt the strategic orientation	Factory farming, RBGH, GMOs, WTO/World Bank, IMF, Farm workers' rights, Farm Bill, Organic rule, Grape boycott	Sustainable/organic farmers, Intensive rotational grazing farmers/networks, Farmers' markets, On-farm operations, Delivery schemes, Microenterprise development, Farmers' marketing	Local and regional nonprofit organizations, Food policy councils, Regional and national networks and organizations, Land-grant university extension

		cooperatives, Green payment farm policies	programs
Concrete examples	Public demonstrations in September 2003 in Cancun, Mexico at the WTO's Fifth Ministerial; La Vía Campesina	The Fair Trade movement, involved in the Cancun Ministerial; The Slow Food movement	The Fair Trade movement as a product of a coalition of civil society groups from Mexico, Canada, and Switzerland

Note. Adapted from Stevenson, G. W., Ruhf, K., Lezberg, S. & Clancy, K. (2007). Warrior, builder, and weaver work: Strategies for changing the food system. In Lyson, T. A. & Hinrichs, C. C. (Ed.), *Remaking the North American Food System : Strategies for Sustainability* (pp. 33–62). University of Nebraska Press. Copyright 2007 by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska. Some of the data for the concrete examples are from Friedmann, H. & McNair, A. (2008). Whose Rules Rule? Contested Projects to Certify ‘Local Production for Distant Consumers’. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8, 408–434. Copyright 2008 by The Authors and Blackwell Publishing Ltd. and Schermer, M. (2015). From “Food from Nowhere” to “Food from Here:” changing producer–consumer relations in Austria. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 32(1), 121–132. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-014-9529-z>. Copyright 2014 by Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht.

2.2.3.2. AFNs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

The systemic changes of 1989/90 in CEE, which marked the end of state socialism and the transition to capitalism, coincided with processes of globalization and neoliberalization and a broad discussion of the topic of sustainable development in international politics (Smith and Jehlička, 2013, p. 148). After the transition and the accession of some of the CEE countries to the EU, they developed close relationships with Western Europe in the political and economic spheres. They were regarded as semi-peripheral, meaning that they were considered as moderately developed, “catching up with the countries of the affluent West” (Kopczyńska, 2020, p. 1). With the fall of socialism, CEE countries became integrated into the world economy and started pursuing neoliberal policies. With regard to food culture, in the

years after 1989/90, consumption processes became “an arena of negotiation between traditional practices and new Western-type modernisation” (Kopczyńska, 2020, p. 3). Modernization talks, i.e., talks about a shift from agrarian to industrial agriculture, were already popular in Western Europe beginning at the end of World War II (Bilewicz, 2020, p. 755). As they were introduced in CEE countries, there was a rapid transition from food shortages to large quantities and a wide variety of foods, which were considered attractive by the citizenry. As Western products entered the markets of CEE countries and thus strengthened the conventional capitalist production and agriculture, local food economies had to compete with foreign producers and importers. Since many of them were unable to contend with the new market economy, they turned to alternative food practices.

There are a variety of AFNs in CEE countries (e.g., food cooperatives, the Slow Food movement, CSA, food delivery initiatives, etc.), some of which are typical for the region, whereas others are adopted from other areas (Goszczyński, 2019, p. 276). Despite the heterogeneity, there is relatively little research considering the emergence of AFNs in the postsocialist context (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019, p. 583). Most European studies on AFNs focus on Northern (e.g., Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, etc.) and Southern (e.g., Italy, Spain, Portugal, etc.) European countries, leaving CEE behind (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019, p. 582). Existing research on alternative food initiatives in CEE show that countries in this region have certain common characteristics related to food and agriculture, such as the agricultural collectivization processes during the socialist years, as well as the low average income, and the low consumption of high-quality products in the period after 1989 (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019, p. 583, 585).

Alternative food initiatives in CEE are imitating Western ones to a large extent (Bilewicz, 2020, p. 765). Despite this, the application of the concept of AFNs in CEE countries is difficult, particularly because its terminology comes from the Western context (see e.g., Goszczyński, 2019; Kopczyńska, 2020) as it is biased towards the West and therefore difficult to apply to the CEE region. In an attempt to move away from the Western bias, Smith and Jehlička (2013) developed a theoretical framework for analyzing AFNs in CEE by introducing the concept of quiet sustainability. They noted that the typical characteristics of alternative food activities in CEE are their positive environmental or social effects but unlike AFNs in other European countries, they are not directly linked to food quality and sustainability, nor are they presented

by their practitioners as related to environmental or sustainability objectives (Smith & Jehlička, 2013, p. 148). For this reason, Smith and Jehlička (2013) argued that such practices cannot be regarded as AFNs, as they are not politically defined alternatives, and thus used the term quiet sustainability to describe this.

According to different authors (see e.g., Smith & Jehlička, 2013; Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019; Sovová & Veen, 2020), studies on AFNs, in addition to being highly biased towards the West, perceive similar practices in the East very differently from those in the West. For instance, typical features of alternative food consumption, such as eating locally produced food, limiting excessive production, and reducing meat consumption, are seen as normal and even admirable in Western Europe but as “embarrassing signs of poverty and associated with the unpleasant communist past” in CEE (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019, p. 585). Much research on alternative food practices in CEE tends to frame them as “backward, and contrasted them with western modernity” (Smith and Jehlička, 2013, p. 149).

With regard to the practice of urban gardening (e.g., community gardens), for example, in Western Europe it is seen as a popular “multifunctional activity that can create valuable alternatives”, whereas in CEE it is perceived as “a remnant of the socialist era and a coping strategy for the urban poor” (Sovová & Veen, 2020, p. 1). Sovová and Veen (2020, p. 2) argued that studies focusing on urban gardening in the Global North associate such practices with progressiveness, sustainability, and resistance. In other regions, such as CEE, they noted that food self-provisioning initiatives (e.g., urban gardening) are perceived as a way of coping despite being much more common there than in Western Europe (Sovová and Veen, 2020 p. 3). Sovová and Veen (2020, p. 3) also argued that there are various studies on food self-sufficiency in CEE, but they are “rarely related to the current debates on multifunctional urban agriculture, spaces of resistance or environmentally sustainable food systems”. Tóth et al. (2018, p. 163) noted that overall, urban agriculture in CEE is not well researched. They conducted a research on the development of allotment gardening (form of urban gardening) in the Czech Republic and Slovakia from the eighteenth century to the present and found out that during socialism, urban gardening in the two countries was used as a strategic tool by the regime, which supported it from the top down and offered flexible regulations for it (Tóth et al., 2018, p. 180). After 1989/90, allotment gardening in both countries declined due to a number of factors, including spatial, economic, and social changes, influenced by the

transition processes (Tóth et al., 2018, p. 180). However, after 2000, new forms of urban gardening appeared, which complemented allotment gardening (Tóth et al., 2018, p. 180).

In regard to other alternative food practices, such as CSAs, while they have been multiplying annually in an increasing number of European countries (Volz et al., 2016, p. 9), they are still new in Eastern Europe (Möllers & Bîrhală, 2014, p. 140). As a result, there has been much research on CSA in Western Europe, whereas only few researchers have taken CSAs in CEE into consideration (Balázs et al., 2016, p. 101). The few studies, focusing on CSA practices in CEE (see e.g., Möllers & Bîrhală, 2014; Balázs et al., 2016), posited that CSAs in this region are still a new phenomenon but they are slowly growing in number. For instance, in their research on the CSA movement in Hungary, Balázs et al. (2016, p. 101) noted that CSAs are still marginal there, but seem to have potential and Hungarian policymakers are even encouraging people to start community food networks. Similarly, in the case of Romania, CSAs are still rare, but the ones that operate actively bring economic advantages to farmers and influence the consumer behavior of people who join the network (Möllers & Bîrhală, 2014, p. 144, 147).

What makes AFNs in CEE an interesting phenomenon to study is that they are not simply "copied and transferred" from other European countries or the US, but are region-specific cases (Goszczyński, 2019, p. 276). Currently, AFNs in CEE are much more visible than ever, which means they require research. Moreover, due to their visibility, in some CEE countries, such as Lithuania, public authorities began to simplify "food safety and veterinary requirements for the production, processing, and distribution of small quantities of food products sold directly to consumers" through AFNs (Blumberg & Mincyte, 2020, p. 190).

3. Methodology

This chapter explains the research methods that were applied in the thesis, namely literature review and expert interviews as the method of material collection and the qualitative content analysis by Mayring (2014) as the method of material interpretation.

3.1. Literature review and expert interviews

To answer the first sub-question of the current research, namely *What are the characteristics of the Corporate Food Regime in Bulgaria?*, I conducted a literature review, including scientific articles, books, reports, news articles, and other publications, of the Bulgarian agricultural sector's development during the second food regime, as well as the corporate food regime, focusing on two significant political and economic transition periods in the country, namely the transition from socialism to democracy in 1989 and the entry of Bulgaria into the European Union in 2007.

As previous research on AFNs in Bulgaria is very scarce, the most appropriate way to address the second sub-question of the present study, namely *Which strategies do Bulgarian alternative food networks use in order to change the Corporate Food Regime in the country and which difficulties do they face in their work?*, is through interviews with people who can share valuable insights into the working processes of Bulgarian AFNs. Therefore, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews from December 2020-April 2021 with experts from alternative food initiatives in Bulgaria, concerned with the development of sustainable and organic agricultural practices in the country. I followed the guidelines of Blatter et al. (2018, p. 53) on conducting qualitative expert interviews, who suggest that the structure of such interviews should be strong to very strong, the way of communicating should rather be dialogical, the attitude of the interviewer should be professionally distant, and he or she are allowed to bring in prior knowledge in the interview. The interviewed experts provided specialist knowledge on the social issues to be examined and information on the events, in which they “have participated or which they have helped to shape” (Blatter et al., 2018, p. 54). They offered insights into the

working process of four AFNs in Bulgaria, namely Bioselena, Hrankoop, For the Earth, and Root. The interviewees are:

- 1) the chairman of Hrankoop Nikolay Genov,
- 2) the main coordinator of Hrankoop Ralitsa Kassimova,
- 3) the member and producer of Hrankoop Ilian Panov, who owns a bee farm in the Sakar Mountains region,
- 4) the member and producer of Hrankoop Trayana Vasileva, who owns a fruit and vegetable farm in Sofia and Novi Iskar (a town, located in Sofia City Province),
- 5) the chairman of Bioselena Stoilko Apostolov,
- 6) a member of For the Earth Ivaylo Popov,
- 7) and the chairman of Root Bojidar Emanuilov.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, having in-person interviews was not possible. To combat this, the interviews were conducted online via the instant messaging software application, Viber, and the video chatting service, Zoom. The duration of the interviews was between 30 minutes and 1 hour. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed word for word, leaving out all filler words including “uhms” or “ahs”, as well as words like “right”, “you know” or “yeah”. In addition, all interviews were translated from Bulgarian to English and coded using Mayring’s (2014) method for evaluating study data.

The sample of the present study was selected based on the goal of integrating multiple perspectives to the research questions and determining which Bulgarian AFNs fit into which of the three strategies of the Warrior-BUILDER-Weaver approach outlined by Stevenson et al. (2007). The interviewed individuals were chosen based on non-random criteria, meaning that I deliberately targeted the most prominent AFNs in Bulgaria and identified individuals related to these AFNs who could provide insight into goals and methods of their respective organizations. In the case of the AFN Hrankoop, the sampling strategy used was the snowball sampling, which, as Berg (1989, p. 33) stated, involves: “first identifying several people with relevant characteristics, interviewing them and then asking them for the names of other people who possess the same attributes as they do”. The first persons from Hrankoop identified for the interviews were Nikolay Genov and Ralitsa Kassimova.

After conducting the interviews with them, they were asked for the names of other people who could also share valuable insights on the topic, namely the two producers and members of Hrankoop - Ilian Panov and Trayana Vasileva. Interviewees from the other AFNs were reached via email.

Prior to preparing the interview questions, a topic outline was developed, listing all the broad categories applicable to the study. A series of questions was then created that were relevant for each of the categories outlined. The interview guides addressed the way of working of the four selected Bulgarian AFNs, how they try to change the mainstream food system in the country, and the difficulties they face in their work.

Since expert interviews are “not so much about spontaneous answers, but about reflected and informative replies” (Blatter et al., 2018, p. 55) in contrast to other types of interviews, interviewees can be provided with the interview guidelines in advance. Therefore, the interviewees, who asked to see the questions in advance, received the interview guidelines before the interview. Because the survey method is a semi-structured interview, I had a specific list of questions, but did not ask all of them, nor did I follow a specific order of questions. The interviews consisted mainly of open-ended questions to encourage the interviewees to provide descriptive and lengthy answers.

By interviewing these experts and analyzing their responses, more knowledge was obtained about the activities of AFNs in Bulgaria, the manner in which they operate and try to change the dominant supermarket food system, and the difficulties they encounter in their work.

3.2. Data analysis: Qualitative content analysis by Mayring

The qualitative content analysis by Mayring (2014) was used as the method for evaluating the study data obtained through the interviews. Mayring (2014) differentiates between three fundamental forms of interpreting data: summary (reducing the material in such a way that the essential contents remain), explication (providing additional material on individual doubtful text components to increase understanding), and structuring (filtering out particular aspects of the material, to give a cross-section through the material according to pre-determined ordering criteria, or to assess the material according to certain criteria). There are two forms of

summarizing: reduction and inductive category formation. Since there is not much research on the topic of the study, namely the impact of AFNs on the corporate food regime in Bulgaria, inductive category formation was used for the data analysis, which implies that “categories will come directly from the material itself” (Mayring, 2014, p. 79) and will not be explicitly formulated before the coding. In inductive category formation, not all material is regarded for analysis, but only those parts relevant for the specific research question (Mayring, 2014, p. 79).

Mayring (2014) proposes an inductive category development that follows seven steps: step one is formulating a research question and describing the theoretical background; step two is the establishment of a selection criterion, category definition and level of abstraction; step three is working through the texts line by line and formulating categories; step four is revision of the categories and rules after 10 - 50% of texts; step five is final working through the material; step six is building main categories if useful; step seven is intra-/Inter-coder agreement check; and step eight is showing the final results, ev. frequencies, interpretation.

The present research followed all steps except step seven (intra-/inter-coder agreement check), since no second coder could be found for the particular research. Initially, three research questions were formulated, and the theoretical basis was described. Selection criteria were then set to determine the relevant material from the texts, which was created in connection with the theoretical references, i.e., the Warrior-Builder-Weaver approach by Stevenson et al. (2007) and included two categories - strategies and difficulties. The level of abstraction was defined to determine how specific or general the categories needed to be formulated. The next step included working through the texts line by line and formulating categories. All materials that did not fall into any category were ignored in this procedure. When no new categories appeared, which means that the category system has comprehensively addressed all provided information, a revision was carried out to check whether the category system fits the research questions. A final coding followed, i.e., all the material was processed according to the same rules. Once there was a list of categories, they were grouped into main categories to be useful for answering research questions. Step eight included using the method of interpretation, meaning that after analyzing the data, there was a set of categories to a specific topic, connected with specific passages in the material. The further

evaluation was conducted by interpreting the whole system of categories in terms of the aims of analysis, as well as the theories.

Particularly, the results were interpreted using the Warrior-Builder-Weaver approach by Stevenson et al. (2007). The approach was applied to the analysis of Bulgarian AFNs in the corporate food regime by examining which Bulgarian AFNs correspond to which of the three approaches (i.e., warrior, builder, weaver), and more particularly, which strategies they use to influence the corporate food regime. In addition, the difficulties they face in their work were explored.

4. Case study

The following chapter discusses the development of the Bulgarian agricultural sector during the corporate food regime, beginning with a brief explanation of the pre-1989 era, i.e., the second food regime, for a better understanding of the transition process from socialism to capitalism. It highlights previous studies, which have explored the difficulties faced by small farmers in Bulgaria during its years of socialism, post-socialism, and EU integration. It then provides information on four prominent AFNs in Bulgaria by discussing each AFN individually, starting with Bioselena, followed by For the Earth, Hrankoop, and ending with Root. The history and main activities of each organization are briefly described in the beginning of each subchapter, followed by a discussion of the results of the interviews, in particular the strategies used by the AFNs to change the corporate food regime in Bulgaria, as well as the difficulties they face in their work. In general, the strategies are discussed separately from the difficulties, but there may be overlaps in the analysis as they are interrelated. The different strategies are divided into three main types of strategies: resistance (warrior approach), reconstruction (builder approach), and connection (weaver approach). At the end of each subchapter, there is an explanation of how each organization fits into the Warrior-BUILDER-Weaver approach by Stevenson et al. (2007).

4.1. Bulgaria in the second food regime

The second food regime in Bulgaria was marked by the rule of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) from 1946 to 1990, which followed the policies of the Soviet Union, transforming the country from an agrarian rural society into an industrialized socialist society through a series of reforms.

Until 1946, Bulgaria was a country “of small-scale community farming, in a general state of economic underdevelopment” (Daskalov, 2005, as cited in Medarov, 2013, p. 170). As the BCP came to power in 1944, Bulgarian agriculture consisted primarily of 1.1 million small-scale farms (Curtis, 1992, p. 144). The party saw the consolidation of these farms as its most immediate and important goal related to agriculture (Curtis, 1992, p. 144) and started collectivization processes as an effort to replicate the Soviet agricultural model of state-controlled collective farms (Medarov,

2013, pp. 170-171). When Todor Zhivkov led the BCP from 1956 to 1989, he aimed to transform Bulgaria from an agrarian to an industrial society (Frye, 2010, p. 193). Through dramatic economic changes, the BCP moved a large portion of the labor force from the countryside to the city to provide workers for newly established large industrial firms (Curtis, 1992, p. 117). Initially, despite tensions in the rural sector caused by the “violence of the primitive socialist accumulation” (Medarov, 2013, p. 171), there were remarkable rates of economic growth arising from the new policies. Later on, however, the growth rates became disappointing, which resulted in numerous economic experimentations in Bulgaria (Curtis, 1992, p. 117). The agricultural sector, in particular, became one of the most frequently reformed and transformed areas in the socio-economic life of the country (Keliyan, 1994, p. 128). The declared aims of the state’s agricultural reforms were related to “loudly-proclaimed plans to attain higher socio-economic status for rural communities and all consumers of agricultural produce” (Keliyan, 1994, p. 128). Nonetheless, the economic experimentations of the BCP never achieved a fully market-based economy (Curtis, 1992, p. 117). Due to poor economic performance and a low quality of life, Todor Zhivkov, who had served for 33 years, was stripped of his office on 10 November 1989 at the plenum of the Central Committee of the BCP. This led to the fall of the communist system and the beginning of Bulgaria's transition to democracy and a market economy.

4.2. Bulgaria in the corporate food regime

4.2.1. Transition from socialism to capitalism

The consolidation of the corporate food regime in the global context in the 1990s coincided with the fall of socialism in Bulgaria in 1989/90, followed by a major political and economic transition to capitalism and numerous agricultural reforms.

In the 1990s, following the dissolution of the BCP, a new political system was established, based on processes of liberalization and democratization, as well as on the transition from socialism and capitalism. All parties participating in the elections to the Grand National Assembly in June 1990 “made a public commitment to transform the country from a centrally planned to a market economy” (Svindland, 1992, p. 88).

“In the first four years of the 1990s, Bulgaria saw three elections, five governments and great turnover within cabinets.” (Frye, 2010, p. 193) The beginning

of the 1990s in Bulgaria was marked by political divisions between the left-wing Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, successor to the BCP) and the right-wing Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and “an environment of great uncertainty about future policy” (Frye, 2010, p. 199). The first elections after the dissolution of the BCP were won by the BSP, backed by the rural population, “mostly for reasons related to agricultural policies and land rights” (Medarov, 2013, p. 173).

Development in Bulgaria started to unfold rapidly after the UDF won the second free elections in 1991. UDF's policies had a strong impact on the agricultural and industrial sectors (Medarov, 2013, p. 168). In 1991, the party proposed a new Arable Land Law, which was passed by the National Assembly. The new law focused intensely on the disbanding of the former socialist cooperatives (Rangelova & Vladimirova, 2017, p. 31), also known as the Liquidation process (Medarov, 2013, p. 173). The law allowed “every Bulgarian citizen to own as much as thirty hectares of land, or twenty in areas of intensive cultivation” (Curtis, 1992, p. 150). However, despite successfully dismantling the old political system, the new Government could not provide “the institutional support required by the new one” (Rangelova & Vladimirova, 2017, p. 32). Moreover, the agricultural reform encountered resistance from local officials, who supported the BCP and therefore “destroyed pre-collectivization land ownership records and threatened or bribed farmers to remain in collectives rather than seeking private farms” (Curtis, 1992, p. 151). Furthermore, in the early 1990s, “a wide process of de-industrialisation and severe economic downturn swept through the entire country” (Medarov, 2013, p. 168). The deep structural changes in the economy and the numerous agricultural and economic reforms made in the early 1990s affected food prices and changed subsidies and taxes for producers and consumers (Ivanova et al., 2007, p. 384). The transition to a market economy had a variety of impacts on agriculture, production, consumption, marketing, economy, income, diet, and so forth (Ivanova et al., 2007, p. 385). In general, the agrarian reform in Bulgaria managed, despite the difficulties, to change the public to private ownership of land, but failed to fulfill its main goal – “to create the necessary prerequisites for the implementation of highly effective and competitive production within the EU” (Rangelova & Vladimirova, 2017, p. 33).

The history of the socialist period left Bulgaria's agricultural sector highly concentrated around collective state-controlled farms (Grouiez & Koleva, 2018, p. 1). In order to rebuild agrarian land, Bulgaria had to create conditions for the restoration

of agriculture and rural development, which was possible through state aid and subsidies, appropriate policies, and the increased autonomy of local governments (Keliyan, 1994, p. 134). Land property was thus transferred step by step from the state to the agricultural workers after 1991 (Grouiez & Koleva, 2018, p. 6). Paradoxically, however, during the transition period, the state relinquished its “regulating and social security functions from the past” but “still kept its economic influence intact” which means that, in fact, the state still managed the economy’s organization (Keliyan, 1994, p. 134).

In addition to the systemic reforms that Bulgaria has undergone since 1991, there were some “economic crises that prompted several changes to the economic structure” (Ivanova et al., 2007, p. 385). The transition led to several economic crises, including the failure of some economies, periods of hyperinflation, the devaluation of the local currency, and the launching of "shock" economic policies (Marangos, 2002; Sachs, 1994, 2004, as cited in Ivanova et al., 2007, p. 389). These factors influenced the agricultural sector significantly.

4.2.2. Accession to the European Union

The second major political and economic transition that Bulgaria experienced in recent years was its accession to the EU in 2007, which marked a new chapter in the history of agriculture in the country. Following Bulgaria's integration into the EU, new agricultural rules and regulations imposed by the Union drastically altered the sector (Rangelova & Vladimirova, 2017, p. 39). In general, the changes consisted of “payment of EU subsidies”, “opening up of markets”, and “introducing new requirements for businesses” (Rangelova & Vladimirova, 2017, p. 39).

With the accession of Bulgaria to the EU, a variety of conditions set by the CAP of the EU had to be fulfilled by the agricultural sector. The CAP, proposed by the European Commission (EC) in 1960, is a cornerstone of EU farming and rural areas policy designed to “ensure adequate supplies, increase productivity and ensure that both consumers and producers received a fair deal in the market” (Eurobarometer, 2008, p. 3). Until 2003, the EU’s agricultural policy was based on a “production-based system of subsidies”, but in 2003 it took on a new dimension and moved to “a market-orientated system where financial support to farmers is decoupled from production and is also dependent on producers meeting food safety,

quality, environmental, plant and animal health and welfare standards” (Eurobarometer, 2008, p. 3).

When Bulgaria entered the EU and implemented the CAP in 2007, the public agenda regarding agriculture was “centered on the issue of prices” as inflation was “on the rise across the continent” (Eurobarometer, 2008, p. 3). After being incorporated into the CAP, Bulgaria started benefitting from its economic advantages, but at the same time the country began facing intense “competition in the agricultural sector by developed European economies” (Borisov et al., 2019, p. 439).

The primary CAP instruments through which Bulgaria received funding were the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, which according to scientists of the Center for Economic Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Science “raised or strengthened distortions” in the Bulgarian agricultural sector, such as the separation between producers and consumers, the heavy invasion of international corporations and supermarkets, and the reduced or almost stopped production of traditional Bulgarian food (Rangelova & Vladimirova, 2017, p. 38).

Moreover, not all farms had the same potential for benefitting from EU integration and the CAP implementation (Bachev, 2011, p. 7). It was mostly the bigger farms that participated in public support programs because they had more experience, resources and possibilities for “adaptation to new requirements for quality and other standards, which are potential for preparing and winning projects” (Bachev, 2011, p. 8). Opportunities to benefit from public support for agriculture from the CAP also did not reach the majority of Bulgarian organic producers, who are generally small farmers, due to significant administrative difficulties and a high level of transaction costs associated with producer participation in various support schemes (Stoyanov & Doncheva, 2018, p. 186).

Another significant change seen in the agricultural sector of Bulgaria since its accession to the EU was the disappearance of the smallest farms (Ivanov, 2018). According to Ivanov (2018), after the accession, “the number of farms in Bulgaria fell from 493,000 in 2007 to 204,000 in 2016”. The conditions that made small-scale agricultural production possible before the accession were uprooted as small farmers were “ill-prepared to compete in the new international markets” (Medarov, 2013, p. 176).

Furthermore, Bulgaria's accession to the EU also affected the incomes of farmers (Todorova, 2016, p. 115). In Todorova's research (2016), 48.57% of the farm owners claimed that their incomes had decreased significantly since 2007, the main reason for which is "the high competition in the common EU market", for which Bulgarian farms were not well prepared (Todorova, 2016, p. 115).

4.2.3. Bulgarian organic agriculture (OA)

The origins of organic agriculture (OA) in Bulgaria can be traced back to the end of the socialist era. Compared to many other European countries, the establishment of the sector was not influenced by a farmer-led social movement, nor was it the result of consumer demand (Stoeva, 2016, p. 86). It was rather a process triggered by "academics, local consultants, organisations driven by foreign donors, and EU accession" (Stoeva, 2016, p. 86). The first actors who took steps towards the development of OA in Bulgaria in the early 1990s were professionals from the Agrarian University in the city of Plovdiv, who decided to create an Agriecological Center (AC) for popularizing the methods of organic farming (Slavova et al., 2016, p. 512; Stoeva, 2016, p. 90). The AC started to promote OA in Bulgaria through translation and distribution of literature related to it, including European legislative documents, as well as doing student trainings (Slavova et al., 2016, p. 513). In 1993, the AC established the first organic farm in Bulgaria (Todorova & Ikova, 2014, p. 311) and began producing and selling organic products. In the mid-1990s, it established the first Bulgarian NGO in the field of OA – Ecofarm (Stoeva, 2016, p. 90), which functioned as a private consultancy organization and can be considered the second actor to become involved in the development of OA in Bulgaria (Slavova et al., 2016, p. 513). Later, in 1993/94, a third actor joined the network - the Swiss Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), which established the NGO Bioselena Foundation for Organic Agriculture in Bulgaria in 1997 to become part of the promotion of organic farming in the country. Bioselena became the fourth actor to join the network and eventually, the most powerful one, thanks to the experience and resources gained from their Swiss counterparts (Slavova et al., 2016, p. 514). Subsequently, other organizations joined the network for the promotion of OA in Bulgaria, such as the Agrolink Association, which also contributed to the recognition of organic farming in the country. Thus, the first important activities in the

development of organic farming in Bulgaria took place between 1996-2000 (Todorova & Ikova, 2014, p. 311). This was a period marked by the weak interest of the political authorities in OA, as they dealt mainly with issues such as the restoration of land and farms after the collapse of the socialist cooperatives (Stoeva, 2016, p. 93). Moreover, at that time, there were still no fully trained farmers in the country who showed interest in organic farming. Hence, activities related to OA in the first years of its development in Bulgaria were led without the strong interest of the state and the participation of farmers, which "directly affected the dynamics of community development over the long term" (Stoeva, 2016, p. 93).

When Bulgaria began negotiations with the EC to join the EU in the early 2000s, the state took more measures regarding the development of OA in the country (Slavova et al., 2016, p. 516). Thus, the period 2000–2004 was marked by several important events with regard to organic farming. These include the establishment of national organic legislation (Ordinance 22 and Ordinance 35), the first national festival of OA, the first farm certification, as well as the first participation in an international exhibition - the BioFach Organic Trade Fair (Todorova & Ikova, 2014, p. 312). In addition, the first farmer-led OA organisation in Bulgaria - the Association of Organic Beekeepers (AOB) was established in the early 2000s and hence joined the OA network, contributing to its diversity.

Between 2005 and 2008, organic products became available in Bulgarian shops (Todorova & Ikova, 2014, p. 312) and there has been a trend of a steady growth in their production since 2008 (Dzhabarova, 2015, p. 31). This is likely because an increasing number of farmers turned to organic farming, while many customers started searching for healthier products produced without fertilizers and other artificial additives (Stoyanov & Doncheva, 2018, p. 187). Other factors which contributed to the development of organic farming in Bulgaria in recent years include the large number of ecologically preserved regions in the country, the realized benefits for the environment and the rural areas, and the fact that Bulgarian organic goods are well received in international markets (Aleksiev & Doncheva, 2017, p. 252, 254).

The first Bulgarian organic store opened in 2008 in Sofia (Nikolov et al., 2013, p. 9). Over the years, the organic production in Bulgaria continued to grow steadily. In 2015, Bulgaria ranked first in the EU by percentage of agricultural land "in conversion" into organic agricultural land, which is essentially "the rise of organic

agricultural land in percentage compared to the existing organic agricultural" (Stoyanov, 2017, p. 122, 123). In 2019, the majority (over 80%) of the organic foods, produced in Bulgaria, were exported, mainly on the European market - in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Italy, which shows "a clear export orientation" (Aleksiev et al., 2019, p. 50, 60) and a strong position in highly competitive markets (Stoyanov & Doncheva, 2018, p. 189). However, Stoyanov (2017, p. 120) argued that because most of the Bulgarian organic products are sold on international markets, the consumption of organic products in Bulgaria is relatively small.

The channels of realization of organic products in Bulgaria, as explained by Dzhabarova (2015, p. 32), are the following: 1) mixed shops such as hypermarkets, supermarkets, and neighborhood mini-markets; 2) specialized shops for healthy and organic food; 3) direct sales - from the farm, subscription (box) system, specialized markets of producers; 4) electronic commerce; and 5) others - restaurants, drugstores, government offices, specialized bazaars. Dzhabarova (2015, p. 32) noted that the predominant part (80%) of the certified organic products in the country are sold in mixed stores because Bulgarian consumers tend to trust more internationally certified organic products than local ones, which is why imported bio products have a very strong presence on the Bulgarian market (Aleksiev et al., 2019, p. 60).

Despite the positive trends in the development of OA in Bulgaria, the country is still among the countries with the least widespread organic farming in the EU (Grebenicharski, 2016, p. 8). The main obstacles to the development of organic production in Bulgaria are related to the limited domestic market and the low incomes of many households (Grebenicharski, 2016, p. 13), as organic products are typically more expensive than non-organic ones. In addition, in Bulgaria, there is a need for investment in the development of organic farms, particularly in the processing and storage of organic products and the training of farmers (Stoyanov & Doncheva, 2018, p. 187). Moreover, Bulgarians show clear preferences for imported international organic foods, which can be found mainly in grocery stores (Aleksiev et al., 2019, p. 60). In addition, relations between farmers and retail chains are difficult, and certification processes are complex (Aleksiev et al., 2019, p. 60). All these factors make local small farmers look for other sales channels, such as the direct market to sell their products. Through direct sales, small producers increase their profit as there are no middlemen (Dzhabarova, 2015, p. 34) and they get in direct contact with customers, which helps them understand their preferences.

Currently, there are various food initiatives in Bulgaria that aim to promote direct sales of organic products and provide producers of such products with direct sales markets. In addition, there are different food networks that advocate for the development of organic production and consumption in Bulgaria overall. The next chapter will briefly present a few of these food networks.

4.3. AFNs in Bulgaria

4.3.1. Bioselena

The Bioselena Foundation was established in 1997 by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), based in Frick, Switzerland, which ran the project "Development of Sustainable Agriculture in the Central Stara Planina" (mountains in central Bulgaria) in Bulgaria with funding from the Agreement on Technical Assistance between Bulgaria and Switzerland. Initially, the foundation was entirely Swiss, but over time, it became a Bulgarian non-governmental organization (NGO), with the Swiss Institute retaining the right to be an honorary member of the Board and a partner in the foundation's activities. Bioselena has been a member of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) since 1998 and the EU Group of the IFOAM since 2011.

The main mission of the Bioselena Foundation is to contribute to the development of organic and sustainable agriculture in Bulgaria through advocacy and lobbying and to provide organic farmers with political support and effective access to European and national programs. The goals of the foundation include: development of modern regulations and measures to support the production and consumption of organic food in Bulgaria, providing consulting and training of organic farmers and introducing innovations throughout the food chain, supporting and promoting short food supply chains and ensuring better access of organic foods to local markets, increasing the incomes of farmers in the mountainous regions of Bulgaria, and promoting sustainable use of natural resources.

In addition to advocacy and lobbying, Bioselena organizes farmers markets and takes part in various national and international projects. Since June 2017, the foundation has been running a farmers' market every Wednesday in Sofia in front of the building of the Ministry of Agriculture. More than 50 producers participate in the market, offering over 300 products, of which 25% are bio-certified. The producers are

from various regions of the country and offer different products such as fruits, vegetables, dairy products, honey, and others. The foundation also participates in various projects related to improving producers' access to training, maintaining soil health, offering information activities in relation to the EU's CAP, awareness of food waste, promoting organic seed production, and others.

4.3.1.1. Strategies

Connection strategy: Holding discussions

Bioselena is one of the first organizations that introduced the concept of organic farming in Bulgaria (Interview 5). In the first years of its work (1995-2000), the organization's activities revolved around acquainting small farmers, the Bulgarian administration, the Ministry of Agriculture, and experts from various institutes with the concept of organic farming (Interview 5). At that time, there were not many established farmers in Bulgaria due to the liquidation of the cooperative farms after the end of socialism in 1989/90 and the definition of organic farming was unclear for both producers and the state administration (Interview 5). Thus, the initial period of the organization's work was rather an "introductory period" (Interview 5).

During discussions with state officials such as the Minister of Agriculture on organic farming, Bioselena encountered many difficulties as its representatives were told that the Minister was busy providing food for the people and did not have time to engage in organic farming (Interview 5). As for the discussions with farmers, Bioselena's members found out that they do not use pesticides in their production due to the lack of stable incomes, but would use them to produce more food if they had higher earnings (Interview 5). This means that both state representatives and farmers did not understand the concept of organic farming very well at that time and did not want to practice it or support it (Interview 5).

To improve Bulgarian farmers' understanding of OA, the Bioselena Foundation sent some of them to Switzerland for two consecutive years and gave them the opportunity to stay there and learn about organic farming from Swiss farmers (Interview 5). Moreover, in addition to holding discussions with various groups and institutions, Bioselena introduced many new things in Bulgaria related to agriculture in the late 1990s, such as electric shepherds, new seeds, new varieties of fruits, fertilizer pits for storing manure from farms, and so forth (Interview 5).

Resistance strategy: Legislative work

Along with holding discussions with small farmers and state representatives, over the years, the Bioselena Foundation has been involved in various legislative initiatives related to organic farming in Bulgaria.

The first significant events related to OA in Bulgaria took place in 2001 in conjunction with an initiative by Bioselena. In 2001, Bioselena and the Ministry of Agriculture created the first two regulations for organic farming: one for crop production, and one for animal husbandry. For the first time, organic farms in Bulgaria were being certified. Bulgaria started exporting organic honey and currently ranks first in Europe in the number of certified organic beekeepers. In 2003, trade and exports of organic products in Bulgaria began to increase (Interview 5). Bulgarian organic farmers participated in an exhibition for organic farming abroad for the first time. The event was held in Germany and Bulgaria had its own stand with organic products such as rose oil, honey, herbs, tea, fruit, and vegetables (Interview 5). In 2007, there were about 250 bio-certified farms in Bulgaria compared to the beginning of the 2000s, when there were only about ten. However, Bioselena's chairman Stoilko Apostolov specifically noted that, at that time, these farms did not receive support from the state, but worked entirely on a market principle, i.e., they were market units that produced, sold, and profited from the price markup (Interview 5). They did not rely on any help from anywhere and were mainly export-oriented - they were producers of herbs, dried spices, essential oils, and so forth (Interview 5).

Regarding the attitude of the state towards organic farming, according to Apostolov, it generally depends a lot on the people working in the Ministry of Agriculture (Interview 5). That is, when there is a team interested in the development of organic farming in Bulgaria, OA is developing well in the country (Interview 5). For instance, in the period between October 2004 - June 2005 with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Bioselena and the Ministry of Agriculture prepared the first National Plan for the Development of Organic Agriculture. A working group of more than 30 representatives of key stakeholders was established for the preparation of the plan and their work was supported by an expert team, composed of specialists in the field of organic farming from NGOs, scientific circles, and consulting companies (Interview 5). The working version of the

plan was discussed with more than 600 people from all over the country through a series of six meetings held in each of the planning regions in March-April 2005 (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, 2009). As a result, in 2006, the Council of Ministers adopted the plan with a specific budget and specific goals. The plan aimed to provide the necessary resources for environmental protection, stabilization of ecosystems, preservation and restoration of natural resources, prevention of the process of land abandonment, sustainable development of rural areas, stabilization of farmers' incomes, and reduction of unemployment. The main goals set in the plan were the following: 1) development of the market of organic products, 2) eight percent of the utilized agricultural area to be managed organically by 2013, 3) creation of an effective regulatory framework for the development of organic farming by 2007, 4) practice-oriented research, education, training and consulting in the field of organic farming, and 5) establishment of an effective system of control and certification (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, 2009, p. 36). According to the plan, the Ministry of Agriculture was given the role of a competent authority with the obligation to implement the legislation in the field of organic farming. The following structures were set up for the implementation of the laws: 1) Organic Agriculture Commission, which assists the Minister, 2) Secretariat to the Commission, which organizes its work, and 3) Supervisory Expert Team, which supervise the control bodies through an annual audit (Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, 2009, p. 6).

In 2007, Bioselena began working on the Rural Development Program 2007-2013 together with the Ministry of Agriculture. At the suggestion of Bioselena, in 2007 a payment for organic beekeeping was introduced in Bulgaria, and in 2014 - for the breeding of animals in an organic way (Interview 5). Apostolov noted that payment for organic bee colonies is practiced in only a few European countries and Bulgaria is among them (Interview 5). Bioselena achieved its goal of Bulgarian organic beekeepers receiving payment through a long process of convincing the EC what they need it for. Regarding the cultivation of organic livestock, Bioselena insisted that Bulgarian farmers raising animals organically receive additional support for these activities. The reason for this insistence comes from the fact that, in Bulgaria, unlike for example Austria and Switzerland, where almost all organic farms are mixed, meaning they have both plants and livestock, 95% of the Bulgarian organic farms have only plant production and no animals, which is not sustainable (Interview 5).

Before introducing the payment for the breeding of animals in an organic way in 2014, there were about 12 organic animal farms in Bulgaria. Currently, there are about 50-60 such farms. As explained by Apostolov, at present in Bulgaria there are many bio-certified sheep and goats, but when it comes to chickens, for example, there is only one bio-certified producer with 700 hens (Interview 5). In addition, regarding organic eggs in Bulgaria, most of them are imported from Hungary, Slovakia, and other countries. For this reason, according to him, there is an imbalance in the Bulgarian market as there is not enough production of organic animal products (Interview 5).

In 2019, the Ministry of Agriculture prepared a National Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production for the period until 2027 together with representatives of controlling and consulting organizations, including Bioselena, scientific institutes and universities, organizations of organic producers, and traders. The plan set strategic goals in support of Bulgarian organic producers and for the further development of organic production in Bulgaria. As explained by Apostolov, the current plan was written because of a negative report of the EC (Interview 5). The plan was created from the top-down under the guidance of the working group of the Ministry of Agriculture. In comparison, the National Plan for Organic Agriculture in Bulgaria 2007-2013 was created from the bottom-up by farmers and other interested organizations, including Bioselena. According to Apostolov, the new plan is problematic because it is written to be read by the EC (Interview 5). It is also uploaded on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture so that the EC can see that Bulgaria has a plan for the development of OA because having a plan is one of the conditions for receiving funding (Interview 5). However, there are no specific budgets or timelines in the plan. For this reason, the chairman of Bioselena sees the plan as problematic (Interview 5). According to him, if a plan does not have a budget or some written indicator to measure the result, it is not a serious plan; it is just a plan that includes intentions that can be made by choice (Interview 5). Apostolov pointed that a plan must include deadlines, managers, and budgets (Interview 5). He noted that the plan must be re-written as the current document is ultimately signed only by the Minister of Agriculture, but not by the Council of Ministers, which means that it is only a temporary measure (Interview 5). One of the main things that is currently missing from the plan is specifically what the EC is proposing, i.e., the implementation of the European Directive on Green Public Procurement and funding of activities in support

of organic farming, e.g., to include organic products in the menus of kindergartens, schools, social and medical institutions (Interview 5). Apostolov indicated that Bioselena hopes that the EC will put pressure on the Bulgarian state to act more on the development of organic farming (Interview 5). According to him, organic production must be stimulated, as must demand, because even if organic producers receive sufficient financing, if they do not have a market to sell their products, the mechanism is unsustainable (Interview 5).

Reconstruction strategy: Creating alternative agrifood networks

Besides holding discussions and doing legislative work, Bioselena has been running a farmers' market in front of the Ministry of Agriculture every Wednesday since 2017. Apostolov explained that the main goal behind the creation of the farmers' market was for consumers to have access to high quality and artisanal food from small farms, and for farmers to have the opportunity to have a direct contact with consumers (Interview 5). To organize this market, Bioselena received assistance from the Swiss government through one of the projects it was funding at the time – the *Linking nature conservation with sustainable rural development* project, for which Bioselena received the Natura 2000 award from the EC in the category of socio-economic benefits. Within this project, Bioselena prepared over 50 small farmers from all over the country and provided them with a secure market (Interview 5). The initial plan was even larger - Bioselena wanted to hold farmers' markets in various Bulgarian cities such as Sofia, Plovdiv, Gabrovo and Troyan, but in the end, the organization managed to organize only one farmers' market - the one in Sofia (Interview 5).

The organization waited two years for permission from the municipality for the farmers' market in Sofia. Apostolov noted that, currently, the market is working very well, with between 30 and 40 producers gathering there every Wednesday, regardless of the season (Interview 5). They offer a variety of foods, mainly dairy products. The Bioselena Foundation maintains very strict rules for market participation. Internal rules are discussed with all participants and they must be followed for farmers to participate in the market (Interview 5). For instance, only products produced in family or small farms and artisanal products and not sold in

supermarkets are permitted for sale at the Bioselena's farmers' market (Interview 5). Other requirements for farmers are that their animals are kept under humane conditions (Interview 5). The foundation does not require the products to be bio-certified, but 25% of the products sold at the farmers' market have organic certifications (Interview 5).

Connection strategy: Coalition building

In addition to the aforementioned activities, Bioselena participates in various projects related to nature conservation, sustainable rural development, increasing the capacity of farmers to cultivate different plants, energy efficiency, improving the quality of products, food consumption and food waste, improving the efficiency of organic farming by promoting organic seed production in Europe, restoring soil health, and more (Interview 5). In these projects, Bioselena partners with various countries and organizations. The organization's participation in the projects usually includes training and information meetings; construction of demonstration farms; launching farmers' markets; participation in exhibitions, analysis; publishing various scientific publications, brochures, and manuals; developing a website for the exchange of knowledge and good practices; and others (Interview 5).

4.3.1.2. Challenges

Legislation

One of the main challenges that Bioselena has encountered in its work over the years is related to the Bulgarian legislation on farmers' markets.

Bioselena organizes its farmer's market in front of the Ministry of Agriculture in the form of an event for which the Municipality issues a permit every year. The reason for this is, as Apostolov explained, that the Bulgarian legislation on farmers' markets is problematic (Interview 5). In the Sofia Municipality, as well as in other Bulgarian municipalities, there is an ordinance from the 1960s for organizing farmers' markets, which are called municipal or cooperative markets. However, as Apostolov noted, the participants in such municipal markets are not farmers, but traders and trading companies who rent stalls or pavilions with the goal of turning the maximum

profit. The municipality benefits from these stalls working every day, and working every day means that farmers cannot participate in the municipal market because when they are not selling, they are busy producing their goods (Interview 5). If they want to participate in the municipal markets, farmers must pay a fee for 365 days a year, and in practice, be present at the market and use the stand only one or two days a week, because the rest of the time they are busy (Interview 5). Because of this, stalls in municipal markets are rented by traders, not by producers (Interview 5). People selling products there usually claim to be producers, when in fact, they are traders buying products from somewhere and selling them at the markets, with many consumers believing that they are real producers (Interview 5). For these reasons, Bioselena's chairman noted that he would not like Bioselena to be part of such a market - a market with traders and not producers, and thus found a solution of the problem, which is to hold its farmers' market in the form of an event for which the Municipality issues a permit every year (Interview 5). For each event - each farmers' market - Bioselena pays rent to the Municipality. The rent is three times higher than the one for the municipal market and although it is more expensive, the organization refuses to work at the municipal markets and prefers this way of working (Interview 5).

Public interest

Another major challenge that Bioselena has faced in its work over the years is the lack of interest from the public.

In the summer of 2020, Bioselena organized another farmer's market, which was held every Saturday in the parking lot of the Billa supermarket, an Austrian supermarket chain. This farmers market was a joint project with Billa, which provided Bioselena with free space and electricity. In the end, however, the market failed to succeed because people did not show enough interest in it (Interview 5). According to the observations of the chairman of Bioselena, most of the people did not even notice the farmers' market. Bioselena worked the same way with the Kaufland supermarket, a German supermarket chain, but the farmers' market was again unsuccessful, which demonstrates that collaborating with a popular chain does not correlate with whether or not people will be interested in a farmers' market and its

products (Interview 5). According to Apostolov, the reason for the low turnout does not stem from the fact that Bulgarians are not interested in organic products, but because not all of them can afford such food, as it is expensive (Interview 5). He argued that many Bulgarians would buy organic food for their children, but not for themselves, judging by the high sales of organic baby purees from the Swiss brand Hipp, which are expensive in Bulgaria (Interview 5).

Relations with the state

Another significant problem that Bioselena has encountered in its work over the years is related to the state's attitude towards organic farming.

For instance, every year from 2001 to 2007 Bioselena held a National Holiday of Organic Agriculture in Sofia. The Minister of Agriculture was always present at the celebration and gave a speech on how the Ministry of Agriculture supports organic farming. However, according to Apostolov, government officials often talk about how the state supports organic farming, when in reality, the state sees organic farming as an annoying obligation imposed by the European Union (Interview 5). After Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007, the Bulgarian state had to fulfill obligations under the CAP for the implementation of measures for protection of soil, air, and climate. With the introduction of the European Green Deal by the EC, the state will have even more obligations to implement new practices and will have to comply with the new policies set by European institutions.

Fraud

In addition to the aforementioned problems, Bioselena has also faced challenges related to fraud.

For instance, in 2016, Bulgarian organic producers stopped receiving support under Measure 11 "Organic Farming" of the Rural Development Program 2014-2020, as there was no more budget. The Bulgarian state stopped accepting requests for support and the media reacted very negatively to this news, questioning how the funds ran out (Interview 5). In the end, it turned out that there are many farms that had received large subsidies for organic farming, but still farmed their products in the

conventional way (Interview 5). Bioselena found out that the same situation occurred in other countries as well. At the time, the organization was involved in discussions about the introduction of degressive tax rates for organic farming as a member of the IFOAM. During the Federation's meetings, Bioselena learned that other countries have the same money laundering problems as Bulgaria, which is why they introduced a degressive tax rate to minimize the chances that products would be presented as organic, despite being conventionally farmed, just to get subsidies. Such measures exist in Poland, Portugal, and Italy.

In Bulgaria, the first problem with money laundering in organic production was related to the organic production of walnuts (Interview 5). In Poland, for example, the same problem occurred years before (Interview 5). Apostolov explained that the problem with creating a walnut farm is that the walnut begins to bear fruit 5-6 years after planting (Interview 5). Some people in Bulgaria plant a walnut garden, certify it as an organic farm, but until the walnut starts to bear fruit, their commitment expires, they receive subsidies for five years and in the fifth year they give up, which is a fraud (Interview 5). The fact that this money scheme appeared first in Poland and later in Bulgaria shows that people involved follow examples from other countries (Interview 5). Due to these problems, Bioselena proposed legal changes in Bulgaria. Their proposed changes were accepted as a temporary measure, resulting in the condition for granting new EUR 40 million in subsidies under Measure 11 "Organic Farming" of the Rural Development Program 2014-2020 (Interview 5).

4.3.1.3. Warrior, Builder, or Weaver?

In general, Bioselena employs a variety of strategies to promote and encourage organic farming in Bulgaria, some of which could be classified as warrior strategies (legislative work), others as builder strategies (creating alternative agrifood networks), and others as weaver strategies (coalition building). However, because Bioselena has been involved mostly in legislative initiatives over the years, a plausible conclusion is that the organization is mostly associated with the warrior strategy. While the most visible warrior work is public protest, there are other forms of warrior work, such as legislative work, as well as research and analysis (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 44), meaning that Bioselena fits the warrior strategy well. Typical warrior work strongly opposes the conventional agrifood system and seeks to

transform both political and economic systems, as well as civil society views and values (Stevenson et al., 2007), which applies to Bioselena.

4.3.2. For the Earth

The For the Earth Environmental Association is an independent civic organization established in 1995 to promote an environmentally friendly lifestyle. The experts, activists and volunteers working in the organization strive to achieve the following goals: effective changes in local, national, and European policies related to a clean environment; formation of an active civic culture and participation in preventive decisions; improving citizens' access to information and justice; and greater transparency of institutions in the management and spending of public funds. At first, For the Earth was as an anti-nuclear organization. Its first campaigns were related to opposing various nuclear technologies. Today, the organization's activities are focused on several campaigns aimed at specific areas of environmental protection and restoration, including zero waste, clean air, organic farming and food, energy efficiency, climate, and public funds.

For the Earth organizes and participates in various types of initiatives, such as the cleaning of natural areas, promotion of new types of food supply chains, lobbying against GMO techniques and products, and so forth. For instance, since 1999, every year volunteers from the organization participate in the cleaning of protected areas of the highest mountain areas in Bulgaria. Since 2010, For the Earth has organized the promotion of food cooperatives in Bulgaria, which led to the establishment of the first food cooperative in Sofia - Hrankoop.

4.3.2.1. Strategies

Connection strategy: Holding discussions

Similarly to Bioselena, one of the strategies used by For the Earth to change the corporate food regime in Bulgaria is to hold discussions with small farmers and state representatives on organic farming practices.

In 2010, representatives of For the Earth began work in the field of organic farming by holding discussions and conducting interviews with small producers in

different regions of Bulgaria (Interview 6). The producers were mostly elderly people living in Bulgarian villages. The main problem for small producers, which the representatives of For the Earth found during the interviews, was that it was difficult for them to sell their products at a fair price (Interview 6). Their only opportunity to sell their products was through an informal sale, i.e., that their relatives or acquaintances would buy products from them. For the Earth's representatives noted that the inability to sell their products at a fair price demonstrates that they needed a secure market for their products (Interview 6).

In addition to discussions with farmers, over the years, For the Earth has regularly participated in discussions with local authorities and municipalities, most often with representatives of the Sofia Municipality. As explained by Ivaylo Popov, member of For the Earth, the organization plays an advocacy role and communicates with the state through meetings, letters, comments on regulations and policies of the Ministry of Agriculture, defending the interests of food initiatives such as the food cooperative Hrankoop before the state (Interview 6). For instance, For the Earth helped Hrankoop in finding suitable land for a farmers' market, for issuing market permits, and so forth (Interview 6).

Connection strategy: Coalition building

After holding discussions with small producers in Bulgaria in 2010 and learning about the problems they face, the representatives of For the Earth sought out to help them (Interview 6). They began to search for information on how small producers in different countries around the world dealt with the same problems. They thus discovered the food cooperatives and found out that there are many such networks around the world. They established contacts with a food cooperative, based in Catalonia, Spain, which in turn shared information with For the Earth on the functioning of the cooperative, the pros and cons of such a network, and provided them with various materials on the subject. The representatives of For the Earth decided to create the same type of food cooperatives in Bulgaria (Interview 6). Popov noted that similar cooperatives existed in Bulgaria before 1945, that is, before the emergence of socialism, but they were not so well-organized (Interview 6). Before the advent of the socialist regime, small Bulgarian farmers helped each other sell their

products directly on the market at fair prices. At that time, the cooperative movement in Bulgaria was quite well-developed. However, after the rise of socialism, the old cooperatives disappeared and were replaced by new cooperatives that were not intended to enter the market and were organized according to a top-down approach, and not according to a bottom-up approach as was the case before 1945 (Interview 6). For the Earth began popularizing the model that existed before 1945, but in a more organized form (Interview 6). After holding various discussions and meetings with different people interested in the topic, the idea of creating a food cooperative, called Hrankoop, arose (Interview 6). In the beginning, Hrankoop was an informal organization of mostly consumers who were looking for manufacturers from whom they could buy. In the beginning, the most difficult tasks for the cooperative were finding producers, as well as the organization of the work. For the Earth and Hrankoop organized deliveries of products once a week and over time, Hrankoop turned from an informal organization into an official food cooperative (Interview 6). For the Earth and Hrankoop are well connected to this day and some of the members of For the Earth are also Hrankoop's customers (Interview 6).

In addition to helping with the establishment Hrankoop, For Earth has been involved in the creation of various similar initiatives (Interview 6). An example of this is the food cooperative in Varna, a city in Bulgaria. The creation and functioning of this cooperative were supported by For the Earth (Interview 6). The food cooperative in Plovdiv, which still works today, is another example of how the organization assists in the implementation of such ideas. In addition, For the Earth helped the organization Bioselena with the establishment of its farmers market, located in front of the Ministry of Agriculture in Sofia (Interview 6).

Aside from food cooperatives, For the Earth organized and participated in various food initiatives over the years with the support of other food organizations, such as Food Not War, Hrankoop, Urban Agriculture, and others (Interview 6). Food-related initiatives mainly took the form of cooking courses and culinary seminars, during which participants could discuss food problems and their solutions (Interview 6). Topics in the courses were related to social and environmental issues and included aspects such as reducing food waste, minimizing meat consumption, the benefits of a vegetarian and vegan diet, and so forth (Interview 6). One of the main goals of such culinary workshops was to build and develop a network of organizations working to promote environmentally friendly food production and

consumption (Interview 6). According to Popov, the organization has worked very well with various partners over the years through such campaigns (Interview 6). For the Earth has participated in many discussions and initiatives together with other organizations, thus building a strong network of groups with the same cause. In addition to culinary workshops, For the Earth has held film screenings and webinars on topics related to sustainable practices.

Connection strategy: Communicating messages

For the Earth's activities, related to organic farming and food, are all related to the principles of food sovereignty (Interview 6), a term first coined in 1996 by La Vía Campesina in connection with providing greater control to producers and consumers in the processes of food production, distribution, and consumption. For the Earth was the first organization to introduce the term food sovereignty in Bulgaria in 2012 (Interview 6). Prior to the introduction of the concept, For the Earth's representatives participated in various international events related to it (Interview 6). Being part of different international networks dealing with the topic of food sovereignty, For the Earth began to draw information from them and thus decided to introduce the term in Bulgaria (Interview 6).

The organization's work on popularizing the concept and principles of food sovereignty in Bulgaria consisted of the translating and posting of publications on For the Earth's official website, speaking at events and conferences, having talks with various institutions, as well as organizing film screenings (Interview 5). In the beginning, For the Earth promoted the topic in a more theoretical way but since it did not receive enough attention from the public, the organization changed its way of working and began presenting the term through specific examples (Interview 5). For instance, at events and conferences, For the Earth's representatives started explaining what exactly a food cooperative is, how orders could be made in such an organization, and gave concrete examples about such cooperatives in Bulgaria (Interview 6). Through this approach, the term food sovereignty started gaining popularity in the country.

Currently, due to lack of resources, For the Earth does not promote the concept of food sovereignty as much as before, but as Popov (Interview 6) noted,

there are various groups and organizations involved in encouraging such practices in Bulgaria. According to Popov (Interview 6), it is important to promote food sovereignty as one of its most important characteristics is that both producers and consumers, i.e., the two main end links of the food chain, play a leading role in decision-making on policies and laws, rules, subsidies, and so forth in the food sector. As argued by Popov (Interview 6), it is important for For the Earth to empower producers and consumers because they are the “weakest elements” in the food chain, while large retailers and processors take precedence and participate in many more policies because they have very strong lobbies. Other important characteristics of food sovereignty, which For the Earth stands for, are the sustainability of production, i.e., food to be produced in a way that does not harm nature, as well as economic justice, i.e., economic relations, in which both parties are satisfied with the results (Interview 6).

In addition to the initiatives connected with the promotion of food sovereignty in Bulgaria, For the Earth has participated in various initiatives against GMO products and techniques. The organization's activities in recent years in relation to GMOs were mainly related to lobbying and, where necessary, public speaking on the issue (Interview 6).

Popov noted that Bulgaria has some of the most restrictive laws concerning GMOs within the framework of the European legislation (Interview 6). When the strict laws against GMO products were introduced in Bulgaria, For the Earth and other organizations conducted tests on the quality of the products sold on the market (Interview 6). The organizations detected some infringements, but over the years they have greatly decreased (Interview 6). In addition to the laws, there is a strong public opinion in Bulgaria against GMO products, and there are many sociological studies supporting this (Interview 6). Years ago, thanks to the activities of For the Earth and other organizations, there was a strong anti-GMO movement in Bulgaria (Interview 6). Over the years, For the Earth has initiated many activities related to GMO techniques and products (Interview 6). For instance, in December 2020, For the Earth conducted a survey which showed that Bulgarians are very critical of GMO products (Interview 6).

In addition, For the Earth constantly monitors legislative changes concerning GMOs and participates in various discussions to show that GMOs are harmful (Interview 6). In recent years, the organization created many materials concerning

the new techniques for genetic reproduction, i.e., a new class of GMOs (Interview 6), the most popular of which is the CRISPR gene editing method, used in soybeans, rapeseed, corn, and other products. As Popov explained (Interview 6), this technology is much cheaper and easier to apply compared to the classic GMO technology. Over the past two years, For the Earth issued several press releases on the new GMO techniques, but they were not covered in the media (Interview 6). According to Popov, the lack of interest of the media is somewhat understandable, as the processes related to the presentation of the new GMO techniques are still pending and there are still no official procedures for change (Interview 6). However, though there are still no official changes related to the new GMO techniques, the lobbying organizations of the GMO industry were extremely active in recent years and are currently receiving more attention than the press releases of For the Earth (Interview 6). Therefore, For the Earth sent a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment about the position of Bulgaria in these processes and is waiting for an answer (Interview 6).

Today, For the Earth continues to work hard on its anti-GMO campaigns. In particular, the organization works on the topic of GMOs with several international organizations, such as Friends of the Earth, Testbiotech, and GMWatch. In the last few years, For the Earth, with the support of other organizations, produced various materials on the subject of GMOs, such as reports, articles and videos. Currently, For the Earth is preparing an information campaign and a sociological survey to show that Bulgarians are against GMO products (Interview 6). The organization also plans to hold a seminar on new GMO techniques with journalists in May 2021 (Interview 6).

4.3.2.2. Challenges

Relations with the state

According to Popov, state officials in Bulgaria often claim to have a keen interest in organic farming, when in fact, the state does not implement sufficient policies regarding organic farming practices (Interview 6). In addition, Popov noted that discussions with state officials are usually not fruitful, as in most cases the management simply wants to maintain its public image and does not actually help (Interview 6). He argued that the Ministry of Agriculture does not use all the necessary tools to help develop organic farming and food cooperatives, such as

investment or implementing new rules and policies (Interview 6). Moreover, he claimed that the Ministry of Agriculture complies with the economic interests of certain circles and people, ignoring the economic interests of small farmers, which leads to the slow development of organic farming in Bulgaria (Interview 6).

Relations between small farmers

In addition to the state's lack of interest in organic farming, Popov noted that meetings with government officials are often unsuccessful for another reason, which is that small producers in Bulgaria are not well connected. They do not participate in agricultural organizations (Interview 6). He stated that Bulgarians in general find it very difficult to unite and work together and for this reason there are no strong organizations representing small farmers in Bulgaria (Interview 6). Thus, the organizations involved in lobbying processes are usually those of large manufacturers. However, as he noted, small farmers' organizations must defend themselves against the state, not organizations such as For the Earth, because it is an environmental organization, and the state pays more attention to the actions of farmers' organizations (Interview 6).

4.3.2.3. Warrior, Builder, or Weaver?

Similarly to Bioselena, For the Earth employs a variety of strategies for the promotion of organic farming in Bulgaria. Most of For the Earth's activities related to OA regard communicating messages to the public, promoting the creation of alternative agrifood networks, and working with various groups on different food initiatives - activities that can be classified as weaver strategies.

As explained by Stevenson et al. (2007), weaver work aims at creating relationships between warriors and builders. Examples of weaver work are the linking of farmer groups with environmental groups on the issue of agricultural land conservation or the connection of nutritionists with the organizers of "buy local" campaigns (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 47). In the case of For The Earth, the environmental organization led to the creation and linked itself with the food cooperative Hrankoop. Moreover, it has worked with or provided assistance to other

similar organizations such as Bioselena, which implies that it aims at building coalitions between the various food initiatives.

Out of the three approaches, weaver work is most clearly movement-oriented and focuses to a large extent on civil society (Stevenson et al., 2007, pp. 45-46, p. 47). Weavers operate in the political and economic sectors and are especially important in mobilizing civil society, which applies for For the Earth as it encourages people to act in anti-GMO initiatives or other food-related activities.

4.3.3. Hrankoop

The Hrankoop movement in Bulgaria began with the initiative of the environmental association For the Earth in 2010 after one of its activists, Filka Sekulova, introduced the idea of CSA (or food cooperative) following a visit to Barcelona, Spain, where the concept was gaining momentum (Genov et al., 2015, p. 27). After sharing the idea of CSA, the NGO For the Earth launched a one-year project to promote food cooperatives as a new form of support for small farmers from consumer communities (Genov et al., 2015, p. 27). In the beginning, another organization - the Together Foundation, which also had its own project for solidarity agriculture and organized solidarity actions to support farms, also played an active role in the initiative to spread the idea of food cooperatives (Genov et al., 2015, p. 27).

At one of the meetings organized by For the Earth, a group of about 20 people was formed, who decided to look for ways to order and deliver agricultural products from producers they know personally (Genov et al., 2015, p. 27). In one year, the group grew to 60-70 families, created a Google mailing list in for orders and organized joint deliveries of fruits, vegetables, dairy products and eggs (Genov et al., 2015, p. 27).

In the summer of 2012, the group organized its first improvised farmers' market in Sofia and later that year it spontaneously decided to help an organic farm, called *Penovi*, which had produced 10 tons of bio-certified lentils, but did not want to export them to Germany at a low price and had to sell them somewhere in Bulgaria (Genov et al., 2015, p. 28). From this the *Save 10 tons of lentils* campaign grew. It involved many members of the Hrankoop group, who organized online orders and distributions and in six months managed to "save" the lentils by selling them at a fair

price (Genov et al., 2015, p. 28). After several more similar campaigns took place, more and more producers wanted to join Hrankoop to sell their products directly to consumers (Genov et al., 2015, p. 28).

At the end of 2013, a number of meetings of the members of the group were held, who decided to adopt common rules of work (Genov et al., 2015, p. 28). At one of the meetings, it was decided to introduce a membership fee, to rent a permanent room for regular deliveries, and to select three coordinators to work more actively to make deliveries (Genov et al., 2015, p. 28).

Until 2015, Hrankoop Sofia worked as an informal group (Genov et al., 2015, p. 30). In 2015, its organizers decided to register the group as a cooperative under the Bulgarian Cooperatives Act. The organization had over 180 active members, including over 30 producers delivering organic food on a weekly basis (Genov et al., 2015, p. 28).

Hrankoop currently has its own online platform through which users can order and receive products from Hrankoop's office or have them delivered. The quality of the products is guaranteed as through compliance with the relevant legal requirements. Producers who are members of Hrankoop and offer their products online produce healthy products and follow organic farming practices. The online platform offers various types of fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, dairy and meat products, honey, bread, wine, and many other processed products. Cosmetics, household products, books, and other similar products can also be purchased on the platform.

In addition, every week, Hrankoop organizes several farmers' markets in different places in Sofia, where farmers meet producers directly and sell their products.

4.3.3.1. Strategies

Reconstruction strategy: Creating alternative agrifood networks

Hrankoop's main goal is to change the traditional relationships between suppliers and customers, in which they are highly distant from one another, by organizing alternative food markets. In the organization, producers and consumers are strongly connected with each other. For instance, consumers are invited to

participate in various events such as the distribution of farmers' products, during which they meet with producers and exchange contacts (Interview 1). Consumers can also visit producers' farms and participate in solidarity actions, organized by Hrankoop. Solidarity actions are the basis for the creation of the organization and hence play an important role in the organization's work.

Hrankoop's solidarity actions are typically held for a day or two. They may include picking fruits and vegetables, haymaking, digging a well, setting up a children's playground, moving a herd of animals, and more (Hrankoop Sofia, 2021). Before the start of a solidarity action, the farmer informs the organization about what needs to be done, how many people are needed for the work, what equipment is needed, how to get to the place, if he or she can offer shelter and food, and so forth (Hrankoop Sofia, 2021). After receiving the information Hrankoop's organizers recruit volunteers who are interested in helping and give them the opportunity to work on someone's farm (Hrankoop Sofia, 2021). In this way, volunteers connect with other like-minded people, become familiar with the farmer's job, and help with the harvest. By playing a role in solidarity actions, consumers show their support and solidarity for farmers, which builds trust between them and strengthens their relationship. Solidarity is an important principle for building a cohesive community, as it strengthens it and helps it overcome the difficulties it faces over time. Over the years, Hrankoop has organized many solidarity actions, and it now plans to organize one such actions every month (Hrankoop Sofia, 2021). The organization created a new team to deal specifically with solidarity actions, aimed at strengthening the trust between consumers and producers (Hrankoop Sofia, 2021). The team must ensure that these initiatives are sustainable and must provide practices in decentralizing the activities of Hrankoop, which means that some of the organization's activities are carried out by volunteers and not just the core team (Hrankoop Sofia, 2021). The team of volunteers plans to promote the solidarity actions, using materials in Bulgarian and English to reach both the Bulgarian-speaking as well as the English-speaking people in Bulgaria and to hold 12 solidarity actions in 2021 (Hrankoop Sofia, 2021).

Hrankoop's chairman Nikolay Genov explained that the principle of solidarity is important for Hrankoop not only because of the better relations between producers and consumers, but also because solidarity agriculture is more sustainable than the conventional farming (Interview 1). The reason for this is that the people involved in

solidarity agriculture are usually small farmers who produce in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way. Solidarity agriculture is also more economically sustainable, as it helps small farmers and creates job opportunities and thus supports the local economy. Solidarity agriculture provides food security as it does not depend on foreign imports and supports local production (Interview 1).

Voluntary work in Hrankoop also includes order processing once a year by customers (Interview 1). In this way, Hrankoop engages consumers in many different actions, which makes them support the work of the organization and that of farmers. As a result of building trust and solidarity between farmers and consumers, the latter are much more likely to accept an incomplete order in case of insufficient harvest, as they comply with the farmers and their work and show solidarity with them. For example, if a customer orders 20 kilograms of carrots, but receives only 10 kilograms, they are expected to understand the producer and the situation (Interview 1). Hrankoop's main coordinator Ralitsa Kassimova noted that the good relations between producers and customers benefits both parties because producers can learn about the products consumers want and respond to these requests and needs (Interview 2).

Additionally, as explained by Hrankoop's producer and member Ilian Panov, by being part of Hrankoop and particularly, by taking part in the farmers' markets, producers strengthen their relations with other farmers because they exchange information, contacts, consumers' recommendations, and so on (Interview 3). Furthermore, Hrankoop provides producers with the opportunity to visit other producers' farms (Interview 3). As Hrankoop's producer and member Trayana Vasileva noted, farmers gain a lot of information and exchange experiences with other producers, which is very beneficial for them (Interview 4). Thus, the existence of organizations such as Hrankoop helps to build better relationships not only between producers and consumers, but also between different producers. Through solidarity and mutual assistance, producers and consumers in such organizations maintain the organization's stability and prosperity, thus successfully challenging the dominant food system.

In addition to focusing on producers and consumers, who are members of the organization, Hrankoop's organizers try to involve non-members of the organization in its activities (Interview 2). At the farmers' markets, Hrankoop organizes various workshops, e.g., culinary ones, in which non-members of Hrankoop are invited to

participate in activities such as making and decorating sweets and biscuits, painting Easter eggs, and so forth (Interview 2). This brings non-members together with other like-minded people and gives them the opportunity to take part in various activities they are interested in.

Farmers who join Hrankoop are usually people who have not offered their products at other markets before. In most cases, these are small producers with small production capacities, in need of a secure market. They are people interested in organic farming, environmental protection, and sustainability. For this reason, the food they produce is organic, healthy, and free of antibiotics, enhancers, flavorings, pesticides, etc. The consumers who join Hrankoop, on the other hand, are people interested in healthy eating and supporting the local economy. They are people who want to know the exact origin, ingredients, and quality of food, and appreciate the opportunity to meet the people who produce the food they consume. In Hrankoop, they all work together, support each other, and have a voice in important matters, concerning the organization. For example, when new producers want to join the organization, all members, especially producers, are asked if they know the producer who wants to join and if they agree with them joining (Interview 2). In addition, when Hrankoop organizers plan to create new farmers' markets or events they ask everyone for their opinion (Interview 2). In this way, decisions are made collectively by all members of the organization.

4.3.3.2. Challenges

Relations with the state

Hrankoop's main challenges are related to the state's attitude towards OA and small farmers. According to the interviewees, the state does not help or encourage alternative food initiatives and small farmers enough. For instance, Hrankoop's organizers state that they have many problems when working with municipalities. It is important for the organization that the municipalities provide them with a good place to hold a farmers' market so that they can be visible for the people and connect with more customers (Interview 2). However, municipalities often do not provide Hrankoop with good places. For example, when the organizers of Hrankoop asked the mayor of Stara Zagora, a city in Bulgaria, for permission to hold a farmers' market in front of

the municipality because of its good location, the mayor refused immediately, giving the request little thought (Interview 1). Another example of the difficulty in working with mayors or deputy mayors is related to the farmers' market in Bankya, a district of Sofia. Initially, the market was held in a very good place, provided by the deputy mayor. However, when he left his position and was replaced by a new deputy mayor, he did not want the market to take place in the same place. The reason why mayors refuse to offer Hrankoop a decent location is because they consider farmers' markets to be filthy, believing that pigs, chickens, and other related animals are sold there, which is incorrect (Interview 1).

Another challenge coming from the state is that in Bulgaria, there are no legal structures explicitly for alternative food initiatives such as CSA. This means that they are not regulated in a normative way and if they do not become legally registered, e.g., as cooperation in accordance with the Bulgarian Law on Cooperations, this can lead to problems. As the organizers of Hrankoop explained, such problems occurred in the producer-consumer cooperative in Varna, a city in Bulgaria. The organization's product distribution center was searched by the National Food Agency, the National Revenue Agency and the Police because their competitors wanted to interfere with their work and accused them of various things (Interview 2).

Another problem for Hrankoop related to the state is the Bulgarian Law on Cooperations. According to Hrankoop's organizers the law is outdated and though it has been updated many times, it is still old and confusing and creates many problems for the organization (Interview 1). The law is created for cooperations, where members enter with a share of capital, or in the case of agricultural cooperations – with land (Interview 1). Hrankoop's case is different because members make all decisions collectively and the organization does not work to win, meaning that the goal is not profit, but the development of the organization and the farmers' markets (Interview 1). For this reason, Hrankoop's organizers want to change the laws because if a cooperation starts to win and take dividends, the purpose of the organization changes immediately (Interview 1). The cooperation must export its profits to its members (Interview 1).

In addition to these challenges, all interviewees reported that the state puts pressure on small producers and does not encourage their production enough because in Bulgaria, the state is very dependent on the business, the branch organizations, and the trade chains (Interview 2). In general, large producers, mostly

grain producers, benefit the most from state aid (Interview 3). Moreover, when it comes to organic farms, the state does not stimulate their further development in any way and those who produce organic products do so of their own will (Interview 4).

Other problems for Hrankoop's producers, related to the state, include the lack of electronic services. According to some of the interviewees, the monitoring and control of agricultural production, conducted by state institutions, could be simplified. For instance, the producer Ilian Panov noted that when it comes to the exchange of documents, it could all be done electronically because some producers have farms in remote places, far from the city, where the relevant institutions are located, which farmers have to go to (Interview 3). Panov explained that state institutions in Bulgaria still require the manufacturer to always appear in person to present documents, which could happen electronically to facilitate the manufacturer's work (Interview 3).

Relations within the network

In addition to the problems with the state, there are issues within Hrankoop itself. For instance, due to internal tensions in the coordinating team, two of the coordinators left the organization a few years ago but kept its meeting room and some of its resources and also tried to keep a large part of the consumer group (Interview 2). The two coordinators were more business-oriented and did not want to participate in cooperative initiatives such as farmers' markets. They wanted to remain an informal group, as they currently are (Interview 2).

Another internal problem is caused by Hrankoop's producers. There have been several cases in the organization where farmers have accused other farmers of not selling organic products, claiming that they buy non-organic foods elsewhere and then sell them at the farmers' markets because they perceive them as their competitors. The producer Trayana Vasileva noted that this is a big problem, as it leads to a loss of trust between producers, and between buyers and farmers (Interview 4). When the organizers of Hrankoop detect such a problem, they react immediately, make producers reconcile with each other, try to convince them to have more trust in each other, and make them monitor each other's farms to make sure that production is organic (Interview 1).

Relations with supermarkets

Hrankoop's organizers reported that competing with big supermarket chains can sometimes be unsuccessful. In 2016, Hrankoop opened its own farm shop in a shopping mall in Sofia but encountered many difficulties, suffered serious financial problems, and was thus forced to close the shop in 2018. The farm shop opened at the invitation of Mall Serdika in Sofia. The shop was very successful in its first six-seven months but when the supermarket chain Billa opened nearby, Hrankoop was forced to move its store to new places three times. Additionally, the Bulgarian organic store Zelen, which is one of the big bio chains in Bulgaria, opened in the mall as well, which made Hrankoop reduce the space of its store from 40 square meters to 12 square meters to meet the criteria of the mall and the grocery stores. As a result, Hrankoop operated at a loss for almost a year (Interview 1). Hrankoop's organizers made great efforts to move the store to another place, but several of the organization's members managed to persuade the others that it is better to close it and thus the store was closed (Interview 2). Consequently, Hrankoop's organizers still pay money to their suppliers and manufacturers due to the losses (Interview 2).

Another similar problem that Hrankoop encountered was when it had to close one of its farmers' markets in the Ivan Vazov district in Sofia because the municipality there wanted to build a DM store, a German chain of retail stores (Interview 2). The market remained closed for a year, but the citizens of the Ivan Vazov neighborhood created a petition in which they stated that they did not want the market to be destroyed and a DM store to be built in its place. They sent the petition to the municipality and for this and other reasons, the DM shop was not built and therefore the farmers' market could continue to take place there (Interview 2).

Public interest

Another problem for Hrankoop is Bulgarians' perception of their organization. According to Genov, some Bulgarians associate such food organizations with the state-controlled cooperations which existed during the socialist years in Bulgaria (Interview 1). Moreover, due to the lack of imported goods during the socialist years, imported foods entered the Bulgarian market late and therefore are still very

interesting for people, ie. their varieties, packaging, etc. (Interview 2), which makes the products sold at farmers' markets not as attractive to the public. Thus, the idea of agricultural cooperatives based on solidarity and community support has not yet received as much as attention in Bulgaria as in the West (Interview 1). At the same time, however, big organic stores and chains in Bulgaria have attracted attention lately and are growing much faster than markets with locally produced healthy food (Interview 1), which shows that there is interest in organic products, but imported goods are still more appealing than traditional foods.

In addition to these problems, some Bulgarians show distrust in Hrankoop's producers. Some think that the producers can buy products from other markets and offer them as organic products at the farmers' markets (Interview 1). This confirms that some Bulgarians still mistrust the agricultural cooperative form and for this reason, the idea of solidarity agriculture in Bulgaria is getting attention slowly (Interview 2).

4.3.3.3. Warrior, Builder or Weaver?

Hrankoop's main strategy for changing the corporate food regime in Bulgaria is the creation of an alternative agrifood network, which can be considered a builder strategy. Builders operate primarily in the economic sector in a less contentious way than warriors, as is the case for Hrankoop.

Builders can face many challenges in their work when starting and maintaining new agrifood businesses due to the lack of entrepreneurial experience and financial capital, as well as the conditions set by conventional agricultural and food markets (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 45). The last two apply to Hrankoop as well, as it faces many difficulties in its work, some of which are related to financial issues and the attitude of supermarkets. Despite these problems, Hrankoop connects farmers with consumers and provides them with alternative ways of production and consumption, thus changing the traditional relationship between them, in which they are highly distant from one another, and influencing the mainstream food system.

4.3.4. Root

The Root Foundation was founded in 2011 in Sofia with the main goal of promoting sustainable practices in Bulgaria. Root's activities are related to implementing various strategies, models, and technologies for sustainable development in the fields of architecture, agriculture, education, and culture with the aim of protecting and improving natural resources, landscape, biodiversity, and the quality of life of people. Root's team is made up of seven people who are passionate about ecology and organic farming, who cooperate with different environmental organizations; universities; and state, regional, and municipal authorities to achieve the goals of the foundation.

Root's work is primarily focused on the development of shared urban agriculture in Bulgaria, which is why the team organizes a number of initiatives related to this goal.

4.3.4.1. Strategies

Reconstruction strategy: Creating alternative agrifood networks

The Root Foundation is involved in various initiatives related to urban agriculture. For instance, Root's team aimed at creating a so-called demonstration village in the village of Pozharevo in Bulgaria, where urban agriculture can be practiced (Interview 7). The village was supposed to have buildings made of natural and recycled materials, following the American *Earthship* model for creating a self-sustaining home (Interview 7). Buildings made according to this model are supplied with renewable energy. For example, rainwater is collected from roofs and then re-used for other purposes. Root's team wanted to apply different approaches to agriculture in the village – the polyculture production system (in which more than one species is grown at the same time and place) and the food forest system (in which various edible plants are grown in the forest to mimic ecosystems) (Interview 7). The foundation held talks with the mayor of the village of Pozharevo, who was very open to the idea of creating such a village. However, in the end, the project did not materialize due to lack of financial resources (Interview 7).

Another example of Root's work related to the promotion of urban agriculture in Bulgaria is the Urban Experimental initiative, which was launched in 2018 and aims to create a system for shared composting and growing edible plants in urban environments. As Root's chairman Bozhidar Emanuilov explained, composting is a natural biological process that breaks down biowaste. Food breaks down into the soil and eventually produces a humus-like material called compost (Interview 7). The idea of Root's project is to develop the idea of composting in Bulgaria and to encourage people to try to compost it in their own homes and yards (Interview 7). Root's team is promoting the project online and is organizing lectures on the topic.

Root's team is also part of the Initiative for the Development of Urban Agriculture in Bulgaria, which involves several different organizations, such as Gorichka, Ecocommunity, and the Garden of Friendship, all of which have a common interest in urban agriculture. The initiative started in 2017 with the aim to create a network of shared urban gardens in Sofia, where residents can grow their own fruits, vegetables, spices, and herbs through environmentally friendly agricultural practices

The organizations participating in the initiative started working with the municipal enterprise *Sofproekt* to obtain information on suitable sites that can be used to implement the idea (Interview 7). As a result of their joint work, a map was created depicting territories identified as good for the development of urban agriculture of the communal type. The map is in a continuous process of development, as the information in it is constantly upgraded. The ambition of the initiative in the future is to cover all types of urban agriculture, which will support communication between different stakeholders (Interview 7). Through the initiative, the organizations managed to create a city garden in the Vitosha district of Sofia in 2019. Currently, about 40 people look after the garden, which is managed on a democratic basis.

There are two other big urban gardens in the capital, the garden in the Druzhba district, which started working in 2013, and the garden in the Obelya district, which started working in 2021. Emanuilov noted that to have a successful urban garden the urban community is very important (Interview 7). Urban agriculture depends on the community and in turn, also stimulates its development (Interview 7). In urban gardens, everyone is responsible for the common and works in a democratic way. For this reason, Root aims to stimulate the urban communities, as well as the creation and development of urban gardens. According to Emanuilov, overall, in

Bulgaria, there is a lack of civic self-awareness (Interview 7). He argued that people depend mostly on the state and municipalities for initiating such practices, but in fact it is the community that needs to create them (Interview 7). In addition to the positive effects on the community and the formation of a stable civic consciousness, urban agriculture is an opportunity to take a break from the hectic lifestyle in the big city, and it is useful for the biodiversity and health of people working in urban gardens as they grow products without chemicals (Interview 7). According to Emanuilov, urban agriculture teaches young people where food comes from, how it is grown, and is the key to creating a healthy community (Interview 7).

Connection strategy: Coalition building

Root's team has built an online platform of ecovillages and sustainable practices in Bulgaria. This platform gives each representative from such settlements or individuals representing such projects the opportunity to create a profile including detailed information about where they are, what they offer, whether they are looking for volunteers, what mission they follow, and so forth (Interview 7). In addition, they can create a project with volunteers and give them the opportunity to sign up for participation as a volunteer for a particular project (Interview 7). Moreover, users can create events in different categories and publish their own blog articles (Interview 7). The website is called *ekoselishta.bg* and allows users to sign up for one of the following activities: aquaponics, architecture, herbalism, biodynamic agriculture, carpentry, animal husbandry, agriculture, art, permaculture, practical courses, beekeeping, rural tourism, construction, and technology. As Emanuilov explained, the website is not advertised in any way, but is popular with people interested in environmental practices (Interview 7). Therefore, the organization relies on the promotion of the site through word of mouth.

4.3.4.2. Challenges

Relations with the state

Similarly to other Bulgarian AFNs, the Root Foundation has encountered difficulties in working with government officials over the years. According to

Emanuilov, public authorities usually claim to help and invest in urban agriculture, for instance by creating a map of potential urban gardens, but in reality, they do not do much in relation to developing such farming practices (Interview 7).

Root has held several discussions with representatives of the Sofia Municipality on the development of urban gardens in Sofia over the years, one of which is related to an initiative called *Vision for Sofia*, which aims to create a long-term strategy for the development of the capital and its suburban areas until 2050 (Interview 7). The project aims to analyze the current state of Sofia and propose concrete steps, measures, and goals for future sustainable development of the city. The initiative includes the idea of developing city gardens, which was proposed by Root and Sofiaproekt, a municipal enterprise involved in finding suitable land for urban gardens. However, as Emanuilov noted, the official documents related to the initiative do not have specific deadlines, which shows that the Sofia Municipality is not committed enough to the project (Interview 7). Emanuilov argued that, for urban gardens to develop well, the Municipality must be as active as possible, providing good terrains near public transport, which have groundwater, etc. (Interview 7).

Relations with supermarkets

Like other Bulgarian AFNs, the Root Foundation has also worked with some large supermarkets in the country. For instance, Emanuilov explained that the German supermarket chain *Metro* supported the urban agriculture initiative financially, while the French retail chain *Mr. Bricolage*, which offers home furnishings and do-it-yourself goods, provided the initiative with tools and supplies (Interview 7). Emanuilov noted that, in his opinion, the reason for this help is that big corporations want to be seen as socially and environmentally friendly (Interview 7). He used the term greenwashing to describe this assistance and argued that big companies spend time and money to appear socially responsible to the local community, when in fact, they are not (Interview 7).

4.3.4.3. Warrior, Builder or Weaver?

Root's main strategy for shaping the corporate food regime in Bulgaria is the creation of an alternative agrifood network, which can be considered a builder strategy. Unlike the other two strategies, builder work is more positive, less contentious, and more accessible to people (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 56). Root meets these criteria, as it uses friendly strategies to attract public interest. Through creating and participating in various initiatives related to urban agriculture in Bulgaria aimed at attracting public interest, Root has a strong influence on the development of alternative food practices in the country, thus leading to changes in the traditional food system.

4.3.5. Integrating Warrior, Builder, and Weaver Work

According to Stevenson et al. (2007), the transformation of the agri-food system cannot be achieved through a single strategy; a combination of strategies is needed to effectively influence dominant relationships in the traditional food system. Topics related to the seeking of change of the current food system need to be interconnected to have more impact, i.e., for example, linking food security with living wages, agribusiness domination with corporate concentration, or domestic food access with global food sovereignty issues (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 57).

Stevenson et al. (2007) described how the warrior, builder, and weaver work can be successfully combined to achieve change in the food system. The event, which illustrates this success, relates to the activities of civil society organizations during the Fifth WTO Ministerial in Cancun, Mexico in September 2003. Warrior work was performed by a key U.S.-based nonprofit organization, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), and other civil society groups, which demonstrated against the WTO outside the meeting halls, as well as lobbying of delegates inside the ministerial (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 49). Builder work consisted of providing an alternative model for world trade: the fair-trade model (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 50). Weaver work is what made both warrior and builder work successful as it connected them through a series of coalitions (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 50). The Fair-trade model, for instance, was created through a coalition of civil society groups from Mexico, Canada, and Switzerland, as well as participation by

the IATP and Oxfam International (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 50). In addition, weaver work included the establishment of an Internet radio station, *Radio Cancun*, which provided information about the events that took place during the Ministerial (Stevenson et al., 2007, p. 50).

In the case of Bulgaria, most Bulgarian AFNs are strongly interconnected. Firstly, Bioselena has worked closely with the Swiss FiBL and the Bulgarian NGOs Ecofarm and Agrolink in promoting sustainable farming practices and organic farming in Bulgaria in the first years of its development. Secondly, For the Earth led to the creation of Hrankoop in 2010. The two groups organized product deliveries together, and some members of For the Earth are still customers at Hrankoop today. In addition, For the Earth helped Bioselena with the establishment of its farming market and has participated in various food-related events, such as cooking classes and culinary seminars, along with other organizations, including Hrankoop. Thirdly, Root is part of the Initiative for the Development of Urban Agriculture in Bulgaria, together with several other organizations, such as Gorichka, Ecocommunity, and the Garden of Friendship, all of which have a common interest - urban agriculture. This implies that most Bulgarian AFNs seek to form coalitions with other similar initiatives to have a greater impact on the corporate food regime.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the results of the study in relation to the literature, particularly the food regime theory by Friedmann and McMichael (1989), the previous studies on AFNs in CEE, as well as the Warrior-Builder-Weaver approach by Stevenson et al. (2007).

The aim of the present thesis was to explore the characteristics of the corporate food regime in Bulgaria and the impact of AFNs on the mainstream food system in the country as previous studies have mainly focused on the development of AFNs in Western, Northern and Southern Europe, leaving CEE largely out of focus. It did so by conducting a literature review of the Bulgarian agricultural sector's development during the second food regime, as well as the third (corporate) food regime. It particularly focused on two significant political and economic transition periods in Bulgaria, i.e., the transition from socialism to capitalism in 1989/90, and the accession of the country to the European Union in 2007. In addition, seven interviews were conducted with experts from four alternative food initiatives in Bulgaria, namely Bioselena, Hrankoop, For the Earth, and Root to investigate their activities, strategies, and challenges.

The results of the research indicate that the corporate food regime in Bulgaria is highly influenced by the socialist past of the country and the transition process from socialism to capitalism in 1989/90. During the rule of the BCP in Bulgaria (1944-1989), the agricultural sector underwent many changes, the most significant of which was the process of collectivization of agriculture, in which farmers were forced to give up their individual farms and join large collective state farms. The collectivization processes greatly changed agriculture at that time, as well as its future development.

As described by McMichael (2005, p. 275, pp. 276-277), the corporate food regime is characterized by conflicts between a global agriculture and politics of food sovereignty, as well as by a shift in the site of food security from the nation-state to the global market in the 1990s. These processes can be seen in Bulgaria as well, following the fall of the socialist regime in 1989/90. After the dissolution of the BCP, the country began a process of transition from a state socialist to a capitalist system, which resulted in integration into the global economy, the pursuit of neoliberal policies, and the subordination of the agricultural sector to the corporate model. After

1989/90, the agricultural sector in Bulgaria continued to undergo many reforms and transformations. The former socialist cooperatives were disbanded, and every Bulgarian citizen could own land again. However, in general, the Bulgarian agricultural sector found it difficult to cope with the changes, as the socialist period left the country very concentrated around collective state farms.

McMichael (2005, p. 278) noted that when the site of food security shifted from the state to the world market in the 1990s, local farmers around the world were disadvantaged while the power of agribusinesses was strengthened, which is visible in Bulgaria as well, particularly after the second big political and economic transition in the country in recent years, namely its accession to the EU in 2007. After entering the EU, the Bulgarian agricultural sector had to meet a variety of conditions imposed by the CAP of the EU. Bulgaria began to receive agricultural financing, but due to the heavy influence of international corporations and supermarkets, local producers were faced with great competition from more developed European economies. Moreover, producers and consumers became strongly divided and the production of traditional Bulgarian food suffered. Furthermore, larger farms in Bulgaria received more financial benefits from the EU, whereas smaller farms, including organic ones, did not, due to a lack of resources. In addition, after becoming part of the EU, the incomes of Bulgarian farm owners decreased significantly.

As only a small proportion of the world's population benefits from the corporate food system, many opposition movements have emerged dedicated to its restructuring (McMichael, 2005, p. 286). This also applies to Bulgaria. There are various food organizations that oppose the corporate nature of the new food order, called AFNs in the literature. Previous research on AFNs in CEE shows that CEE countries have certain common agricultural characteristics, such as the collectivization of agriculture during the socialist years, as well as low average income and low consumption of high-quality products since 1989 (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019, p. 583, 585), aspects which apply to Bulgaria as well. In Bulgaria, the collectivization processes strongly influenced the development of (organic) agriculture. Due to the political transitions in the country, especially immediately after the fall of socialism, the domestic market was quite limited and many households had low incomes, which were the main obstacles to the development of organic production in Bulgaria. The slow development of organic farming in the country can

also be seen as related to the slow development of AFNs, as most of them were created to promote OA in Bulgaria.

Previous research on AFNs in CEE shows that they are few in this region but still can greatly influence the mainstream food regime. For instance, in their research on CSA in Hungary, Balázs et al. (2016, p. 101) noted that CSA practices there still do not have a big impact on the traditional food system, but appear to have a future potential. This applies to Bulgaria, where the first CSA initiatives appeared around 2010, grew in number over time, and now involve a large number of people. Similarly, in the case of Romania, CSA practices are still not numerous, but those that work actively bring economic benefits to farmers and influence the consumer behavior of people who join the group (Möllers & Bîrhală, 2014, p. 144, 147), which is also visible in Bulgaria.

In general, there are different types of AFNs in Bulgaria, where people work to develop sustainable and organic farming and are involved in its promotion in various ways. Most of the individuals participating in such organizations became involved in this type of farming because the conventional intensive agriculture is unsustainable and hence endangers human health. OA, on the other hand, is sustainable as it keeps the soil viable by using organic wastes and no synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Organically produced food is thus healthier and increasingly preferred by many Bulgarians. For this reason, many of these people participate in various networks and organizations concerned with different aspects of sustainable organic farming.

Over the years, such AFNs have played an important role in the development of organic farming in Bulgaria. Each of them operates in its own particular way, with some focusing on legislative initiatives, some on the organization of food supply networks such as farmers' markets, and others on the promotion of specific organic farming principles. Most of them cooperate with other similar groups and use a variety of approaches to accomplish their objectives, including trainings, consultations, solidarity actions, seminars and events, as well as participation in numerous programs and meetings with organic farmers and government officials, and so forth.

Lots of research on AFNs concentrates on the strategies AFNs use to change the corporate food system and the challenges they face in their work, with several applying the so-called Warrior-Builder approach, in which builders use non-conflict

strategies to social change such as the building of new food networks, while warriors employ confrontational strategies, including public protests and legislative work. In addition to these two types of strategies, there are weavers, as introduced by Stevenson et al. (2007), which aim to create better relationships between warriors and builders by building coalitions and communicating messages to civil society.

When the Warrior-Builder-Weaver approach (Stevenson et al., 2007) is applied to the Bulgarian AFNs, it becomes clear that they fit the strategies well. For instance, an organization that exemplifies the warrior work well is the Bioselena Foundation, established in 1997 to advocate for the production and consumption of organic food in Bulgaria. Bioselena uses various strategies to promote and encourage OA in Bulgaria, including legislative initiatives (warrior work), running of a farmers' market (builder work), and working with various organizations on the development of (organic) agriculture in Bulgaria (weaver work). Because Bioselena has been active in legislative initiatives over the years, it is plausible to think that it is mostly linked to the warrior approach. Over the years, Bioselena has worked directly with government officials from various municipalities and ministries, attempting to persuade them to take more measures to promote and support organic farming in the country. The organization has been involved in the process of writing numerous national plans for the development of agriculture in the country. For instance, in 2001, Bioselena worked with the Ministry of Agriculture to create the first two regulations for organic farming, one for crop production and one for animal husbandry, which led to the formation of the country's first bio-certified farms. In 2004 and 2005, the organization worked with the Ministry of Agriculture on the preparation of the first National Plan for the Development of Organic Agriculture. In 2007, based on Bioselena's recommendation, Bulgaria introduced a payment for organic beekeeping, and in 2014 - a payment for organic animal breeding.

Two Bulgarian AFNs that exemplify the builder work well are Hrankoop and the Root Foundation. The two organizations have created new food networks within the food system where producers can sell their locally produced (organic) products and consumers can buy directly from them, as well as where people can grow their own products - strategies associated with the builder approach. For example, Hrankoop, a Bulgarian CSA initiative, founded in 2010, has established alternative food channels such as box schemes and farmers' markets. Hrankoop seeks to change the traditional relationship between suppliers and customers, in which they

are very distant from each other. The organization is therefore trying to bring them together through markets, solidarity actions, and other gatherings. Producers and consumers work together at Hrankoop and are committed to creating alternative ways of producing and consuming in the agri-food system. Another Bulgarian organization, concerned with creating alternative modes of production and consumption, is Root, which was founded in 2010. Root is focused on creating shared urban gardens in Sofia, where people can grow their own fruits, vegetables, herbs, and more. Moreover, it participates in various discussions and initiatives related to urban agriculture.

In terms of weaver work in Bulgaria, the environmental organization For the Earth is a good example. For the Earth was established in 1995 to promote eco-friendly living. It engages civil society in various campaigns, related to zero waste, clean air, organic farming and food, energy efficiency, climate change, and so forth. Two of its biggest achievements are the introduction of the concept of food sovereignty in Bulgaria and the running of various anti-GMO campaigns in the country. In addition, For the Earth led to the creation of Hrankoop and other similar food initiatives. For the Earth and Hrankoop are still connected today, as they have organized and participated in various activities together. Thus, the majority of For the Earth's activities related to OA revolve around distributing messages to the public, supporting the formation of alternative agrifood networks, and collaborating with diverse groups on various food initiatives - all of which are weaver strategies.

The results of the research indicate that most Bulgarian AFNs work together with other similar initiatives to achieve their goals as this may lead to more success. For instance, Bioselena has worked with the Swiss FiBL and the Bulgarian NGOs Ecofarm and Agrolink. For the Earth has led to the creation of Hrankoop and has later worked with it, as well as with Bioselena, Food Not War, and Urban Agriculture. Root has participated in numerous initiatives together with the Bulgarian NGOs Gorichka, Ecocommunity, and the Garden of Friendship.

Regarding the difficulties Bulgarian AFNs face in their work, the findings of the research suggest that they are developing slowly mostly due to problems related to the state, such as the lack of government intervention and support for such initiatives, the outdated legislation, and the insufficient state electronic services. Other challenges include low public interest, problems within the networks, pressure from big supermarkets, complicated relations between small farmers, and fraud committed

by farmers. Despite the difficulties, Bulgarian AFNs work hard on the development of sustainable (organic) farming in Bulgaria.

6. Conclusion

Although OA and AFNs are still a small niche in the Bulgarian food system, more and more producers are shifting from conventional to organic farming and more consumers are looking for markets offering regional, artisanal, and organic products. The evidence from the present study suggests that alternative food organizations in Bulgaria affect the corporate food regime in the country in different ways. Some of them challenge state authorities to be more active in their efforts to promote sustainable agricultural practices. Some operate within the current food regime, providing alternatives to traditional market channels. Others are attempting to engage civil society in initiatives aimed at developing sustainable agriculture in Bulgaria. Despite many challenges in their work over the years, particularly when collaborating with state officials, Bulgarian AFNs continue to work hard to develop sustainable agricultural practices in the country and have a significant impact on the corporate food regime in the country, either by confronting it or by working within it.

The present research contributes to the literature on AFNs in two ways. First, the findings of the study can be of great benefit for people concerned with the role of agriculture in capitalism and more particularly the agricultural networks, which oppose the way capitalism works as it highlights the importance of AFNs in shaping the traditional food system. Secondly, the research contributes to the limited literature on AFNs in CEE by explaining how such practices affect the corporate food regime in Bulgaria and the challenges they face.

Future research on AFNs in Bulgaria could analyze in detail the state's approach to such food practices, as the current study assesses the state's actions through the responses of the interviewees from the four Bulgarian alternative food organizations, but not through information received from government officials. Future studies could also analyze a greater number of Bulgarian AFNs to gain a better overview of the ways they work. In addition, one could do a comparative analysis between the Bulgarian AFNs to see how they differ from each other. Future research could also address the same research problems and could use the same theoretical approach for alternative food practices in another Central or Eastern European country. Furthermore, the current research could be included in a comparative analysis between alternative food initiatives in CEE.

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Appendix

List of interviews

Interview 1: The chairman of Hrankoop Nikolay Genov, Sofia, Bulgaria, 4 December 2020 (in Bulgarian, translated by author).

Interview 2: The main coordinator of Hrankoop Ralitsa Kassimova, Sofia, Bulgaria, 4 December 2020 (in Bulgarian, translated by author).

Interview 3: The producer and member of Hrankoop Ilian Panov, who owns a bee farm in the Sakar Mountains region, Sofia, Bulgaria, 10 December 2020 (in Bulgarian, translated by author).

Interview 4: The producer and member of Hrankoop Trayana Vasileva, who owns a fruit and vegetable farm in Sofia and Novi Iskar (a town, located in Sofia City Province), Sofia, Bulgaria, 14 December 2020 (in Bulgarian, translated by author).

Interview 5: The chairman of Bioselena Stoilko Apostolov, Sofia, Bulgaria, 19 April 2021 (in Bulgarian, translated by author).

Interview 6: The member of For the Earth Ivaylo Popov, Sofia, Bulgaria, 23 April 2021 (in Bulgarian, translated by author).

Interview 7: The chairman of Root Bojidar Emanuilov, Sofia, Bulgaria, 29 April 2021 (in Bulgarian, translated by author).

Interview transcripts

Transcript 1; Interview 1; List of acronyms: IN = Interviewer, NG = Nikolay Genov; online, 4 December 2020.

IN: When and why did solidarity agriculture appear in Bulgaria for the first time?

NG: In Bulgaria, solidarity agriculture started gaining popularity in 2010. There are several organizations and people (.) such as the “For the Earth” organization and “The Together” foundation that made it popular. But there are certainly other people who have talked about solidarity agriculture (.) it’s just that these organizations are the first visible organizations that tried to unite more people around the same idea. The idea has not yet received as much as attention in Bulgaria as in the West. Rather, we are still trying to promote solidarity agriculture and reach a level where there are enough consumers and producers who are ready to work in this type of organization. In solidarity agriculture both consumers and producers are involved in the organization. Consumers must be engaged with a specific consumer, with a specific farm (.) To be loyal to him, to understand his problems, to participate in different events (.) for example, we invite them to participate in the distribution of products. When the products arrive, they have to be put in boxes and the consumers participate in this process (.) and this process of participation introduces them to the manufacturer, they see each other face to face (..) they can visit the producer, they can take part in solidarity actions, which we organize, and so on (.) this is solidarity agriculture (.) it

involves both parties in the process, so they know each other and therefore consumers are much more likely to accept a loss when there is not enough harvest for example (.) for example when a consumer ordered 20 kilograms of carrots, but the producer manages to bring only 10 kilos (..) When people are involved in the process of creating food, they are in solidarity with the producer. In the past 10 years, healthy life and healthy food has been trending in the Bulgarian media (.) In the beginning media showed that a large part of the food in the supermarkets is of poor quality and accordingly more and more people have started looking for other ways to get food (.) But in Bulgaria things are going slowly, although interest is felt (.) but I would not say that there is a boom here as in the West and in the United States, because we work with no more than a hundred manufacturers and we have 4-5 farmers' markets. In Bulgaria, organic stores and organic chains are growing much faster than locally produced food. In the West, it seems that people are looking more for local products (..) all of this is also related to the environment, to reducing emissions, to the local economy.

IN: What forms of solidarity agriculture are there currently in Bulgaria?

NG: In Bulgaria there are food cooperatives, farmer's markets, eco-villages and independent farms. Eco-villages are created by people coming from abroad or from the big city, who buy land somewhere in the villages and try to make mansions or cooperatives, that is, several families working together (.) they even created a network called Living Places. There are currently 10 such locations in Bulgaria where people have returned to the village and try to restore that particular village. There are also independent farmers and farms who try to gather consumers together (.) for example Chiflik Livadi is such a form of solidarity agriculture, they have a club and in the club people pay their membership fees, order products, and so on. Hrankoop is also in contact with this farm, but they criticize the cooperative model of working.

IN: How many food cooperatives are there currently in Bulgaria and in which cities are they located?

NG: No more than 4 or 5. There may be some that we don't know of. The question is in the organizational level they have reached, because most food cooperatives in the country are in the first stage of their development (.) they have a Facebook group (.) or a Google group, in which producers say what products they have and consumers can order. But this is a very inefficient way of working, because a consumer has to order, for example, from 20 different producers and accordingly make 20 appointments to receive their products, while in a cooperative the manufacturers are united and deliver all their products to one place (.) we combine the products in one box and the consumer comes to take it from us or we deliver it to them. In Plovdiv, several producers tried to make something like a cooperative, but in the end they decided that they wanted to be only producers in the group, because according to them consumers should not make decisions (.) for that reason they remained at the level where only producers offer their products. (.) there is no direct involvement of the consumer in their activity, there is no sense of solidarity.

IN: When, how and for what purposes was Hrankoop created in Bulgaria?

NG: In 2010, the two organizations "Together" and "For the Earth" created two projects, one of which was specifically made to promote food cooperatives (.) the example of a food cooperative had come from Spain (..) one woman, she is called Filka, introduced the idea in Bulgaria (.) they also made a film about this project. Accordingly, after several meetings and conversations about this type of food organization, a group of no more than 20 people formed a group, which functioned as a Google Group (.) and in fact this is the beginning of Hrankoop (.) and so they called it - Hrankoop, food cooperative. This group started growing fast (.) In one year it reached 60-70 people. Then, somewhere around 2011, I got involved in it. At that time it worked on the principle that someone wrote in the group "hey, people, I know an egg producer in Sevlievo and I will go buy egg from him for myself, who else wants?" and everyone who wants tell him and then he buys eggs for everyone (..) he takes

the eggs and then meets the people to give them the eggs. At one point this exchange became intense (..) every day there were many offers and suggestions and so (..) we formed an IT team, a group for the technical tasks of the cooperative (..) and we started thinking about how to make ordering easier (..) we began to think of making sites through which to order. The real boom of orders began in 2012, when a user wrote that we had to save 10 tons of organic lentils from a producer in Strandzha. The manufacturer had produced the lentils for Austria, but the contract for the purchase had apparently failed (..) they had a huge amount of lentils without knowing where to sell the production (..) And within 6 months we conducted a large-scale national campaign to save the lentils, we made a website so that lentils could be ordered in Sofia (..) then new food cooperatives were born in Varna, Burgas and Stara Zagora. The lentils campaign gave impetus to the groups in these cities and then they went on as they decided, but this campaign gave us the impetus to regulate things. From 60-70 people the group grew to over 150 people. After the campaign with the lentils, very quickly other manufacturers of other quality products realized that at a certain place in Sofia like-minded people gather twice a week and they wanted to offer their products as well. Then we saw that there should be a site for ordering different products in one place. That's why at the end of 2012 we made a forum where everyone from the Google group joined. In the forum we reached 300 people (..) so we gathered, 30-40 people, we chose our rules and coordinators, we rented a room and so from 2013 to 2015 we worked in this form already. The rules included choosing three coordinators to be paid 10 percent of the turnover. At the beginning of 2013, from an informal group, we became a more organized group and, accordingly, orders rose (..) the numbers of the producers too – they went from 15 to 50-60. Solidarity actually consisted in the fact that there were some 200 people who ordered regularly and came regularly to pick up their products (..) also once a year consumers have to help the coordinators, that is to volunteer, we have a schedule for this, they could help with order processing. We made our latest site for orders in 2018 and it fully and accurately corresponds to the way we work for deliveries that take place on a weekly cycle.

IN: What are the structures of Hrankoop? How many members are there in Hrankoop?

NG: We currently have 74 members – both producers and consumers, which include the coordinators who are required to coordinate deliveries and help both producers and consumers.

IN: How does Hrankoop work? How many manufacturers and craftsmen do you work with?

NG: We currently work with over 150 farmers. Most producers did not offer their products anywhere else before joining the cooperative (..) some who come to us now and apply to join the cooperative have either gone to other markets or offered them online. Very few of them have been or are now in the trade network (..) very few of them have the opportunity, desire and ambition for that. Our producers manage to sell a large part of their production at the farmers' markets. Many of them also like to participate in events (..) that is, a huge part of our products cannot be found anywhere else, but only in the channels of Hrankoop, that is on the markets and the platform. The products that are now available on farmers' markets have not been offered anywhere before. If there was no market, these producers would not produce their products. They also produce for the markets because they meet the consumer face to face every week. They have the opportunity to hear, to consult colleagues and so on (..) So this is very stimulating and motivating. And the control of the products is monitored by the so-called participatory guarantee system, which means that the members, that is the producers, monitor each other. We have included a supervisory board in our regulations, which consists of a producer, a market coordinator and a food expert. The Supervisory Board makes producers visit each other, exchange experiences and thus increase the overall quality of the products (..) all through the exchange of knowledge and practices.

IN: Initially Hrankoop was an informal group, later an association, and since 2015 - a registered cooperative under the Cooperatives Act. Why did you decide to register your group as a cooperative?

NG: The association was an attempt to create a network between cooperatives, but this idea failed. For several years now, Hrankoop has been building its own network with the markets in Dobrich, Bankya, etc. We adopted the form of cooperation because it is the closest form to ours. If we had registered an association, we would have been an NGO, while the cooperative is run under the Cooperatives Act. As an association, we would have a problem with our business. If we had registered a company, because companies usually do not take into account the opinion of everyone - that is, in our case producers and consumers. Another problem is that the Law on Cooperatives is old, it has been updated many times, but in general it is old and confusing and at the moment we see that it creates a lot of problems for us. For example, in the cooperatives the members enter with a share of capital, in agricultural cooperatives - with land, and with us we want everyone to make decisions together.

IN: Hrankoop manages deliveries to consumers through their online website, but has also created its own farmers' markets in 2013. How many farmers' markets do you organize at the moment and how do they function?

NG: There are currently over 10-12 farmers' markets in the country, which are organized weekly and are made by several organizations (.) maybe 6-7 organizations. The first farmers' market in Bulgaria appeared in 2013 in Plovdiv, but it lasted only a few months. And the first farmer's market of Hrankoop appeared in September 2013 as an answer to the invitation of the municipality in Sofia. The market grew very quickly - from three producers in the beginning to 15-16 in three or four weeks. In 2014 we were invited to make a farmers' market in the Ivan Vazov neighborhood. At the time, producers were worried that a second farmers' market would disrupt the operation of the first, but this did not happen. In 2014, we encouraged Varna and Burgas to start farmers' markets too because they already had informal groups, which functioned online. We invited the groups from Varna, Burgas, Veliko Tarnovo, Ruse and Stara Zagora to a meeting in an eco village in the village of Gorsko Kosovo near Veliko Tarnovo and discussed that with them.

IN: What are the logistics behind managing farmers' markets? (How do you work with municipalities on the building of farmers' markets?)

NG: In general, we have many problems in working with municipalities. But this is part of the many problems, we have problems with the fact that we have turned the cooperative into a cooperation, we have problems with some members of the cooperative, we also have problems with the municipalities. We believe that we should work with municipalities, not with chain stores. Now there are farmers' markets in front of Billa, Kaufland, Lidl, but in our opinion the municipalities themselves should have a commitment to creating food cooperatives or at least allowing them to function normally and provide them with good spots. They should help the markets and encourage them. We still encounter misunderstanding on the part of the municipalities (..) they are interested in what we do, but there is also often a misunderstanding. For example, in Stara Zagora we asked the municipality to make a farmers' market in front of the municipality, but the mayor refused immediately without even thinking about it. Municipalities imagine that such markets should be in more remote places and they think that there are animals, pigs, chickens and other animals at such markets (.) or that it will be dirty (.) there are misunderstandings. But they also invited us, for example in Haskovo, Dobrich and Bankya, and that is why we work well there at the moment. When we want to open a farmers' market, we go to the municipality and offer a package, which says that they must first provide a suitable place that is as central as possible, second, they should provide a warehouse or a place where all the inventory for the market can be stored, third, they should help with the promotion of the market and support it (..) and we do this in the form of a partnership agreement, a contract, and we always pay rent, but still we need help from the municipalities to put the market at a central spot. In Dobrich, for example, they

offered a less central place, but it's still okay. In Balchik, after some negotiations, they agreed on a more central place - on the sea promenade. In Bankya, the deputy mayor also gave us the best place, but when he left, the next deputy mayors did not understand the meaning of having farmers' markets in the center of Bankya, they don't understand that these markets attract outsiders and the people of the city are super happy that they have such markets.

IN: How do Bulgarians perceive your farmers' markets?

NG: Generally, Bulgarians show interest, but there is still not a lot of interest as in the Western countries. Many people still show distrust in the producers (..) they say that producers can buy products from the other markets and offer them as organic products at the farmers' markets (..) they suspect this very often. However, we do inspections and take laboratory samples to make sure that everything is in order. But (..) even the producers themselves in the cooperative accuse other producers of such things. When we detect something like this, we react immediately, trying to convince them that they should trust each other more, we make them visit each other, in order to monitor each other.

IN: At the farmers' markets, Hrankoop offers workshops for children and adults. How do they function and what kind of workshops have you had so far?

NG: We have had many workshops at the farmers' markets so far. Several times we had cooking workshops at the markets (..) one time we made lyutenitsa together at the market itself, reporters from BTV came to cover the event. The event was made for the members of Hrankoop, but because of the BTV reportage, many outside people came to buy lyutenitsa and were disappointed when they found out that they would not be able to buy exactly this one because it was made only for the members of Hrankoop. We have a plan to create cooperative kitchens. We are looking for places to make a cooperative industrial unit for processing vegetables (..) that is, producers who have fruits or vegetables and do not have an industrial unit where to process them, but want to process them and make lyutenitsa or jam out of them (..) they will be able to do that in the Hrankoop industrial unit (..) this will be a cooperative kitchen when it happens.

IN: How did Hrankoop become popular among Bulgarians?

NG: We do not advertise our deliveries much because we are a cooperative and we want the people who enter it to know that it is a cooperative. Since we have the shopping platform, everyone can order (..) not as before, when they could order only with a recommendation from a member. But there are some customers who have zero tolerance for the small producer, who may not deliver to you what you ordered every time you order something. They imagine that they are shopping from Lidl, where if something is not right, you either return it or receive compensation. The media have a lot of interest in farmers' markets, we also try to work with them since we opened the first markets, we send press releases, we have made a media breakfast (..) that is, we gather the media for breakfast with farm products and tell them about our plans (..) We have a solid contingent of relevant media, such as BNT, BNR, Agro TV, Agro Zona, BG Farmer. The media is interested, but in a more superficial way.

IN: Have your farmers' markets worked with conventional stores before and if yes, in what way?

NG: We were invited years ago to organize a farmers' market in front of Kaufland, but we flatly refused. In the team we decided that this is not of interest to us, because it would work for the positive image of Kaufland with their otherwise low-value and low-quality products, and at the same time we would not attract our exact audience (..) the audience there would most likely laugh at our prices or at the fact that our products are not so well packaged. We do not want to work with discount chains, that is chains in which you go to buy quantity for a little money with dubious quality. We know that farmers' markets are an event and we want them to be treated as a cultural and social event, they should be in parks, squares, on people's roads, in pedestrian areas, in a prominent place. Farmer's markets are a holiday.

They need to increase food culture and trust. One summer we organized a farmers market in front of Ikea, because for us it was an opportunity to start a market at a new place, because the location was good. We were warmly welcomed, but when the new Ikea catalog came out in the autumn and they told us that we could no longer organize a farmers' market in front of the store. That is, we were there in the summer, the weaker season, we helped people come, because if they came to the farmers' market, they went inside Ikea as well and in September it was over (.) there was no understanding of partnership. For us, this is not support for the manufacturer (..) the manufacturer needs a secure market, and the consumer must know that on a specific day of the week they will find the specific market at the specific location.

IN: What difficulties do the coordinators in Hrankoop encounter most often at work?

NG: Most people, when they hear a cooperative, think of it as something obsolete or utopia (.) most people associate cooperatives with the cooperations that existed during the socialism in Bulgaria. The cooperations transformed after 1989, I think that by 1996 they had already been transformed into agricultural cooperations (.) and I think that in Bulgaria there are many of them at the moment, I think there are over 3000 such cooperations that are still functioning, but almost in the old way so to speak, but now the pursuit is rather profit. Only landowners participate in them (..) there are still people who cannot perceive that food cooperatives are something completely different from the socialist cooperations.

IN: What difficulties do the producers in Hrankoop encounter most often at work? Does the state support them well enough?

NG: There are many problems in the villages in Bulgaria. There are thefts (..) you have production, but the next morning it is gone. Another problem is the weather conditions (.) Sometimes a broken car, sometimes there is a problem with the manufacturer (..) we had such a case when a man fell from a tree and we had to help him, but when people are involved, with consumers in a cooperative, they are being in solidarity with the producer and this is the meaning of the cooperative. The state demands, above all, to comply with the Food Act, which, in our opinion, is for the industrial production of food and does not correspond to what small producers do. The Food Agency is even proud that the law is the same for large and small producers. 3-4 years ago, the first derogation from the law was adopted (..) with Ordinance 26 the requirements for production facilities of producers of honey, dairy products and others were reduced (.) And many producers registered under Ordinance 26. But since this year they have changed the law and it is again very restrictive (.) there are probably 100 ordinances, which are all very specific, some have reduced requirements, if in small quantities, others have increased them (..) but especially for small producers the state behaves as if they do not exist. When we meet people from the Ministry of Agriculture, they are rather surprised that there are small producers who are entering the market and are starting to develop (.) they do not believe that someone will start with 10 cows and then will reach 100-150 cows and will develop as a farm, will invest (..)

IN: How does Hrankoop manage to compete with large supermarket chains? (What difficulties have you faced while competing with them?)

NG: In 2016 there was a big boom in Hrankoop and we were invited to the mall Serdika in Sofia to create a farm shop. We had the energy and strength for this store (.) It was really very successful in the beginning, it passed all expectations in the first 6-7 months, but then the Billa store appeared near our store and we were forced to move our store 3 times to new places. Finally, the "Zelen" Bio store, which is one of the big chains of organic stores, appeared in the mall (.) and we had to reduce our store from 40 square meters to 12 (..) to meet the criteria of the mall for square meters and grocery stores. And so we worked for almost a year at a loss. We, as a board of directors, made great efforts to relocate the store, but most members of the cooperative did not want this, so we stopped it in the summer of 2018. But on the other hand, we developed our next events on a fairly large scale. Still, we managed to save a part of the store, we moved the Bulgarian natural cosmetics from the

store to a new store located near the Roman wall, where one of our farmers' market takes place. This store has been operating for three years and is developing well. In the beginning we started with 5-6 manufacturers of cosmetics, now we have over 30 Bulgarian manufacturers.

IN: What are Hrankoop's future plans?

NG: We have planned for the next year to make strategic planning, to talk to more people in the cooperative and beyond what we could do after this year (..) one of our main goals is to attract more people to be involved in our activities, because in the last two years it has happened that we do not attract new consumer members, but only producers (..) our producers are already over 100, or even about 150, but our consumers remain the ones that were in the beginning. We also want to create a project that draws attention to the cooperative, in which consumers engage in some way, and our inspiration came from Brussels (..) from a friend who lives there and is a member of a Brussels cooperative. From the cooperative there they have made a supermarket, which functions entirely cooperatively and only members can work in it. And this friend of ours introduced us to this idea and we want to tell everyone else. And we are now looking for a place for such a supermarket, we had an idea for RUM Cherni Vrah, but it turned out that this shop is privately owned and therefore we have to find another place (..) What else (..) now there is cooperation in Radomir, which is in trouble, it is a cooperative for bread, boza and sweets and has several shops in Radomir and the surrounding villages, but in the last year it is stuck and has a lot of obligations and the people there contacted us asking for help. If the bread bakery works for people who want to save the bread bakery (..) that is, 300 people receive bread every week, the cooperation will be saved. This opens up opportunities for many manufacturers to continue to grow. We want to have more markets, now we have 4 weekly, and we want to have 28 weekly, because there are 28 regions in Bulgaria. Cooperative do not work to win, the goal is not profit, but the development of farmers' markets. There is a major problem in Bulgarian laws because they say that the main function of cooperatives is to work for the interests of its members (..) This is so, but we want to change the laws because the interests of members are important to some extent (..) if the cooperative starts to win and take dividends, the cause and meaning of it are already lost for us. Rather, the cooperative must export its profits to others. That's why we are actually at a loss almost all the time, we only had two years in which we were at a profit. We are constantly investing in new markets, in existing ones, and the producers who are members of the cooperative are growing all the time. They do not suffer losses, they increase their production, turnover (..) they benefit from the fact that the cooperative develops the market. They do not need to earn dividends from the cooperative.

IN: In your opinion, why is it important to have solidarity agriculture in Bulgaria and to offer different products than those in the supermarket?

NG: It is important to have solidarity agriculture, because it is more sustainable. And that is by all criteria. More environmentally friendly, more economically sustainable, it allows small families to exist, that is, it creates job places, it is healthier for consumers in the city (..) because it makes much more sense to invest in food security in production here, not to expect that the food will always come from somewhere, from Turkey, Egypt and so on (..) at the moment around 80% of the vegetables in Bulgaria are imported. And over 50 percent of all food is imported. If these imports stop, what will happen (..) it is good that there are state policies, but the state is also us, the people, so people have to start supporting a certain circle of producers, so that food security in Bulgaria can be restored. In the more developed countries they may have felt this need for food security even earlier and these ideas appeared 30 years ago and now in England, Italy, Japan, the USA they are experiencing a boom (..) they are developing very fast. This is a very fast-growing sustainable local economy.

IN: When and why did solidarity agriculture appear in Bulgaria for the first time?

RK: In recent years, there have been attempts to create solidarity agriculture in Bulgaria. There are attempts by consumers and consumer families to unite around one or two producers and to prepay on an annual or seasonal basis and then receive products from the producer (.) every week or every second week. This thing happens relatively rare in our country. Maybe because it is unconventional and still new. What my experience shows, when I have consulted producers over the years, most of them worry about what will happen if they have problems with the harvest and can't produce enough for the consumer, given that they have already paid. Then I point to the solidarity element (..) we, consumers and producers, take the risk together. To have solidarity agriculture a lot of human resources is needed, because it is a lot of coordination, a lot of work from our team to be able to connect producers and users on this subscription principle, and so on. What is important in solidarity agriculture is that the food in solidarity-based cooperatives is not anonymous because the consumer knows the producer (..) however, the idea of solidarity agriculture in Bulgaria is getting attention slowly, because producers are not being fully aware of themselves as subjects (..) but trust is definitely slowly returning, consumers are slowly realizing that there may be other products besides the ones they see in stores. We are most often asked by consumers what the prices of our products are and how we know and how we control the quality of the products and check that real producers are behind the production (..) for years we have been trying to restore the consumer's trust (..) Fortunately, successful, but in a slow and difficult way. For example, we require producers and all members of their families or farms to be present at our farmers' markets. And at the moment, almost one hundred percent of the participants in our markets are producers, which brings huge benefits to them emotionally, financially and in every other aspect. This brings benefits also to the consumers, who see themselves face to face with the people who produce their food. Imported goods entered Bulgaria late and they are still very interesting to the people (..) their varieties, their packaging and so on (.) but Bulgarians are slowly realizing that products in the supermarket are not always the best ones.

IN: What other forms of solidarity agriculture are there currently in Bulgaria?

RK: In Bulgaria, in addition to food cooperatives and farmers' markets, there are also urban gardening, eco-villages and individual farms. For example, there is urban gardening in Sofia (..) following the example of a young man who took the idea from Vienna because he saw one in Vienna.

IN: How many food cooperatives are there currently in Bulgaria and in which cities are they located?

RK: In addition to ours, which is based in Sofia, there are several others in the country (..) especially in Varna [the third-largest city in Bulgaria] is the other strong food cooperative, operating for 6-7 years. In our country, the food cooperatives are not regulated in a normative way and by being unregulated by law, they are in fact illegal. In Varna, for example, the cooperative was attacked by the National Food Agency, the National Revenue Agency and the police (..) the room where people were handing out orders was attacked. Some of their competitors, some food business, had turned all these institutions against them but in the end the institutions could not file a lawsuit or sue 400 consumers.

IN: When, how and for what purposes was Hrankoop created in Bulgaria?

RK: The idea for Hrankoop came from a girl who volunteered in a food cooperative in Spain. I personally joined Hrankoop in 2012, although I wanted to do that before, but you could only join them with a recommendation, and I didn't know anyone in the beginning (..) In the beginning, everyone knew each other and they were all very careful about who to include in the group. You could only join the group if someone recommended you. Then I joined in

2012 and we soon began our farmers markets (.) our first market was informal and we did it in front of the “Sun and Moon” restaurant in Lozenets, we gathered there every Friday and distributed products and it looked like a market (..) in the beginning there were only a few manufacturers (.) but soon other people became interested in what we’re selling and started coming and buying products (.) but we did not declare this thing as a market anywhere (..) but many people started coming and soon someone informed the Food Agency, which came to us and said that we should stop this form of market.

IN: What are the structures of Hrankoop? How many members are there in Hrankoop?

RK: There are 74 members in Hrankoop at the moment - consumers and producers, and they both have different motivations to be in such an organization. Manufacturers want to sell at maximum price and be one of the few producers in the cooperative, and consumers want products to be affordable and have a choice between different products. The coordinators in the cooperation, such as me, must balance the two sides, that is, not only to allow new producers to join the cooperative, but also to give preference to the current manufacturers, and at the same time our consumers should not be hampered by high prices and should have the advantage of being members of the group, to have a big choice between products (..) it is quite complicated. The coordinators should balance the interests of both groups. The members of the cooperative pay a membership fee of BGN 60 per year, which guarantees consumers discounts when shopping, and guarantees producers an advantage when participating in events (..) that is, if at one event we have to choose between two producers with similar products and one of them is a member of the cooperative, then we are obliged to give preference to the full legal member. Full members also have the right to vote in our general meetings.

IN: How does Hrankoop work? How many manufacturers and craftsmen do you work with?

RK: We currently work with over 150 farmers, some of whom are craftsmen, which offer non-food products (..) every week new manufactures apply and join the cooperative. When new producers want to join the cooperative, we ask our members, especially the producers - whether they know the manufacturer, who wants to join (.) we also ask everyone about whether we should start a new market, make an event, and so on (.) this is always decided together with all members. Our two main goals are to support small producers of quality Bulgarian products and to facilitate consumer access to these quality products. Through the live contact with the consumers, producers find out very quickly what the consumer is looking for, they can ask the consumer what they like and grow exactly what the consumer is looking for (.) And in that way producers know that they will have a secure market. Producers have very rarely brought anything to our markets that did not arouse interest and was not sold.

IN: Initially Hrankoop was an informal group, later an association, and since 2015 – a registered cooperative under the Cooperatives Act. Why did you decide to register your group as a cooperative?

RK: We tried to create an association (.) it included people from Sofia, Plovdiv [the second-largest city of Bulgaria], Varna and Burgas [the fourth-largest city in Bulgaria] and our idea was to create a network of cooperatives and then markets, but over time things did not work out and so we registered the cooperation (..) but the cooperation is not a continuation of the association. We had to leave the association to preserve Hrankoop and its activities, so we urgently registered a cooperation in 2015. When we created the cooperation, we invited everyone from the informal group, both consumers and producers.

IN: Hrankoop manages deliveries to consumers through their online website, but has also created its own farmers’ markets in 2013. How many farmers’ markets do you organize at the moment and how do they function?

RK: Our farmers’ markets are a continuation of the cooperative. When we were invited in 2013 to make the first farmers' market, we already had both consumers and producers. Now,

we have 4 markets every week. In Sofia they are at the Roman Wall [an architectural monument in Sofia] every Saturday and in the Ivan Vazov district [a district in Sofia] every Wednesday, we also have a market in Bankya [a small town located on the outskirts of Sofia] every Saturday, in Dobrich [a city in northeastern Bulgaria] we do every Thursday and now we are trying to make a new market in Balchik [a city in northeastern Bulgaria] (.) We started working in July on it, our team from Dobrich took over, we got in touch with the municipality (.) and there is definitely interest in the products, but we are still clarifying how regularly the market will be held there. There is still no weekly market there.

IN: What are the logistics behind managing farmers' markets? How do you work with municipalities on the building of farmers' markets?

RK: We sometimes face hardships when working with municipalities but in the end we usually find consensus. We as a cooperative do not receive funding (.) the funding comes from the very activities of the members themselves. We have always worked mainly with loans, not donations (.) so when we start an activity, the members give a loan and we repay the loan over time (.) We have done this many times for our farmer's market (..) for example when we need to buy refrigerators, tents and so on (.) We take loans mainly from the producers and then repay it to them. This also happened when we created the new farmers' market in Dobrich (.) in the first three months we sent people from Sofia by buses to Dobrich, they brought tents and other things but that was very expensive and time consuming. So we looked for a coordinator there [in Dobrich] and when we found her, we gathered the producers who wanted to start the market there, and we told them that we needed BGN 7,000 to buy tents, tables and refrigerators, and in the end we managed to collect BGN 8,000 from them (.) to equip the Dobrich market. Currently there are between 15-20 local producers there. That is, it is a form of cooperation, they come together and make decisions together.

IN: How do Bulgarians perceive your farmers' markets?

RK: Bulgarians are interested in farmers' markets, but this interest is developing very slowly. A typical example is our market at Ivan Vazov (..) it started very successfully, for three years it was developing very well (..) there was a stable market for about 20-25 manufacturers, but if we had added 10 more manufacturers there would not be enough customers for all products (.) but for 20-25 [producers] it's okay. Then the market closed because the municipality wanted to build a DM store [a German chain of retail stores] there. It remained closed for a year but the citizens of the Ivan Vazov neighborhood created a petition, in which they stated that they did not want the market to be destroyed and a DM store to be built in its place. They sent it to the municipality and the municipality then called us and told us that the store would not be built and we could return. We reopened the market, made a big opening, with a lot of advertising, with an event, but not many people came (..) and the producers themselves gave up, because on the same day, every Wednesday, there is a [farmers'] market [in front] of [and organized by] the Ministry of Agriculture (.) and some of our members go there because this market there has not been closed. I think there is still not enough interest to have more markets and producers. It is also very important to have good places for the markets, because even if there is interest, if we do not have a good place for the market, it will not work. We work in difficult conditions regarding the places of the markets, and at the same time the consumers are looking for us. When the market is at a good place, it turns out great. That is why we aim to look for beautiful urban places for the markets, because otherwise the municipalities push us into remote places that they want us to revive and at the same time they don't want us to disturb them.

IN: At the farmers' markets, Hrankoop offers workshops for children and adults. How do they function and what kind of workshops have you had so far?

RK: We have done many culinary workshops over the years at the farmers' markets for making candies, cookies, for decorating, for painting Easter eggs, and so on. Since we opened the market on the Roman wall, we do at least 2-3 such events a month (..) with

different topics, many of them are related to cooking (.) we would like to do more workshops, but sometimes we don't have enough place and enough people (.) that is because in the markets we use all the space for the producers. This year at Alexander Nevsky [a cathedral in Sofia] once a month we did all kinds of workshops for children and for adults, both culinary and creative, musical and so on. So we really aim at making cooking and educational workshops (.) especially for the little ones, but we often do not have the opportunity to do that.

IN: How did Hrankoop become popular among Bulgarians?

RK: For a long time, we did not advertise Hrankoop loudly because we needed to improve our ordering platform (.) and therefore we did not advertise it publicly. Recently we entered into a sponsorship with Dacia [a Romanian car manufacturer], which are our very good partners (.) and we made a video in which we advertised our orders, our deliveries and Dacia. Now, we advertise our markets a lot - in various media, online through posts, most often on Facebook, but the word of mouth is our most stable advertising.

IN: Have your farmers' markets worked with conventional stores before and if yes, in what way?

RK: In Bulgaria, there are farmers' markets at the parking spots in front of big supermarkets (.) these farmers' markets are an attempt of the retail chains to respond to the pressure from the Minister of Agriculture Desislava Taneva, who called on the chains to load more Bulgarian products. But there are already Bulgarian products in these chains, firstly, and secondly, in order to enter such a chain you have to have some capacity, logistics, products and so on (.) Those who participate in our farmers' markets, those with whom we work, these are very small producers (.) they neither have the discipline nor have the ability to organize and communicate to enter such chains, nor do they have such quantities of products (.) because in order to enter the chains, you need to have money in advance, in order to participate in advertising brochures (.) conventional stores also often pay with huge delays (.) it's just a completely different type activity that does not meet the scale of our manufacturers.

IN: What difficulties do the coordinators in Hrankoop encounter most often at work?

RK: The coordinating team, which was formed in 2012, consisted of me and two colleagues who a few months ago asked to be separated from us. (.) Niki [the chairman of Hrankoop] and I continued with Hrankoop and much of the core, but they kept our room and some resources (.) and they also tried fraudulently to keep a large part of the user group. They did not want to participate in markets, they did not want to participate in a cooperative, they wanted to remain an informal group, as they are now. They have no intentions to create a cooperative, they want everything to be just a business. They work in the same way we worked before - they have an informal group online with producers and consumers, almost half of the producers who deliver there deliver to us. The rule is that in their group the three coordinators decide what to do and what not to do, decisions are not made between all members. If the coordinators want to know if their decisions are approved by the group, they will find out from the money they will receive (.) That is, if people buy, then their decisions are okay, and if they do not buy, then something is not okay.

IN: What difficulties do the producers in Hrankoop encounter most often at work?

RK: The state does not help, but puts a lot of pressure and restricts small producers (..) right now, they are subjected to destruction (..) especially in recent years (.) In fact only we encourage them (.) what the state does is, it makes you invest , regulate and look for a market yourself (..) you do everything by yourself, while we do the opposite, we show what market the producers can have and then we require them to register and go through all the procedures. We show them that there is a horizon and meaning for their investment. The state is very dependent on the business, on the branch organizations, on the trade chains (..) With us the producers are not pressured in advance, we offer a flexible fee, we give them a

secure market and they can develop slowly, without pressure. With us, the producers are members of the cooperative and they are sure that they will not be displaced from the market (..), they have security and through that they monitor their development and invest more. Many of them years ago asked for subsidies (..) because there are programs for subsidies (..) for example BGN 50 per ha (..) but a small producer with 30 ha will take BGN 1500 per year, which is a very small amount of money and cannot help him with anything. In this way they are limited by the state. And if the producer takes these subsidies, the state institutions start with the inspections (..) If he has received subsidies for tomatoes, but has decided to plant both tomatoes and peppers, this is not good for him (..) and because of such problems the small producers stopped to apply for grants. Our manufacturers know that they have a stable market, especially that of the Roman wall. This year, the Ministry of Agriculture helped them financially due to the coronavirus crisis, but the amount that our producers received is very small (..) for example BGN 1,800 for a year.

IN: How does Hrankoop manage to compete with large supermarket chains? What difficulties have you faced while competing with them?

RK: We suffered a very serious financial problem because of a store we built in 2016 in a mall in Sofia. However, we endured the problem only because we are a cooperative (..) if we were a company, we would not have survived. This store opened because of an invitation of the mall, the project was very stable (..) Producers and consumers gave loans for the equipment, for the delivery of products and so on. The store was extremely successful, but the external interests of the mall, the Billa store [an Austrian supermarket chain] and other stores literally put us on our knees and we still suffer losses (..) We still pay debts to our suppliers and manufacturers. We moved the store from one mall to another, but it no longer exists now. We did not want to close the store because it was the first farm shop with Bulgarian products in Bulgaria, we wanted to move it somewhere outside the mall, because the rents in the mall are very high, the working hours are very long (..) we wanted to work for smaller turnover, but also to be able to pay the debts. At a general meeting, several people from Hrankoop managed to persuade others to close the store (..) and so we have been going through hard times since 2018, because with a closed store we have to pay debts, pulling revenue from the markets in an attempt not to close the markets too. This was caused by the members of the organization themselves.

IN: What are Hrankoop's future plans?

RK: This year our calendar was full until December, but we could not do almost any events because of the coronavirus (..) now in December we plan to do 1-2 events. We try very hard to preserve our identity, we have many plans for future events, we have enthusiasm.

IN: In your opinion, why is it important to have solidarity agriculture in Bulgaria and to offer different products than those in the supermarket?

RK: It is important for people to know who produces their food, why and how. It is also important for producers to know who is buying their food. This makes them more empathetic to each other and more responsible to each other. Saying this as an organizer and consumer, it is very valuable for me to know the producers of my food and to be able to help them and learn from them (..) to exchange recipes (..) this communication is very enriching for both parties. We have many examples of consumers who have become passionate about developing their own products in their own place after communicating with producers. They see how important and graceful this thing is.

IN: Would you please introduce yourself and tell me about your farm?

IP: My name is Ilian Panov. I raise bee families in the area of Sakar Mountain. The number of the bee families I'm looking after is currently about 240 (..), located in three apiaries. The care of bee colonies is related to the provision of appropriate conditions for the normal and healthy development of them, this means that the apiaries should be located in areas that offer all the necessary natural sources of water, sources of nectar (..) and of course, there should be no contaminants. Other care for bee colonies is related to providing a good environment in their homes, in the beehives themselves (..), since they are located in the appropriate areas. I use beehives only from natural materials, which I always make sure are in excellent mechanical condition, without any damage to them and (..) there should be no opportunities for insects, animals, water and so on to penetrate them. For the bees to be able to develop well, the honeycombs should be replaced regularly because this guarantees the ideal conditions for them, and thus reduce the risk of developing pathogenic microorganisms. The products that our bees produce are basic bee products, honey, bee pollen, propolis and royal jelly (..) they are being offered to the end user in unprocessed raw state, with the exception of the bee pollen, for which it is more appropriate and normatively required to let it dry before selling it. We do not mix different types of honey and do not change the structure of the honey before selling it (..) if it has begun to crystallize, it is offered to the consumer in its natural form without performing any operations on it. I have the desire and aspiration of my children to contact as often as possible with nature and specifically with our bees (..) my kids have been close to the beehives from an early age, now they help me a lot with them. I want my kids to get acquainted with the natural processes in nature, to use the riches that nature offers, in this case specifically bee products, (..) but in a way that ensures the preservation of nature itself and some sustainability in the future, which means to not interfere in a way that may have an adverse effect on nature and the apiaries. Specifically, we want to obtain such a part of the products that the bees collect, which guarantees a residual amount of this product for the bees themselves, without us having to take away their natural food and replace it with artificial food.

IN: When did you become interested in organic production?

IP: I have always been interested in such products, even before I was engaged in beekeeping in a professional way. I have always tried, even as a consumer, to get food from producers whom I trust to produce their products without harming nature, but protecting it. I didn't start beekeeping with the idea of developing it professionally, but rather in the beginning it was my hobby (..) and it was connected with meeting the needs of my family and relatives, but later it turned out to be an interesting activity, which developed, and with the help of organizations like Hrankoop, we came to the situation we are in now.

IN: How did you find out about Hrankoop and how did you join the cooperative?

IP: I had heard about the existence of such cooperatives before knew about Hrankoop (..) I met with the Hrankoop's organizers at a food and product exhibition in Haskovo, and they invited us to participate in the farmers' markets organized by them and so on (..) we have been together for several years. I started working with them around 2014 (..), we've been working together for about 5-6 years.

IN: How do you work with Hrankoop?

IP: Apart from the online platform of Hrankoop, where producers sell their products, I also sell my products at the farmers' markets, organized by Hrankoop, and other similar events, such as farmers' festivals. Hrankoop provides the organization of the events, the inventory, and so on (..) and we, the producers, are the main participants in these events. They organize our meeting with the end user. I regularly participate in the farmers' markets, which

take place every week, and also in some other events, which don't take place every week but are bigger than the regular farmers' markets.

IN: Before you became part of Hrankoop, did you sell your products somewhere else?

IP: At first I produced products for my family, relatives and close friends (.) when I started to produce more products than the volume needed for my family and relatives, I started offering my products online, and also people started buying my products because of the so-called (..) word of mouth advertising.

IN: Since you joined Hrankoop, how has your relationship with the consumers changed?

IP: My relationship with consumers has become much more intense thanks to organized farmers' markets and other events organized by Hrankoop. The weekly direct connection between us, the producers, and the consumers and the feedback that consumers give us has led to much more trust between us, consumers trust us for producing the products they need and we trust them for buying our products.

IN: Since you joined Hrankoop, how has your relationship with other producers changed?

IP: Yes, because it is one thing to communicate only remotely with other manufacturers and it is another to be in direct contact with them every week (..) it is very important to exchange information (..) exchange contacts, consumers' recommendations and so on, this is all very useful. In Hrankoop, there is also the possibility for producers to visit the farms of other producers (..) Other farmers have not visited my farm so far because my farm is very remote, it is not near a big city, but I have visited some farms of other producers in Hrankoop.

IN: What difficulties do you most often encounter at work?

IP: One of the main problems I face is related to the work with the state administration, with the institutions, because after all our activity is controlled and monitored by various agencies and institutions. I believe that (..) the requirements of the authorities and the lack of understanding on their part is a big problem for us. I think that many things in our work can be simplified, including when it comes to the exchange of documents, it could all be done electronically (..) because for example I am in a remote place, which is 100 km from the regional town, where the relevant institutions are located, with which I have to communicate (..) The problem is that these institutions still require the manufacturer to always appear in person, to present the documents in person, which I think could nowadays be avoided (..) everything could happen electronically, there should be electronic communication. Everything could be much easier, because it takes many hours and days of our time, and very often in the height of the season. Authorities also generally do not provide much support for the farmers' markets or other such events, and are now even more cautious about them because of the coronavirus situation. There are some mechanisms that the state has established specifically to help the beekeeping sector, but the budgets are very small. Therefore, I would not say that great support from the state can be felt. The assistance provided by the state is enough to encourage some novice beekeepers to start their activities, but at some point the state cannot anymore encourage their development and guarantee them some minimum income that would guarantee them the existence of the farm (..) In general, large producers, mostly grain producers, benefit the most from state aid. Another problem is connected with the meteorological conditions (..) we are completely dependent on them, as far as we can we consider our activity, we follow the forecasts from several sources so that we can plan our work. Our apiaries are far from the city in which we live, so we have to travel a lot, so planning is very important to optimize the work. Droughts have also been a problem recently, and they have a great impact on the development of bees and honey yields.

IN: How do you compete with the big chains and do you want to compete with them?

IP: We do not want to compete with the big chains and we do not do it. The products from our farm are different from the products in the supermarket. Although the label and name of the products are the same products, in quality and type they have nothing in common. The honey we offer is in the same form in which the bees collected it. Our job is only to pack it in appropriate packaging that will not affect its quality, composition and its useful properties (..) while honey in supermarkets has undergone several treatments, batch homogenization, which is associated with the treatment of very high temperatures, making it another product that has nothing to do with our pure honey. Our products are not the same as the products in the supermarket so we cannot say that we are competing. The production of quality honey takes place in small and medium-sized farms, which in turn do not have the capacity to supply the chains with such a volume of supply as they need.

IN: In your opinion, how does the Bulgarian perceive food cooperatives like Hrankoop?

IP: There are many people who are interested in organically grown products and who are looking for such products at the farmers' markets. I think that there is big interest in Bulgarians in such products. Those who are interested in this type of products are positive about food cooperatives such as Hrankoop.

IN: What benefits and lessons have you learned from your participation in Hrankoop so far?

IP: The lessons I have learned from my participation in Hrankoop are that my ideas about the way food should be produced and the way it should reach the end user (..) are strengthened (..) I would be happy if the number of producers who grow and produce organic food, organizations like Hrankoop and events like the farmers' markets that are now taking place increase. The benefits of working with Hrankoop are many, there is a good basis for direct contacts with consumers and there are opportunities for sales of our products.

IN: Why do you think it is important to have solidarity agriculture in Bulgaria and to offer different products from those in the supermarket?

IP: It is important because in this way Bulgarian agriculture is developing very well (..) the share of food produced in a biologically clean way must increase, because the quality of such food is much higher, it would increase the welfare of consumers, especially when it comes to health. Consuming food of higher quality leads to health benefits.

Transcript 4; Interview 4; List of acronyms: IN = Interviewer, TV = Trayana Vasileva; online, 14 December 2020.

IN: Would you please introduce yourself and tell me about your farm?

TV: My name is Trayana Vasileva and I have a my farm since 2016 (..) it all started very spontaneously as a result of my hobby and that of my family (.) I am referring to my parents. Initially we started with an extremely modest assortment, we grew only a few green salads, seasonal vegetables such as (..) tomatoes in summer, root vegetables in autumn (..) broccoli, cauliflower (.) And later our incentive began to grow stronger during the farm markets when we realized what a huge demand there is for clean food. So we started to expand our business a bit and in fact to optimally use our only three acres that we have (..) and from year to year we expand our business, but not because we have bought new space, but because simply we use all our space. Our farms are located in the Trebic district, which is a district of Sofia, and we don't need so much time to get to the center, which minimizes fuel costs and so on, and our products always arrive very fresh. Our other farm is located in Novi Iskar, which is also very close to Sofia (.) and these are our two properties, which are houses with agricultural land. Currently, three people take care of the farms.

IN: When did you become interested in organic production?

TV: I have always been an active consumer of clean food for my own health and I think it is best for people to eat clean food to feel good (..) it was difficult for me to find a big variety of organic products in stores and markets and that's why we started growing such crops ourselves.

IN: How did you find out about Hrankoop and how did you join the cooperative?

TV: I found out about Hrankoop in 2015, after attending one of their farmers' festivals in the Zaimov Park in Sofia (..) after seeing so many producers in one place, I realized that there are actually regular markets every Saturday and so I contacted Hrankoop because I wanted to join them. They told me that I could not go and sell my products just like that (..) I had to first register as a farmer. I did it and accordingly they accepted us as members of the cooperative and that's how we started to be regular participants in the farmers' markets. I decided to become part of the cooperative because the products I produced at that time were many, we had a surplus, and financially we needed this type of work to support our main activity, which later even ceased to exist because agriculture became our core business.

IN: How do you work with Hrankoop?

TV: We participate in the farmers' markets only once a week because we don't produce so much (..) we also participate financially, because we give the cooperative 10 percent of our market turnover. Since the summer of 2016, we have been participating in the markets every week.

IN: Before you became part of Hrankoop, did you sell your products somewhere else?

TV: Before we became part of Hrankoop, we did not offer our products anywhere else. For us, Hrankoop has always been our first and only market where we offer our products. We started with very few products (..) we had 20-30 salads that we exported to the market and so it cannot be said that at that time we were serious producers. We just sold the products from our garden that we were not able to consume because we had surplus. Our products are currently selling very well, we have never returned products from a market (.) we literally go with a loaded bus, with products that we picked up on Friday, the day before the market and everything is sold until 10:30-11:00. I would say that the first people that come to the market come to us (..) and we have already built trust in the people, they know us, many of them have come to our farm (..) I think this is due to the fact that we run out of products very quickly. Apart from that, we read a lot of up-to-date information from England, from the United States, we constantly get a lot of new products and seeds (.) that we see that are new and interesting in Western Europe. We take them and experiment with them to see how they

are and if we like them, next year we are already offering some of them on the market, which we see is going well. It is interesting for us to have a large assortment, to offer many different things, but in small quantities. We also have a Facebook page, but I do not do active advertising there because our capacity is not enough to cover a lot of interest. I intentionally rarely publish information.

IN: Since you joined Hrankoop, how has your relationship with other producers changed?

TV: We gain a lot of information and exchange experiences, which is very valuable. Before we became part of Hrankoop, I can't say that we were real producers, because we produced only for our needs and consumption, but since we started participating in the farmers' markets, we met real producers who shared their experience with us in producing, in methodology, in finding quality seeds (.) because finding organic seeds turned out to be a serious problem for Bulgaria (..) all this sharing of information is a very big plus for us. In Bulgaria, unfortunately, you can find pure seeds of GMO-free varieties only from some old women in the villages who have decided to keep their varieties of seeds (..) but in the United States this is a great culture of development and there are many farms that produce organic seeds, hereditary varieties from 100 years ago, so (..) we are actively looking for seeds from abroad. We literally fight pests by cleaning by hand, we also use bio-certified detergents, which are much more gentle than the conventional chemicals used. But we always have losses due to pests (..) this is 30% and 50% of the production.

IN: What difficulties do you most often encounter at work?

TV: The labor force. The fact that one cannot rely on people who are outsiders must be close to one's heart in order to do this thing (..) physical labor is much greater than material security. Working with each plant is very individual, one must feel it to know how to care for it. Our work, for example, cannot be compared to the work of brigades picking fruits and vegetables. In our country, literally every square meter is sown with a different culture.

IN: How do you compete with the big chains and do you want to compete with them?

TV: No, we have never had such interest before. It is easier for us to pick all fruits and vegetables in one day, as we do now on Friday, and to sell everything live in direct contact with people again in one day, so that we can there is time left for work (..) because if we deal with supplies or work with other companies every day, there will be no time for work, and we are the only people working on our farm, we have no workers.

IN: In your opinion, how do Bulgarians perceive food cooperatives like Hrankoop?

TV: I think that some consumers have lost trust in the cooperative lately. The reason for that is (..) that some manufacturers tell customers that other manufacturers do not have organic products, that they buy them from somewhere and then sell them (.) and in that way there is no trust in the whole organization (..) this should be better controlled (..) I think that in our team of producers there is a lack of cohesion and solidarity (.) and we have to defend each other, to learn from each other (..) but sometimes everything is based on personal interests and probably this is due to the small scale of the activity of the cooperative. Personally, I have only witnessed such situations, where producers accuse other producers (.) I myself have not participated in such situations. But action must be taken against this, because this problem has existed for years.

What benefits and lessons have you learned from your participation in Hrankoop so far?

TV: The benefits are many. From a personal point of view, at a difficult time for my family, when our main activity could not continue to exist, my family lost their job (..) when my grandparents needed financial support, the work in our farm united our whole family around one activity. (.) My grandparents now have an incentive every day to get up in the morning, to take care of something, to earn money from it (.) This has had a very good effect on the

understanding in our home. The benefits for the farm become more and more with our presence in the markets, because we are constantly developing. When one year a product does not grow well, the next year we grow it in a different way.

IN: Why do you think it is important to have solidarity agriculture in Bulgaria and to offer different products from those in the supermarket?

TV: It is important because through quality food a person can contribute a lot to their health and get closer to nature. Because people in general have moved away from both nature and the essence of health. It is very important to have small producers who produce quality products (..) we have a very fertile soil in Bulgaria and in my opinion it is not used to its full potential. But the state does not stimulate in any way the further development of organic farms. Those who produce organic products do so of their own free will.

IN: Could you tell me about the establishment of the Bioselena Foundation?

SA: The foundation started working in 1995 as a project that was funded by the Swiss government and implemented in Bulgaria by a Swiss research institute called Research Institute of Organic Agriculture. The project started with research missions of experts in Bulgaria. The aim was to start introducing organic farming in the country. A 4-year project was approved, which started in 1996 and ended in 2000, and the first four months were dedicated to introducing organic farming to farmers in Bulgarian villages (...) the project was limited to three municipalities, three places in Bulgaria - Apriltsi, Ribaritsa and Kalofer, located in the Central Stara Planina. The main activities in the beginning were training, demonstrations (...) there was an idea to make several pilot farms with different techniques that are useful for the development of organic farming. Other activities included the acquaintance of the Bulgarian administration, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the experts in various institutes and services with the concept of organic farming because in those years in Bulgaria the situation was transient (...) this happened 24 years ago and at that time there were no real farmers in Bulgaria yet, it was shortly after the liquidation of the cooperative farms and therefore there were still no real farmers (.) or at least not in the mountainous areas. That is, in the project areas, farming was still in its early development. The farmers there were very small, with few animals, old machines. When we talked about this type of agriculture and these practices in the villages, most people said that they are already involved in organic farming because they are poor and do not have money to use chemicals, but when we asked them if they had the money for chemicals would they buy them, they said that they will. That is, they did not understand the true meaning of organic farming. The Ministry of Agriculture accepted the concept of organic farming with curiosity, but that was the end of everything, their interest. We were even told not to bother the Minister of Agriculture with nonsense when we went to meetings, because the Minister is busy feeding the people (...) in general, these were the first years in the development of the Foundation and respectively organic farming in Bulgaria. During these years we also took farmers in Switzerland. For two years in a row, we organized groups that traveled to organic farms in Switzerland and stayed there for two weeks to get acquainted with organic farming. It was more of an educational activity, those first four years. These years were just a preparation. During them, we also introduced some innovations such as electric shepherds, new seeds, new varieties of fruits (...) such as raspberries. We did a lot of trainings and seminars with scientific institutes. Then the National Agricultural Advisory Service was born (...) we held discussions with them as well. We also created 2-3 demonstration farms. We also made fertilizer pits for storing manure from farms. These things were still new at that time.

IN: When did the first big change in your work come?

SA: The first big change happened in 2001, because until then we were mainly explaining how things happen. In 2001, the first certification of several farms as organic farms began. At that time began the second four-year phase. Bulgaria still did not have national legislation, and there were no certification companies, so the first companies which certified organic farms were foreign, for example from the Netherlands (...) they certified farms, such as those for oil-bearing roses, intended for export. They conducted inspections and the first certified organic products appeared in 2002-2003. And then the real work began. In 2001, together with the Ministry of Agriculture, we made the first two regulations for organic farming, one was for crop production, the other - for animal husbandry. And so the first certified organic farms began to appear. In 2003 we managed to go to Germany for an exhibition for organic farming (.) this was the first official participation of Bulgaria in such an exhibition, with a Bulgarian stand. In 2003, there were already real deals, trade, exports, etc. In the beginning, only 10 farms were certified, but gradually they became more. In 2007, there were already about 250 organic farms, but none of them received any support, they operated entirely on a market basis, that is these were market entities that produced and sold and profited from the

price markup. They did not rely on any help from anywhere. They were oriented mainly to exports - they are producers of herbs, dried spices, essential oils. At that time we [Bulgaria] were the only producers of oil-bearing roses. Since 2001 we [Bulgaria] have also exported organic honey and so far we are number one in Europe in the number of certified organic beekeeping.

IN: How does the state treat organic farming and has it changed its attitude over time?

SA: Every year we held a National Holiday of Organic Agriculture in Sofia, we brought animals in the South Park (.) there was a full-day program (.) from 2001 to 2007 we held such a holiday and the Minister of Agriculture always came, he was always invited. He always held a speech about how he will support organic farming (.) that is, in general, officially, state representatives always talked about how much the state supports organic farming, but at the same time, in my opinion, the state rather accepts organic farming as an annoying obligation, imposed by Brussels [the European Union]. After 2007, when we entered the European Union, the obligation under the Common Agricultural Policy to implement measures to protect soil, air, climate, etc. appeared. Under the program there is a measure of agriculture, which the state is obliged to implement. Now, with the advent of the Green Deal, these practices are intensifying. The state has even more obligations to implement new practices. The attitude of the state towards organic farming depends a lot on the people working in the Ministry of Agriculture. That is, when there is an interested team, it works well. For example, in 2005 we wrote with the help of the Swiss program (..) in general Switzerland helped this sector the most (..) we wrote the first National Plan for the Development of Organic Farming. We worked on it for a whole year with experts (.) then there were discussions all over the country, issues in the Plan were discussed, corrections were made (.) and so in 2006 the Council of Ministers adopted the plan with a budget, specific goals (..) for a particular percentage of lands to become organic by 2011 and 3% of the sales in Bulgaria to be organic. Then there were many changes of governments, coalitions, etc., and because of the subsidies that started to be paid in 2008 (..), in fact this was the first year when organic farmers received real payments under the measure, which was then measure 214 (..) afterwards there was an increase of the number of organic producers, of hectares of organic agricultural land included in the certification. There was a very steep increase in organic farms mainly due to subsidies. But this still happens at high tide due to difficulties in implementing the measure. In the beginning, the problem was that very few farmers sought certification and applied for subsidies because there was a requirement for a 5-year contract, and many producers had no guarantee that they will be able to use the land for 5 years due to land use problems, for example they cannot find all the heirs of all the properties they cultivate to sign a contract for the next five years, and there is a risk that if something happens in the fifth year and they cannot continue to produce, they were obliged under the then rules to return all subsidies taken for the previous four years, plus interest. This discouraged people from applying for these subsidies. The other problem was related to minor infringements, in case of minor infringements the producer was still obliged to return all subsidies. For this reason, in the first 2-3 years there was very little utilization of this money for support. Little by little, these problems began to clear up and after 2010 the number of organic producers and their organic farms and the beneficiaries of the measure began to grow smoothly but steadily.

IN: What changes have there been for small farmers after Bulgaria's accession to the European Union? Have they been harmed in any way by the appearance of foreign imported products from other European countries?

SA: Imported products entered as early as 1990, long before we entered the European Union. The Metro, Billa and other supermarkets have been here for 25 years. Rather, entry into the European Union has opened the borders for duty-free imports and without any other restrictions from all EU member states. I believe that Bulgaria has not been able to take full advantage of the benefits of trade membership. At that time [the time of entering the EU], our farms were still not well prepared and could not take full advantage to trade freely throughout

Europe. At that time, they were still not competitive. Until 2015-2016 Bulgaria relied mainly on cheap labor. The crops that had an advantage were small fruits such as raspberries, strawberries, that is, anything that required cheap labor. However, after the mass emigration of Bulgarians to European countries began, this changed drastically, because in European countries they found much better wages for the same work.

IN: Can you tell me about the farmers' markets you organize?

SA: Our main farmers' market is in front of the Ministry of Agriculture. It takes place every Wednesday for the fourth year. Our idea is to offer people quality food from small farms, artisanal food, and to offer farmers a connection with consumers in Sofia, the big city. For this farmer's market, we again received help from the Swiss government through one of the projects it was funding at the time. For this project we also received an award from the European Commission, the Natura 2000 award. The project is called "Linking nature conservation with sustainable rural development". Under this project we helped many farmers and small businesses (.) We helped them in offering the final product, that is for example to make a small dairy farm for processing products and sell them in small shops, markets, restaurants, etc. This was the main goal and so in the framework of this project with consulting assistance we managed to prepare over 50 producers across the country who already had a finished, registered product and small sites for processing dairy products, local products, honey, fish and other animal products where the food regulation is stricter. That is, for example, if you produce tomatoes, you can go and sell them on the market, but if you produce milk, you must have an investment in refrigeration equipment, everything must be traceable by registration, etc. With the help of this project we managed to prepare such producers who already had to sell their goods somewhere. We had a plan to hold such farmer's markets in Sofia, Plovdiv, Gabrovo and Troyan, but we managed to hold one in Sofia only, which is also good. And although it took us two years to get permission for holding the market, we managed to make the market work to this day. Every Wednesday, between 30 and 40 producers gather, regardless of the season, and are there all day. They offer a variety of foods, mostly dairy products. We have very strict rules. We allow the sale of only products that are produced in family or small farms, produced by artisanal method and products that are not sold in supermarkets. We have internal rules that are discussed with all participants and these rules must be followed in order for farmers to participate in the market. Other requirements are that the animals be kept under humane conditions, for example that the hens are free (..) we do not require the products to be necessarily bio-certified, although 25% of the products on the market are bio-certified.

IN: Could you tell me about your work with municipalities on farmers' markets?

SA: We have experience working with Sofia Municipality. We had several meetings, including with the assistance of the Swiss Embassy, with municipal councilors, with deputy mayors who are responsible for this activity. In general, the problem is in the legislation, because in Sofia municipality, as well as in other municipalities, there is an ordinance for organizing such markets, they are called municipal markets or cooperative markets, which is an ordinance from the 1960s and it describes what it is a municipal market, that is there must be a place to stop, a toilet, etc. Such markets exist. Unfortunately, the rules there are such that there are some commercial companies that rent stalls or pavilions and their goal is to get the most out of it. They want these stalls to work all the time, every day. Which automatically excludes farmers from the possibility to rent such a stall in such a market and participate in it, because he or she will have to pay a price for 365 days a year, and in practice can use one such stall 1-2 days a week, no more, as the manufacturer must also produce, he or she cannot be constantly at the market. So purely economically, these stalls are taken by traders, not by manufacturers, this is also the most common practice. People who claim to be producers most often actually buy agricultural products from somewhere, such as the stock exchange, and sell them at the municipal markets, with a large proportion of consumers thinking that they are producers. We did not want to be part of such a market, a market with traders, not producers. That is why we found a compromise solution, which is to hold the

market in the form of an event, for which the Municipality issues us a permit to hold such a market every year. We pay rent to the Municipality and it is paid for each event. This rent is three times higher than the rent for a municipal market. And although it is more expensive, we prefer not to be working at municipal markets. We have equipment, tents, tables, the preparation before the market starts is long, the organization is expensive and difficult, but we prefer this option of work. And we want to go in that direction. Because at the municipal markets it does not seem that there will be a change any time soon. There are several large municipal markets in Sofia - in Krasno Selo, the "Women's Market" and others. There are also many municipal markets in other Bulgarian cities. These markets work with commercial companies, but are owned by the Municipality and the goal is profit. There are no conditions what kind of manufacturer you are, whether you are a big or small manufacturer.

IN: Can you tell me about the other farmers' market that you held in the Mladost 1 neighborhood?

SA: This farmers' market was an experiment with the Billa supermarket. We held it in the summer of 2020, every Saturday at the parking lot of Billa, the largest parking lot of Billa in Sofia. In September we decided to close the farmers' market because the interest in it was weak. The people from Billa were very responsive, they provided us with free space, electricity, etc. But people did not come to shop from the market. We did the same experiment with Kaufland, but things didn't work out there either, so (..) the place [for the farmers' market] is very important. Just because a place is big, for example, does not mean that people will be interested in the market and the products. Not every place is suitable. Most people did not even stop to look at the products, that is, they only came to the supermarket, shopped in it and left.

IN: In your opinion, to what extent are Bulgarians today interested in organic products?

SA: In my opinion, the interest is great, people want to eat good food, but not everyone can afford such food. The first organic products that began to be widely sought in Bulgaria were the baby purees of Hipp, which is an expensive brand. These products are sold everywhere - in every neighborhood store, every supermarket, every pharmacy. Which means that there is a demand, which for me means that the Bulgarian would buy such products for their child, but for themselves. In my opinion, there is more trust in organic products in supermarkets than in markets, for example, because people believe that these products are 100% tested. And in the municipal markets no one gives you 100% accurate information about where the product comes from.

IN: Could you tell me about the legislative initiatives in the field of organic farming that you are dealing with?

SA: Since 2007, when the first Rural Development Program appeared, we have been participating (..) for the first seven years I have been a member of the Monitoring Committee. I am now a non-voting member as we are a Foundation registered with private benefit, which means that we have the right to speak, but when voting, our vote does not count. We participate in almost all meetings and sessions. We have offered many things. One of the things we are proud of is the introduction of payment for organic farming in 2014 and beekeeping in 2007. We are probably the only country in the European Union where there is an additional special payment for organic animals, because in Bulgaria organic farming went wrong (..) Unlike Austria and Switzerland, for example, where almost all organic farms are mixed, that is, have a crop part and livestock, in Bulgaria 95% of organic farms have only crop production. They have no animals. On the other hand, the payment for agricultural areas under the Rural Development Program are counted per hectare, which further stimulates organic farmers to engage only in crop production. This has led to situations in which farmers growing organic vegetables buy biofertilizers from the Netherlands, Italy or Austria, which means that no matter how many subsidies are given, these organic fruits and vegetables cannot be used for the Bulgarian market. This is how a luxury expensive product

is made, which may become unsold even in Austria. For this reason, we decided to help organic farms start raising animals as well. Currently about 50-60 farms with animals in Bulgaria are organic farms. Before, that there were about 12. There are many bio-certified sheep and goats, but when it comes to chickens, for example, there is only one bio-certified producer with 700 hens. The remaining organic eggs are imported from Hungary, Slovakia, etc. For this reason, there is an imbalance in the market. There is not enough production of organic animal products. Another important achievement for us is the payment for organic bee families. This is practiced by only a few countries in Europe. There are few of them and we have been among them for a long time. From the first program we have a payment for organic bees. It was a long process because we had to convince the European Commission why organic beekeepers needed help. We participated in the whole process. In 2016, it happened that the budget under measure 11 ended and the state stopped accepting applications for assistance, which led to a difficult moment because the media began to talk about why the money was exhausted. Then it turns out that there were many farms that received a big amount of money from subsidies for organic agriculture, but they have large areas for production, which makes everything doubtful, because how will they produce 10,000 acres of organic wheat and other similar crops that are difficult to produce (..) and then it turned out that their certificates said "zero production", that is, all production was sold as conventional and not organic. There we participated very intensively in discussions on the introduction of degressive rates. We are a member of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements [IFOAM] and there we discussed this problem at various meetings with colleagues from other countries and it turned out that there are such cases in other countries too where there have been problems with money laundering and they have introduced a degressive measure, that is up to 50 per hectare is paid 100%, and over 50 is paid 50% of the rate and thus limits the possibility of large areas to be presented as organic in order to receive subsidies. There are such measures in Poland, as well as in Portugal and Italy. What we do most often happens in exchange with other countries. In Poland, for example, they turned out to have a problem with walnuts. In our country, the first crop that was suspicious was also the walnut. After its creation, a walnut plantation begins to give birth only after 5-6 years (..) what happens is that some people plant such a garden, certify it, but until the walnut begins to give birth, their commitment expires, they receive subsidies for 5 years and in the fifth year give up, which is a kind of fraud. This phenomenon began in Poland long before it appeared in Bulgaria, which means that the people who deal with these things take an example from other places and countries and apply them in countries with lower control. So we proposed changes here, in Bulgaria, and they were accepted as a temporary measure. This was also the condition for allocating new 40 million euros so that new producers could also receive subsidies.

IN: Can you tell me about the National Plan for Development of Organic Agriculture 2021?

SA: The problem with this plan is that it is written to be read by the European Commission. The first one was not like that, the first one came from the bottom-up, that is, it was conceived by us, by farmers and other interested people. However, we wrote this one with the working group of the Ministry of Agriculture because of a negative report from the European Commission. One of the conditions for continuing funding is to show that Bulgaria has a plan for the development of organic farming. So we wrote this plan in such conditions. It was uploaded to the site so that people can see that we have a plan. But if you read it carefully, you will see that the plan lacks budgets and deadlines. And a plan without a budget is nothing. The budget shows how serious an intention is. If there is no written indicator with which can measure the result, then this is not serious, but "optional". It can be called a plan when it includes deadlines, managers and budgets. The European Commission demands such a plan and we therefore hope that it will put pressure on Bulgaria. In the end, the plan document was signed only by the Minister of Agriculture, but not by the Council of Ministers. That is, it is a temporary measure. We will have to revise it, add budgets (..) what we are missing in this plan is exactly what the Commission is proposing, that is, to implement the

European Green Public Procurement Directive, to fund activities to support organic farming, that is to include organic products in the menus of kindergartens, schools, social and medical institutions. This will also drive demand. Because at the moment, no matter how much the producers are financed, if they have nowhere to sell their goods, there is no use. This is not sustainable, because the moment the subsidies stop, the production stops.

IN: Could you tell me over the years what difficulties the Foundation has faced most often?

SA: Difficulties are part of everyday life. There was nothing that happened the first time. We have gone through the whole transition process both in our institutional and political environment with different policies, cabinets, and the transitions that have taken place in our donor agencies, because we work mainly with them because we have no state funding, we sell our services through work, we finance our activities by projects. We have worked on projects funded by Switzerland, Norway and European programs. After Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, many of the countries that financed projects in Bulgaria stopped their funding, for example the Netherlands and Italy. There are only a few programs left, coming from Belgium, Switzerland, the America for Bulgaria Foundation and the European funds, in which, however, we failed to fit. We are a specialized organization that provides consulting services and vocational training, and although there are such measures for both programming periods, neither of these programs has worked. In the first program we spent a small amount for vocational training, but the program for consulting services never worked. The measure did not work. In the second program, the vocational training program is not open and the program for consulting services does not work. This also shows the attitude of the state. The state is obliged to provide services of professional advice and training, but does not do so.

IN: Can you tell me what the trainings and consultations are?

SA: In the first period, these were trainings that were carried out by the Agricultural University, for example, but the people from there quickly gave up. We offered a program with vouchers for agricultural consultations, but it never worked. Consultations (..) people have to pay for them and those who currently consult organic farmers are people who sell them something. This consulting activity is not free. It is performed by people who sell fertilizers, preparations or machines and when selling they consult the manufacturer. Farmers think it's free, but in fact the consultation is part of the price of the product. These are sales consultants, they are not just consultants. But this is also the case in Hungary, for example, not only in Bulgaria.

IN: Could you tell me about the projects you are involved in?

SA: We recently worked on a project with the European Network of Farmers and Craftsmen for Cheese and Dairy Products, which is a relatively new network that has existed since about 2010 and has about 15 member countries. We developed training programs - for primary production, good hygiene practices in small businesses, etc. We then upgraded with a second project – an Erasmus one. We created a website with a map showing all the small dairy shops offering apprenticeship opportunities in specific countries.

Transcript 6; Interview 6; List of acronyms: IN = Interviewer, IP = Ivaylo Popov; online, 23 April 2021.

IN: Could you tell me about the creation of the organization For the Earth?

IP: The organization was established in 1995, but I have not witnessed the creation, so I cannot say so much on the subject. It has started working for the Earth as an anti-nuclear organization. The first campaigns it worked on were related to nuclear energy. Some of the organizers were people from the independent association Ecoglanost.

IN: How many members are there currently in For the Earth?

IP: There are currently about 80-90 members in For Earth. We are not the typical membership organization, for us it is more important to have activists in the organization, such as volunteers, to be actively involved in campaigns. We also have a membership fee, but this is not the main goal of the organization.

IN: Could you tell me about the volunteering that For the Earth offers?

IP: Volunteering in For the Earth is not very well constructed, because we do not have a specific person to deal with it. But we have a Facebook group for volunteers for For the Earth and there is information about volunteer campaigns. We have a newsletter in which various advertisements are published, including those for volunteering. Most often, volunteers get involved in actions that we organize. Every year we run a volunteer campaign to clean up the highlands. In recent years, we have had campaigns against plastics and waste incineration, which have been very strong campaigns and there are many volunteers in them. The process is not very formalized, but there are many people who want to get involved in the campaigns.

IN: Could you tell me more about the campaigns that For the Earth has carried out over the years?

IP: We have conducted cooking courses with organizations such as Food Not War, Hrankoop, Urban Agriculture and others. In these culinary workshops, the idea was to talk about food problems, what solutions there are for these problems. About 20 people came to these workshops. People who cook talk about different topics - for example, about reducing waste, reducing meat consumption, the benefits of vegetarian and vegan diets, emphasizing the social and environmental aspects. One of the main goals was to build and develop a network of organizations working in this direction. In this way we worked very well with new partners and existing ones. We started doing more actions and discussions. We have taken part in protests, we have held film screenings, workshops. In the last year we have been holding many webinars. We also conduct campaigns for clean air, for example. We organized a protest in front of the Ministry of Health. Then we opened an exhibition at the Cinema House.

IN: Could you tell me more about the work of For the Earth in the field of food and agriculture? And in particular the promotion of food cooperatives as part of this work?

IP: About 10 years ago, after discussions in About the Earth and research conducted by us on the topic of farming in Bulgaria, we conducted interviews with small producers. These were mostly elderly people in the villages. The interviews were semi-structured and we did them with producers, for example in the Rhodopes. The main problem we found for them is that it is difficult for them to sell their products at a fair price. Then their only selling option was either an informal sale, ie their relatives and acquaintances to buy products from them, but this is a small niche and a small sale for them, because for example even people with 5 cows sometimes produce a lot of milk, ie they need market, and they could not sell their products at high prices. And in general, this problem was encountered by most of the manufacturers we spoke to - the inability to sell their products at good prices. Then we wondered what exactly could be done to help them. That is why we have started to study what is happening in the world and how small producers are doing in Europe. Then we

noticed that there were food cooperatives in many countries. Then we started working and we had very good contacts with an organization from Catalonia. They helped us a lot, introduced us to their cooperatives, helped us with materials about the pros, cons and so on. So we decided that this is something that can be applied in Bulgaria and that existed before, before 1945, but not so organized (..) in some form the farmers helped their products to be sold directly to market. At that time the cooperative movement in Bulgaria was quite well developed. After the advent of socialism, the cooperatives that existed at that time were not so intended to enter the market and were organized from top to bottom, and not as before 1945 - from bottom to top, when the peasants wanted to work together and organized themselves. So we started working on a popular idea for food cooperatives, we met with people, discussed opportunities, met in Sofia and so the idea for Hrankoop was born. In the beginning it was an informal organization of mostly consumers, including me, who were looking for manufacturers, and this was the most difficult in the beginning, including organizational things. And so over the years this structure Hrankoop grew, later it became an official cooperative and to this day we are connected with Hrankoop. I am personally a member and user of Hrankoop. Before Hrankoop, some of the small producers sold their products on the market, but not in this way. It should be mentioned that Hrankoop is not a product manufacturer. Hrankoop's role is to connect the consumer with the producer through farmers' markets, to impose quality and control standards and to promote food cooperatives. For many years, before we started holding farmers' markets, we organized deliveries once a week.

IN: After the creation of Hrankoop did For the Earth participate in the creation and promotion of other food cooperatives in Bulgaria?

IP: We have helped various initiatives, some of which at some point were part of the Hrankoop movement, for example in Varna there is a cooperative. We have helped in the establishment and operation of this cooperative. Another example is the cooperative in Plovdiv, which still operates today. We also helped the organization Bioselena, organizing a farmers' market, which is located in front of the Ministry of Agriculture. We did not help very actively, but we supported them at events and worked together. From For the Earth we welcome all forms of development of food cooperatives.

IN: Do you think that the idea of community-supported agriculture has already developed well in Bulgaria?

IP: Things are happening slowly, but there is still progress. There are new food cooperatives, there are new groups in which people offer and buy products. That is, this alternative system of production and distribution is evolving, it may not be in the form of a cooperative, but there is development. For us, the most important thing is the final connection between consumer and producer. We also welcome environmental production standards.

IN: Can you tell me about the idea of food independence that For the Earth promotes?

IP: Unfortunately, at the moment, For the Earth is not concerned with the promotion and development of the idea of food independence. There are various groups and organizations involved in promoting food independence. Food independence is a broad current that includes many elements in itself. For us, the most important element is the two end links of the chain, ie producers and consumers to have a leading role in decision-making on policies and laws, rules, subsidies, etc. in the sector. In our opinion, it is very important to empower these two elements of the food chain, because they are the weakest elements, while large traders and processors have very strong lobbies and participate in policies and have much more weight in them. The other element of food independence, which is very important for us, is related to the sustainability of production, that is, the production to be produced in a way that does not harm nature. The third, which is very important for us, is economic justice, that is, in such relations in terms of economic parameters, both parties should be satisfied with the result, that is, farmers should not be harmed and consumers should pay a reasonable price. These are the most important things for us in food independence. For the

Earth, it was the only organization that worked systematically to impose this concept in Bulgaria and to develop it. Unfortunately, we do not have the resources and therefore food independence is not our priority at the moment. We are dealing with small things that are part of the struggle for food independence, but we are not working in a structured way to develop a comprehensive movement as we did several years ago. For the Earth introduced the term food sovereignty in Bulgaria, and at that time there was a lot of discussion about whether to call it food sovereignty or food independence. In the end, it was decided that the term would remain food independence, although the term is slightly inaccurate in Bulgarian translation. Our work on introducing the concept of food independence in Bulgaria consisted of publications, events where we talk about it, including talks with various institutions. In the beginning we came up with the term, translated materials on the topic, we had short films on it, that is, in this way we started to promote the topic, but this information was too theoretically presented to people and therefore failed to reach a wide audience. Subsequently, we decided to reverse the approach and began to give relevant examples, ie we did not talk only theoretically, but in making a presentation we mentioned what exactly is a food cooperative and how orders could be made in such a cooperative. So first we gave examples of food independence, and then we explained exactly what food independence was, and that worked better. After a while, given the resources we have, we decided not to explain the theoretical part anymore. Our line of work, food and agriculture, is subject to the principles of food independence. This is the fundamental principle of operation. We have been dealing with food independence since about 2012, and we did not start working on this concept all of a sudden, and it was also a process, first we, the people working in For the Earth at international events, met people who are interested in these topics (..) we started to find out what food independence is. We are part of many networks, some of the networks we work with are interested in the topic (.) We read materials on the Internet and so (..) We also worked with some leftist organizations in Bulgaria, because they also had an interest in the topic. Before we started to popularize the idea here in Bulgaria, we informed ourselves very well through various sources.

IN: How did you manage to reach people with the events? How did you promote them?

IP: First through the information channels we had. At that time, Facebook was still not popular, as well as other social networks, so we used the website and the email list we had at the time. We also participated in various meetings, events, festivals, in which we participated as an organizer or participant with presentations and demonstrations. We have also participated in various farming events. As promotion tools we used banners with information about food independence and food cooperatives, we talked to people about the events and so on. We also talked in the media, but less there. After the appearance of Hrankoop, it began to appear frequently in the media because it gained popularity. Cinnamon is also for us to give presentations on food independence at major media events. For many years he also organized a film fest for the Earth, in which films about food independence could be watched.

IN: Do you think that over time the media has started to show more interest in your work related to food independence?

IP: In general, the topic of food independence is very theoretical, as I said, it is not so suitable for media events, but if we are talking about more specific things like Hrankoop, the interest is already great, and nowadays I think the topic of food cooperatives even it is no longer so modern, that is, it is normal to be present in the media and people perceive this as something normal, it is not something new.

IN: Do you think that nowadays Bulgarians are interested in organic farming and organic products?

IP: As far as I have seen analyzes and my personal impressions, there is increased interest, but I would not say that he is a leader. In my opinion, everyone has a different idea of what an eco-product is. Industrial products began to enter Bulgaria on a large scale in the 1990s,

when there was a peak and people enjoyed the variety and color, but later they began to realize that this does not mean that these products are quality. That is why there is now interest in these products and these production and distribution systems, and that is why they are developing successfully.

IN: What do you think is the attitude of the state to organic agriculture and organic farmers?

IP: I believe that it is often proclaimed that there is great interest, that this is the future, and so on, but I think that the state does not implement enough policies in this direction, and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is not the best tool to support such policies, because it is aimed primarily at large farmers, they receive subsidies.

IN: How does For the Earth communicate with the state?

IP: On the one hand, we communicate with local authorities, with municipalities. We used to help Hrankoop find land, issue permits and so on, we also helped pay fees. We have tried to communicate more with Sofia Municipality and my personal opinion is that there is not much benefit from this work, because the current leadership wants to extract mostly PR and they do not really help much. We have also communicated with the Ministry of Agriculture. We have had a number of meetings with the relevant ministers, specifically I can say about Minister Taneva that there was interest in organic farming, but this interest is not translated into any major specific policies. The Ministry of Agriculture, for example, has helped Bioselena run a farmers' market there, but that is not really enough. The ministry does not use enough tools to help. There are much stronger tools to help, either through investment or through rules, policies. We have long talked about the fact that the standards for food production in Bulgaria are conservative, no distinction is made between small and large producers, it is often necessary for small producers to follow the rules that are made for large producers. I believe that the Ministry of Agriculture has economic interests, and in certain circles, that stop the development of organic farming. However, small producers also have an economic interest. Another problem with small producers is that they are not well associated and do not participate in producer organizations, ie agricultural organizations. The strong organizations are of the big producers. It is logical that it is easier to organize, for example, 10 large farmers and they defend their interests in one organization (.). And it is much more difficult to gather and organize, for example, 4000 small farmers. But I think this is a challenge, not the main reason. The truth is that in Bulgaria people find it very difficult to associate and work together and this is the reason why there are no strong organizations of small farmers. This is also the reason why there are no good results in the talks with the Ministry of Agriculture. It is not only the intention of the state that interferes. This also plays an important role. Hrankoop has little to do with advocacy, the main function of Hrankoop is to help logistically the trade process and to promote the idea of food cooperatives, ie the element of advocacy before the authorities is poorly developed at Hrankoop. For the Earth, he has long assumed this function of advocacy through meetings, letters, comments on regulations and policies, and various forms of communication with the Ministry of Agriculture. But it is much better when farmers' organizations are involved in advocacy, because For the Earth is an environmental organization. There are several such organizations that have been working quite well as an advocacy organization for years.

IN: Could you tell me about how For the Earth fights against GMO products?

IP: We are stronger in this direction. In recent years, we have not had many public campaigns on the subject. But years ago, thanks to our activities and the activities of other organizations, there was a very strong movement in Bulgaria against GMOs. Bulgaria has some of the most restrictive laws within the limits allowed by European legislation. In addition to the laws themselves, there is a strong public mood against GMO products. There are many sociological studies that prove this. In December 2020, Za Zemlya conducted one such survey with colleagues from other countries, and what the survey showed was that Bulgarians are among the most critical of GMO products among the population of the

countries included in the survey. When the strict laws against GMO products were introduced in Bulgaria, Za Zemlya together with its partners conducted tests for the content of the products on the market. Violations were detected, but over the years they decreased a lot. In this case, I am talking about imports, not products grown in Bulgaria, because GMOs are completely banned here. In recent years, we have been constantly monitoring legislative changes (.) If we notice that PR for GMOs (.) Is starting to increase somewhere, that is, for example, there are events on the subject, and so on, we monitor these processes and intervene in them. In the last two years we have produced a lot of materials related to the so-called new techniques for genetic reduction, new GMOs (.) The most popular of them is the CRISPR gene editing method used in soybeans, rapeseed, corn and other products. This technology is much cheaper and easier to apply compared to the classic GMO technology. Unfortunately, in recent years we have not been able to arouse much interest in the subject, nor in the media. For a year or two we have released several press releases that have failed to reach the media. This is somewhat understandable, because the processes themselves are happening at global and European level and there are still no formal procedures for change. We currently expect the European Commission to announce a study in a few days, but it shows the predominance of the GMO industry. We also follow very well the lobby organization of the GMO industry, which are extremely active in recent years and for the first time are in front of us as a position in communications. Following the announcement of the results, an open debate will begin about what we will do with these products. The purpose of the industry is to deregulate them. Their thesis is that they are not GMOs. There is a ruling of the European Court of Justice which says that these products are GMOs and that all regulations related to these products must be complied with. A few days ago we sent a question to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment about what Bulgaria's position will be in these processes, but we still do not have an answer. We are also preparing a parliamentary question and we are waiting for the two ministries to give us an answer, because both have functions on the topic. We are currently preparing a sociological survey to show that Bulgarians are against GMO products. We are also preparing an information campaign. We hope that the lull in the media will change, and I think that will happen when politics gets involved. We also want to do a workshop with journalists in May, but that depends on the coronavirus situation. That's why we still wonder if it's online or on site. Our activities in recent years are mostly related to lobbying and, when necessary, public speaking on the topic, in order to support our advocacy campaign. We also work a lot on the topic of GMOs with the organization Friends of the Earth, with the scientific organization Biotech and with GMWatch. In the last two years we have made very serious materials on the subject. We also have videos on the subject. Most materials are in the form of reports and articles. Pro-GMO campaigns in the 1990s talked about how such technologies would help people cope with hunger, and now they are mostly talking about how we will deal with climate change.

IN: Could you tell me about the Root Foundation?

BE: About 10 years ago, I founded the Root Foundation. Apart from that, I am the founder of the Oborishte Foundation - a foundation that started working in 2009, working for the Oborishte district in Sofia. The Koren Foundation, for its part, has been in existence for about 9 years, and it was established due to my desire for sustainable development in Bulgaria. Both foundations focus on ecology and good urban practices, with the Oborishte Foundation focusing only on the Oborishte district and dealing with improving the quality of life, organizing exhibitions, cleaning, a library for shared reading and other such initiatives. The Koren Foundation is more focused on sustainable development, ecology and agriculture. The team at the foundation consists of a total of 7 people, myself included. Our team wanted to create a demonstration village with different approaches to urban agriculture, combined with different types of construction. In the end, however, we did not have enough financial resources. We found a nice place, we negotiated with the mayor of the village of Pozharevo, she was very committed to her community and to environmental causes, we negotiated to rent a fairly large place. The idea was to build buildings on this site according to an American Earthship system by an American architect. In this system, buildings are created from recycled materials, rainwater is collected from roofs and then used for irrigation, passive ventilation is created for heating and cooling, buildings are divided into two parts - a comfort zone where people live and a greenhouse that serves for thermal insulation. We wanted to make the buildings look like traditional Bulgarian buildings, we would use stone, wood and other traditional materials for us. We wanted to apply different approaches to agriculture - poly-agriculture with different crops, we wanted to apply the technology of food forest, which is a forest with many different crops and has its own ecosystem, which is self-sustaining, it is a very sustainable model unlike monocultures. which you have a crop that depletes the soil, is very susceptible to disease, that is, it must be sprayed with chemicals that pollute the soil a lot, etc. Unfortunately, we were unable to develop this project. The team then consisted of 7 people, 5 of them left, we stayed two, three new people came and the foundation focuses on maintaining the online platform we created for ecovillages.

IN: Could you tell me about the online platform of ecovillages?

BE: Our team decided to build an online platform of ecovillages and sustainable practices in Bulgaria, where each representative of such a settlement or a person developing a sustainable project has the opportunity to create a profile including detailed information about where he is, what he offers, whether he is looking for volunteers, what mission follows, can create a project with volunteers and give them the opportunity to sign up for participation, to enroll as a volunteer for a project, to publish events in different categories and to publish their own blog articles with a small photo gallery. The website is called ekoselishta.bg and allows users to sign up for one of the following activities - aquaponics, architecture, herbalism, biodynamic agriculture, carpentry, animal husbandry, agriculture, art, permaculture, practical courses, beekeeping, rural tourism, construction and technology. The website is not advertised, but it is popular with people interested in environmental practices. Sometimes people in the platform is very active, sometimes not, but we do not advertise it, we rely on people to be interested in it. The people who create their profiles are often people living in the countryside, growing organic products, looking for volunteers to help.

IN: Could you tell me about the Urban Experimentarium initiative?

BE: Two years ago, two new members joined the Foundation, and one of them became chairman of the Foundation. They created the Urban Experimental initiative in 2018, which aims to create a system for shared composting and growing edible plants in urban environments. Composting is a natural biological process that breaks down biowaste, that is, food breaks down into the soil and eventually produces a humus-like material called compost. The idea is to develop composting, and people can develop it in their homes and

yards. Lectures on the topic of composting are organized periodically. Composting is also promoted online.

IN: Could you tell me how the Root Foundation works with the state?

BE: The state authorities usually advertise how they help urban agriculture, how they invest in creating a map of potential city gardens in Sofia, but in fact I don't think they do much. We have sent letters to Sofia Municipality requesting the fulfillment of specific commitments. Sofia Municipality has created an initiative - "Vision for Sofia" to create a shared and long-term strategy for the development of the capital and suburban areas until 2050. The project has the ambition to analyze the current state of Sofia and propose concrete steps, measures and goals for future sustainable city development. This project also includes the idea of urban agriculture, which entered the project at our suggestion with the help of Sofiaproekt, which is a municipal enterprise engaged in the discovery of suitable land for shared urban gardens. However, these texts lack deadlines and boundaries, which means that the texts are not serious but desirable. For me, this is a PR document. The municipality is currently not interested in urban agriculture, and without it it is very difficult to develop urban gardens, because the land we can use is usually land sought for construction. We are looking for terrains close to public transport, to have groundwater, not to be shaded, to have no vegetation on them and many of the municipal terrains correspond to these terrains, but the municipality does not provide them. Rents for existing city gardens are also very high. The municipality must be an active partner because it holds the main terrains. Private plots are difficult to rent.

IN: Could you tell me if you have worked with large supermarkets or corporations in any way?

BE: The Metro chain of stores supported the urban agriculture initiative and the reason for this is the so-called greenwashing, ie when a company or organization spends time and money to market themselves as environmentally friendly, it is their social responsibility to the local community. Metro supported the initiative financially, and the Monsieur Bricolage chain - with materials. This is good PR for them.

IN: Could you tell me about the Urban Agriculture Development Initiative in which you participate?

BE: I am part of the Initiative for Development of Urban Agriculture, in which several different organizations participate - Gorichka, EcoCommunity, Garden for Friendship and other (..) many organizations with which we have a common interest - urban agriculture. About three years ago we got together, set goals, started looking for land and managed to create a garden. The first garden in Sofia is Za Druzhba Garden and it started working in 2013. The terrain is quite large, the government is democratic. The other famous large garden is located in Vitosha district, Studentski district. In order to have a successful urban garden (.), A successful urban agriculture community is very important. For me, this is also one of the main motivations to work in urban agriculture - it is precisely that it creates communities, teaches people to work in a team, to work in a democratic way, to be responsible for the common. For me, urban agriculture is a very good teacher for urban society. And in Bulgaria there is a great lack of civic self-awareness. People do not have such thinking and the state and the municipalities have to take care of it, but the people also have to start thinking in this direction, because we are still part of the state. Urban agriculture, in addition to giving you a break and being anti-stress, is also very useful for biodiversity, and it is good that the people working in these gardens know what they are eating. Urban agriculture also teaches young people where food comes from, how it is grown (..) and in my observations young children have a great interest in it. It also creates a community, and most of the people who participate in such initiatives see them not just as urban agriculture, but as the key to creating a community. The newest large garden is located in the Obelya district and has been operating since 2021. It is located on a private plot.

IN: How is urban agriculture promoted?

BE: Through events - for example, last year we held an event in Borisova Garden in Sofia. It can also be promoted online. However, the main goal of the foundation at the moment is for the Municipality to be more active in urban agriculture, because there is interest in it, but if the Municipality is not active, it will be difficult to develop. There are many people in Bulgaria, returning from abroad, who want to engage in urban agriculture. In general, people have an interest in this.