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# Alternative Food Networks in Kraków, Poland

GEO 511 Master's Thesis

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Investigating the development of Alternative Food Networks  
in the context of post-transformation processes in Kraków, Poland



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## **Abstract**

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This master's thesis explores the emergence and impact of alternative food networks in the region of Kraków. More specifically, this thesis explores these networks within the context of post-transformation processes in Poland. Through qualitative research methods including grounded theory and ethnographic approaches, this thesis examines seven distinct alternative food networks, and reveals their diverse short-food supply chains, institutional associations, and motivations. The findings highlight that alternative food networks enable alternative livelihoods, foster community connections, and promote civic values. While facing challenges, such as building and maintaining community engagement, alternative food networks offer opportunities for participants to reconnect with their rural heritage, and for consumers to access high-quality, locally produced food. This study adds to the investigation of sustainable practices from a Central Eastern European perspective.

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## Abbreviations

AFNs	Alternative Food Networks
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSA	Community-supported agriculture
SFSC	Short-food supply chain
ZZM	Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej (Urban Greenery Management in Kraków)

# 1 Introduction

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The current industrial food system is in crisis. This crisis is described by scholar as the cause of profound and enduring effects on animals, the environment, and humans (Forsell & Lankoski, 2015; Gori & Castellini, 2023; Ritchie et al., 2022). This issue forms the basis of the present master's thesis. The industrial agriculture is characterized by mass production, exploitation of human and environmental resources and is contributing immensely to greenhouse gas emissions. The massive use of pesticides and degradation of soil is threatening human and environmental health (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung et al., 2015; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019; Ritchie et al., 2022). From a socio-economic perspective, the industrial and globalised food system accelerates inequalities in food availability and is overlooking peasant farmers (Van Der Ploeg, 2020). At the same time, the increased amount of processed and fast food disconnects people from food production (Brinkley, 2017). Against this backdrop, individuals and communities around the world are looking for sustainable alternatives (Goodman et al., 2012; Van Der Ploeg, 2020; Van Der Ploeg & Renting, 2000). The development of sustainable alternatives has been, among others, addressed with the concept of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) over the last three decades. The goal of this thesis is to investigate the development of these alternatives in the region of Kraków.

"It is a cold afternoon in November and the market is almost empty. The few sellers which are still there are packing up their goods. I'm looking for cranberry jam, a typical polish jam for which I once again forgot the word for. I cannot find the jam but end up buying a sirop from a farmer instead. We start chatting about his farm. He shares that his wife's family owned a farm, and as their own family grew bigger, they relocated from Kraków to the countryside. That is how he became a farmer twenty years ago. Their farm is about four hectares where they grow vegetables and fruits and process jams, and pickles. The products are sold at the market in his old neighbourhood in Kraków, but only during the season from June until November. Even though he produces organically, he does not bother getting a certification. It's too much bureaucracy and not enough money." (Fieldnotes from an informal interview with a farmer at a farmer's market in Kraków).

The extract recounts an interview with a farmer during the field research conducted as part of this thesis. He embodies both traditional farming, seen in his presence at the farmer's market, and a modern approach as a first-generation farmer. Consequently, he is creating alternatives to the current globalized food systems. This encounter illustrates a growing movement that is challenging conventional practices of food production and consumption.



Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) is an umbrella term which describes practices of food production and distribution, and economies. AFNs provide an alternative to the common global food system (Forsell & Lankoski, 2015). Renting et al. (2003) were some of the first to introduce the concept of AFNs as “alternatives to the more standardised industrial mode of food supply.” A decade later, Goodman et al. (2012) stated that AFNs have reached the mainstream and are being more commercialised which threatens their alternative status. Simultaneously, research on AFNs got more abundant and inclusive, moving from a Western focus to including, among others, Central Eastern European (CEE) perspectives. According to the Polish scholars Śpiewak & Goszczyński (2023, p. 6), AFNs describes “the collective actions of various forms that either complement or stand in opposition to the industrial food system.” Research in the Eastern European scope has shown that many “traditional ‘alternative’ food chains have existed in many CEE countries long before the term was proposed”, e.g. allotment gardens or farmer’s markets (Goszczyński et al., 2019, p. 2). Their potential for sustainability has been overlooked, while the focus has been on the West as a pioneer in sustainability issues. This pioneering role is, among others, due to projects such as evolving community gardens or community-supported agriculture (Jehlička, 2021; Poças Ribeiro et al., 2021). Such framing makes it easier to dismiss newly established AFNs in CEE countries as a mere imitation of Western countries. However, it is crucial to explore AFNs in CEE countries, and to acknowledge the unique background in such AFNs are developing. This enables interpretation and recognition of AFNs beyond the Western framework of knowledge production.

The spatial focus of this study is on the city and the surrounding region of Kraków in Poland. The decision to concentrate on this research location is based on practical and academic considerations. My initial motivation was to investigate the development of sustainability in Poland. During the process of finding a master’s thesis project, I established contact with my co-supervisor at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. This connection enabled direct contact with local expertise and led to the decision to conduct the field research in this area. Therefore, the research generally focuses on the city of Kraków but extends to the broader regional scope. This allows to interpret the findings within the specific context of the surrounding rural areas.

Poland is a country which has undergone profound socio-economic changes in the last century. After the demise of the Polish People’s Republic in 1989, the nation entered a transformation process which concluded in joining the European Union in 2004. During this period, the form of government changed from centrally planned socialism to capitalist democracy. Poland took the necessary economic measures to ultimately join the EU. In the literature, this phase is referred to as transformation (Żmija & Żmija, 2014). During this transformation, the food system changed from local and traditional to globalized and contemporary approach (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019). Global corporations have found their way into the Polish food industry. However, there is also a present

countermovement characterized by a revitalization of traditional and modern initiatives. These are studied since around 2015 by Polish scholars among others with the concept of AFNs. Their development is shaped by post-transformation processes (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015; Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011). These refer to the current social and economic changes happening in the nation for example the creation of a particular social enclave in certain AFNs. Thus, this master's thesis examines how these AFNs are taking shape amid post-transformation processes in the Kraków region of Poland. It aims to explore the experiences and daily lives of people engaged in AFNs and place them in the broader context of socio-economic development of Poland. The following research questions are guiding the research:

**Main research question and sub questions:**

How is the development of alternative food networks tied to post-transformation processes in the region of Kraków, Poland, and what are the implications on the daily life of producers?

1. What forms of alternative food networks exist in the region of Kraków?
2. Who are the people producing in alternative food networks and what motivates them?
3. What opportunities and challenges do producers face in alternative food networks?

The main research question points to the complexity of the development of AFNs in the specific context of post-transformation in Poland. In this context, producers are people who are actively involved in the creation of AFNs e.g. farmers, gardeners, organisers, and others. Additionally, it implies that the producers are affected by transformation and post-transformation processes in their everyday life as seen in the literature (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015; Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011; Goszczyński & Śpiewak, 2022). The research questions permit to follow the daily life of e.g. family farmers, community garden owners or initiators of farmer's markets to understand their motives and perspective on AFNs. The sub-questions work as guiding questions throughout the research project. Through a methodology influenced by grounded theory and ethnographic approaches, this research explored AFNs in Kraków during four months of field research between June and October 2023. The primary methods were interviews and participant observation, including volunteering on an urban farm. The master's thesis is structured as follows.

**Chapter two** provides a literature review describing the current research landscape on AFNs. It explores the concept of AFNs, moving from a global to a local perspective, with a particular attention to the findings of Polish scholars engaged in AFN research.

**Chapter three** establishes the research context and provides an overview of the research site, Kraków, Poland. It further examines relevant historical development in the Polish food

production, such as peasant farming in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the government under socialist influence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the transformation processes after 1989 until the accession to the European Union in 2004 and current post-transformation processes.

**Chapter four** outlines the research design and the methodological approaches. It gives further insight into the research stay and discusses my positionality, limitations, and ethical considerations.

**Chapter five** offers a comprehensive look at the AFNs present in the Kraków region. It presents key findings from the fieldwork, as well as opportunities and challenges they are facing.

**Chapter six** provides insight into the perspective of the producers diving into their connection to rurality and their motivation.

**Chapter seven** connects the findings with the literature on AFNs while answering the research questions and discusses limitations. It explores the role of AFNs in the region of Kraków, highlighting their ability to create value-laden food and thereby enabling to reconnect with peasant heritage.

**Chapter eight** summarizes the research conducted as part for this thesis and provides an outlook for future research investigating AFNs in the context of post-transformation processes.

In the **Appendix** insights into the interview guide and the concept maps of the analysis can be found.

## 2 Literature review

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Research on AFNs addresses various aspects of food systems, including production, distribution, consumption (Jarosz, 2008) and economic dynamics (Rosol, 2018). They are studied by several disciplines such as rural sociology, economic geography, anthropology, and environmental studies. In theoretical as well as empirical research, AFN functions as an umbrella term encompassing a variety of non-economic and economic initiatives (Gori & Castellini, 2023; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019). Initiatives in this research refer to both non-economic and economic AFNs as some scholars use the term initiatives to describe non-economic projects by the term alternative food initiatives (Rosol, 2018). There is no common definition on the concept due to the variety of initiatives which are investigated (Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019). While it may be easier to list specific examples of initiatives which are studied, the strength of concept lies in its flexibility allowing to explore how different initiatives challenge and potentially reshape the current food system. The chapter first presents a general definition of AFNs which is used in this research. Afterwards the emergence of AFN, main characteristics, and insight into the critical discourse is provided. Followed by an overview of research in the Central and Eastern European Context (CEE) and how the concept is used in this research.

### 2.1. AFNs in short

This section summarises my use of the concept of AFNs in this thesis. I consider the main characteristic of AFNs to have a shorter or direct food chain between producers and consumers, e.g. farmer's markets. The production and processing of food can involve alternative methods, e.g. organic farming. In addition, AFNs involve a social network that may be limited to the family or extend beyond. The network may also include alternative forms of governance, such as food cooperatives (Goodman et al., 2012; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019; Misleh, 2022). Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of AFNs based on Forssell & Lankoski (2015). The participants unconventional values & goals are described as background characteristics, in this sense unconventional is used as opposed to the conventional industrial food system. Moreover, while strong relationships are described as outcome characteristics, this thesis explores them beyond.

**Table 1:** Key characteristics of AFNs based on Forssell et Lankoski (2015), own representation.

	Characteristics	Implications	Examples of AFN
Background characteristic	Participants non-conventional values & goals	Motivation and commitment to participate in an AFN	
Core characteristic	Increased requirements for products & production	Natural foods, organic production, small-scale, artisanal, non-industrial, territorially embedded	Organic, permaculture production
	Reduced distance between producers & consumers	Lower physical distance (reduces emissions), value chain distance (less intermediaries), & informational distance	Short-food supply chain: community gardens, urban farms, farmer's market
	New forms of market governance	Redistribution of power, sharing of risk and resources	Community-supported agriculture, food cooperatives
Outcome characteristic	Strong relationships	Social embeddedness, trust	

## 2.2. The emergence of AFN: A quality turn

By highlighting the conditions under which the AFNs and the subsequent concept emerged, it becomes possible to understand both what they are against and what they aim to achieve. Research on alternatives emerged first in North America and Western Europe around the turn of the century. In the US, counter-culture movements of the late 1960s and 1970s inspired the creation of local and occasionally organic food networks characterised by self-governance. Later, they were “conventionalised by scientific and industry bodies” leading to the commercialisation e.g. organic food labels (Edwards, 2016, p. 6), thereby parting from the original demands for social justice and sustainability in the food system. In Western Europe, AFNs were investigated as part of a paradigm shift in rural development which evolved out of multiple factors.

Several food scares with extensive media coverage in the late 1990s sparked critique of the lack of transparency in the food chain. This was accompanied by an increase of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participating in critical dialogue on issues related to food safety and environmental issues in the industrial agriculture. People demanded transparency and improved quality

of food products (Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011). In the words of Goodman, (2004), this is resulting in “turn to quality”. The term quality food takes thereby different notions such as tasteful, local, ethical, and environmentally friendly, healthy, hygienically, GMO-free, and more (Rosol, 2018). Lastly, it should not be overlooked that increasing affluence in the first place has given consumers the ability to make more sophisticated demands (Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011). These events go in hand with the introduction of agricultural reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by the European Union (Edwards, 2016; Goodman, 2004). Its ongoing focus on multifunctional farming aims to create incentives for farmers who deliver public goods and services and go therefore beyond food production. Examples are traditional farming which preserves the landscape and cultural heritage, agritourism which promotes rural development or organic farming which maintain ecosystems services. It also includes educative and community aspects (Sroka et al., 2019; van der Ploeg et al., 2009). These funds serve as an opportunity for farmers to (re-) incorporate alternative modes in their production or distribution scheme (Goodman et al., 2012; Goszczyński & Wróblewski, 2020; Misleh, 2022). These factors have contributed to the development of AFNs in the late 1990s. These dynamics have been studied among others under the notion of alternative agro-food networks (Goodman, 2004) and geographies of food (Whatmore & Thorne, 1997) pathing the way to the concept of AFN.

### **2.3. First phase of research: Social embeddedness as an opportunity**

Research on AFNs can be distinguished in two phases, the first one explores the role of AFNs as a mechanism to promote rural and regional development in Western Europe (Goodman, 2004; Marsden, 2004). Renting et al. (2003), pioneers in this field, describe short-food supply chains (SFSCs) as an AFN which involves organic farming, quality production and direct selling. They distinguish between three types of AFNs (Table 2), first of which is *face-to-face* interaction where there is an immediate between consumer and producer. The second type are *relations of proximity*, where there is at least one intermediary between consumer and producer, but the spatial and cultural closeness remains. And the last type are *extended relations*, whereby the product may overcome big distances but still is part of a SFSC, for example certification labels.

Renting et al. (2003, p. 400) state that “it is not the distance over which a product is transported that is critical, but the fact that it is embedded with value-laden information”. The shortening of the food chain should bring transparency on the origin and quality properties of the produces and according strengthen the relationship between consumer and producer (Forssell & Lankoski, 2015).

**Table 2:** Types of AFNs based on Renting et al., (2003), own representation.

Type of AFNs (Renting et al., 2003)	Examples
Face-to-face interaction	Farmer's markets, box scheme, farm shops
relations of proximity (proximate)	Consumer cooperatives, green grocers
extended relations (extended)	Certified labels

On one hand, this is empowering the farmers because they can regain respectively add value to their produce. On the other hand, the consumers have access to local and high-quality food (Misleh, 2022; Renting et al., 2003). This mutually beneficial relationship forms trust between the producer and consumer brings them closer together. Thus, AFNs can be described by reciprocity character (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015). This mechanism creates a socially and spatially embedded product (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015; Corsi et al., 2018; Edwards, 2016; Goszczyński & Wróblewski, 2020). AFNs therefore have the ability to “respatialize and resocialize food production, distribution and consumption” (Jarosz, 2008, p. 231).

This reflects the idea that economic transactions within AFNs are not only driven by market forces but are embedded in a social-spatial context. Embeddedness<sup>i</sup> is an important framework in the studies of AFNs as it highlights the non-economic values such as trust, relationships, and new forms of governance (Bilewicz, 2017; Brinkley, 2017; Goszczyński et al., 2019), and thereby distinguishes an AFN from the conventional food system at least in the first phase of research (Goszczyński & Wróblewski, 2020).

#### 2.4. Second phase of research: A critical outlook

The second wave of research has been shaped by a critical discourse integrating neoliberal and diversity aspects resulting among others in researching AFNs in the CEE context. Thereby many underlying positive assumptions of the socio-spatially embedded AFNs are questioned.

For instance, the inherent sustainability character due to the locality of AFNs are questioned in numerous studies (Forssell & Lankoski, 2015; Kopczyńska, 2020; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019; Smith & Jehlička, 2013). Research suggests that the sustainability impact is especially high in the social aspect (e.g. learning and participation opportunities) but rather lacking in the environmental aspect (e.g. meat consumption and food waste) (Forssell & Lankoski, 2015). The dichotomy between conventional and alternative is also criticised, as in reality the boundaries are fluid and overlap (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). An example for the overlapping boundaries is when labels replace the social-embedded character of AFNs (extended relations as described above) and find their way into conventional food chains (Corsi et al., 2018). Similarly, the alterity character itself

is questioned, as AFNs can be interpreted as case of commercialisation with neoliberal features instead of a socio-spatially embedded economic exchange. From a neoliberal reading, AFNs are a market niche that add value to their product by increasing its quality. In particular, the shift of governance to the private sector is criticized (Goodman et al., 2012; Misleh, 2022; Rosol, 2018). For instance, this occurs when initiatives establish their own regulations and labelling systems, akin to organic certification (Allen & Guthman, 2006). Another example is when initiatives involve voluntary work, which is considered as a form of “labour flexibilization” (Misleh, 2022, p. 1037). This critique is based on a binary narrative of neoliberalism vs. embeddedness and alternative vs. conventional. However, the integration of a diversity aspect into research such as diverse economies of Gibson-Graham (2014) allows to overcome this binary thinking. Instead, it allows to emphasize and value the variety of alternatives created withing AFNs, e.g. citizen engagement (Misleh, 2022; Rosol, 2018). Another important distinction that scholars have questioned regards “northern” and “southern” AFNs. For example, in Germany and the Netherlands, northern AFNs arise from a focus on public health, hygiene and environmental concerns. Preference is given to commercial and modern AFNs. Whereas Southern AFNs, e.g. in Spain and France, emphasize taste and local tradition and focus on direct sales and regional products (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019; Čajka & Novotný, 2022; Goszczyński et al., 2019; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019). Regarding Polish AFNs, Bilewicz & Śpiewak (2019) argue that this division is too simplified and does not capture the complexity under which AFNs in post-socialist countries develop.

Scholars also questioned the social justice of AFNs from the perspective of both customers and producers. It cannot be assumed that an embedded AFN will automatically benefit agricultural producers and contribute to rural development (Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011). In addition, criticisms extended to the exclusiveness of some AFNs. Scholars highlight how these networks often favour white, middle-class participants. The participation in an AFN can be restricted based on racial and socio-economic factors, and people with financial and educational resources on the left to liberal range of the political spectrum tend to be privileged (Edwards, 2016; Goodman et al., 2012; Goszczyński & Śpiewak, 2022). The critical discourse on AFN stimulated further examination and discussion within the field highlighting the need to broaden up the research on AFNs (Edwards, 2016). Furthermore, criticism arose regarding the inclusion of research beyond the Western knowledge frame.

## **2.5. Research in the Central and Eastern European context: “Quiet sustainability”**

Concerning the research on AFNs in the CEE context there has been a growing group of scholars engaging with AFNs since the early 2010s (Blumberg, 2015; Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011; Smith & Jehlička, 2013). The lack of CEE perspectives can be explained by its limited number of initiatives



resembling those described in Western literature, as the Polish agri-food system are characterized by a long history of family farming and self-provisioning (Halamska, 2016). This argument is picked up by Smith & Jehlička (2013) who illustrate the phenomena of “quiet sustainability” in CEE countries. They argue that traditionally embedded modes of food systems are unintended sustainable and resilient such as self-provisioning in family and allotment gardens. Jehlička et al. (2020, p. 1218) highlight the need to investigate further on these everyday practices of sustainability as this enables to overcome the “provincialisation of western knowledges”. This implies de-centring Western perspectives and making space for diverse, local perspectives and knowledge systems from non-Western contexts.

Research in the CEE context are of diverse nature for example revolving around the critically analysis of the social embeddedness of farmer’s markets in Vilnius (Blumberg, 2015), the sustainability impact of food self-provisioning (Smith & Jehlička, 2013), the relationship between subjective well-being and AFNs (Neulinger et al., 2020), food sovereignty from a producer’s perspective in AFNs (Bilewicz 2020) and in food cooperatives (Popławska, 2021), the potential of SFSC (Solarz et al. 2023), community supported agriculture as a model for rural development (Struś et al. 2020) and on the socio-technological transition and grassroots initiatives (Skrzypczyński et al. 2021).

Goszczyński & Knieć, (2011) were pioneers in researching AFNs in Poland. They emphasise a unique post-transformation model in the development of AFNs. Characterised by low local social capital, which translates into distrust of institutions and scepticism towards innovation in rural areas. Furthermore, they emphasise the significant institutional involvement in AFNs, ranging from conceptualisation of ideas to financial aspects and hygiene regulations. Later contribution by Bilewicz & Śpiewak (2015) show that the members of Polish food cooperation can be distinguished between activist and consumer oriented. The activist-oriented members engage within a smaller grassroots context, inspired by Western ideologies wanting to consume locally and fair. Their focus lies on building a community within the networks but not necessarily outside, for instance with the producing farmers. Consumer-oriented members on the other hand are much more loosely organized and focus more on profits but its members are in turn ready to pay more. They value traditional food, which is associated with locality, however, in reality its localness is often opaque (Śpiewak & Goszczyński, 2023).

Further analysis has been done by Goszczyński et al. (2019), who argue that Polish AFNs develop in between forms of embeddedness and imitation. On one hand, embedded AFNs “are based on everyday customs, traditions and consumption/production patterns” (Goszczyński et al., 2019, p. 5), which also operate on the social network for example allotment gardens, farmer’s markets, or informal food trade. Further they describe a mixed version of AFNs which include characteristics

of both. This could be an embedded brand which includes a novel certification scheme in support of local producers. Imitated<sup>1</sup> AFNs on the other hand are inspired by Western European or US-American role models such as community-supported agriculture, urban gardening, or food cooperatives. Kopczyńska (2020) however, distinguishes Polish AFNs into novel and traditional networks whereby novel networks inspired by Western ideas are reaching more people and on the other hand traditional networks are overlooked since they attract less public attention. She suggests further studying possible ties and bridges between these forms to understand their potential sustainable impact.

Śpiewak & Goszczyński (2023) research the influence of institutions in (the creation of) AFNs and identify diverse institutional arrangements. Control is either executed formally for instance through rules of participation, or informally which include e.g. through ad-hoc rules and face-to-face interactions. Further, they distinguish between four types of organisational structures differing in their contexts and objectives and represented to varying degrees in AFNs. Firstly, Market-based associations prioritize creating a niche market for the producers shaped by the producers. Secondly, bureaucracy-based approaches evolve out of development programs and involve a top-down approach. They contrast with community-based associations who focus on community engagement and collaboration. Lastly, civic-based relationships embody grassroots initiatives that extend beyond economic interactions.

Several scholars have investigated the motivation of members to participate in AFNs in Poland. Śpiewak & Goszczyński (2023) note a range of motivations such as a desire to provide for the family, health concerns, and business opportunities as well as fear of modernity. Members perceive industrial food as synthetic and potentially harmful, which drives them to protect themselves and their families in a rapidly changing world. In contrast to consumers, producers demonstrate a clear business-oriented mindset in their involvement with AFNs. Especially for small-scale producers AFNs provide an opportunity to sustain their livelihood. Thus, participation in AFNs gives back a sense of security to its members. Fear of modernity prevails especially amongst producers who are organised in food cooperatives. In contrast, consumers of the food cooperative investigated by Bilewicz (2017, p. 15) participate to take “part in something “alternative” or “non-conventional””.

Other scholars have further scrutinised exclusion mechanisms within Polish AFNs has been highlighted among other scholars further. Bilewicz & Śpiewak (2015) highlight the specific enclave

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<sup>1</sup> The term *imitated* is replaced by *iterated* in a more recent model, see Goszczyński & Śpiewak (2022).

character in Polish AFNs which is visible in the little low engagement between the different food cooperatives, resulting in their isolation. Goszczyński & Śpiewak (2022) state that the social exclusion stems from a class division marked by the emergence of a new urban middle class and marginalization of the rural folk class. The exclusion of particularly the folk class in modern AFNs is due to spatial accessibility of AFNs, financial possibilities, as well as different cultural values. This leads to lack of inclusion of particularly the folk class in modern AFNs. In turn, individuals from lower classes participate more often in AFNs perceived as traditional. This exclusion mechanism is highlighted by Kopczyńska (2020):

“New AFNs, meanwhile, grow out of entirely different motivations and respond to entirely different problems, meaning that they are part of the lifestyles of different social groups with a distinct economic, geographical, and cultural setting. The resultant danger is that access to quality food—local, seasonal, fresh, ethical, and sustainable—is generally limited to people with high economic and cultural capital.” (Kopczyńska, 2020, p. 4)

More broadly, Bilewicz & Śpiewak (2015) underscore the specific enclave character of Polish AFNs, which is visible in the low engagement/coordination between different food cooperatives resulting in their isolation.

## **2.6. The concept of AFN in this research**

In the CEE context, AFNs are a mixture out of more recent, modern, and long-standing, traditional initiatives. They entail a specific post-transformation character, meaning that their development is shaped by the influence of the past, specifically the Soviet times, followed by a transformation phase, and nowadays post-transformation processes (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019; Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011; Goszczyński & Śpiewak, 2022). This research focuses solely on the region of Kraków and on the perspective of the producers. Here, producers serve as a term to describe people actively engaging in these networks rather than more passive consumers. Research has shown that associated characteristics such as the embeddedness and social justice have to be critically investigated and not assumed (Corsi et al., 2018; Edwards, 2016). Therefore, it is meaningful to explore how AFNs affect the daily life of producers.

The approach of this thesis investigates the existing AFNs in Kraków, prioritizing qualitative over quantitative data. Consequently, specific examples illustrating different types of AFNs are selected in this study. The characteristics in Table 1 provided by Forssell & Lankoski (2015) highlights that an essential aspect of understanding AFNs lies in studying the participants and their motivation, as this provides insight into their normative values and goals that drive these initiatives. Lastly, the outcome characteristics describe how strong relationships between producers and consumers

enable trust and social embeddedness. To ensure a realistic outlook on the impact of AFNs, next to opportunities the challenges are investigated as well in this research.

This state of art on AFNs shows that integrating a more diverse aspect and contextualizing the findings enables to better understand the underlying power dynamics and grasp characteristics. The next chapter explores relevant historical events and processes which have influenced the development of AFNs in the region of Kraków.

### 3 Context

Over the course of its history, Poland (Figure 1) has experienced many political changes with corresponding shifting national boundaries and rulers. Its impact can be observed today in the spatial pattern of the socio-economic and cultural development over the country. Particularly regarding the political polarisation between the – simplified said – economically underdeveloped eastern part in contrast to the developed western part of Poland (Matykowski & Kulczyńska, 2022). Kraków is situated in the Southern part of Poland in the province (*województwo*) of Lesser Poland (*małopolskie*) it is the first big city that connects to the mountainous Carpathian region which is characterized by its agrarian structure and touristic industry (Kubal-Czerwińska et al., 2022).



**Figure 1:** Overview of research Site, the country of Poland (left map) and insight into the region of Kraków (right map). The Carpathian Mountains are visible in the South. Further information on interview locations: Kraków, Mszana Dolna, Tymowa is provided. Own representation. Sources from [www.geoportal.gov.pl](http://www.geoportal.gov.pl).

### **3.1. Political-historical context of Poland from the 18<sup>th</sup> century**

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Kingdom of Poland was split into a Prussian, a Russian and an Austro-Hungarian part. The voivodship of Lesser Poland used to be in the Galician Kingdom which was under the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire while the city of Kraków remained free for some time as former capital and royal court (Dixon-Gough et al., 2015). This division persists in the mindset of people until today and has been subject of statistical investigation. In the Kraków region people vote more towards liberalism in elections, albeit less than in the former Prussian territories. Additionally, there is a stronger affinity towards religious conservatism compared to the former Russian territories. This tendency is partly due to the heritage of democratic and decentralised governance during the Austrian-Hungarian rule. Which fostered a belief in democracy and religious autonomy that had been suppressed in the former Russian Empire (Grosfeld & Zhuravskaya, 2013). This historical context sets the stage for understanding the anti-institutional traditions that emerged during the Soviet rule in Poland, including Lesser Poland.

### **3.2. Forced collectivization and low social capital**

In 1918, after the end of the First World War, the three territories were reunited, and the Polish state became independent. However, only briefly before the invasion into Poland initiated the Second World War. Following this Poland got under the political and economic influence – also referred to as a satellite state – of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Whereby the communist Polish United Workers Party ruled the Polish's People Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa: PRL) from 1947 until its downfall in 1989. The socialist and centrally planned government and economy was characterized by top-down decisions making, “an extensive apparatus of oppression and chronic shortages of all goods” (Perdał, 2022, p. 77). Post-war, the government prioritized rebuilding the economy by expanding heavy industry, which often led to environmental exploitation. Their aim was to create a total egalitarian state on an economic, social, and political level which included heavy indoctrination. For example, environmental concerns were associated with the narrative of rotten capitalism in Western Europe and Northern America (Chodkowska-Miszczuk et al., 2023).

The collectivization efforts, including the establishment of state agricultural farms (Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne = PGR), were not as extensive in Poland compared to other Soviet-influenced countries. After food shortages and social unrest, private agriculture was officially recognized as the Polish road to socialism. The few thousand established PGRs were gradually privatized. Thus, the rural society, with its unique peasant culture, managed to resist the communist collective ideology (Halamska, 2016; Sroka, 2015). However, the forced collectivization and the government as the problem-solving institution has left a lasting mark on Polish society. Rosner & Stanny (2017,

p. 6) describe “a lack of faith in the effectiveness of self-organisation in local communities for solving their problems”. To put it in other words there is limited social support for innovative or risky activities especially in rural areas. The participants within these networks are largely forced to act independently. This is accompanied by a low level of trust in public institutions (Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011; Śpiewak & Goszczyński, 2023). The social capital is characterized by deeply embedded practices which can be exemplified by informal economy, traditional practices, and strong family ties (Kopczyńska, 2020).

Ultimately, the central planned strategy did not work out, bringing “social relations and the entire economy [...] to their knees” (Perdał, 2022, p. 78). This was met with the uprising of the Polish people. In contrast to other former Soviet satellite states, Polish society was less dependent on and control by the USSR. As a result, Poland was the only country where mass protests were frequent. The independent trade union *Solidarność* became the opposition movement that was supported by almost the entire Polish population. This eventually led to the fall of the socialist regime in the spring of 1989 and ultimately to the end of the Iron Curtain in Europe (McMahon & Niparko, 2022).

### **3.3. Food self-provisioning as an “anti-institutional tradition”**

During the socialist regime the society endured constant food shortages which favoured the establishment of informal and semi-legal markets. Bachórz (2018, p. 100) describes the meaning of home-made food in the real-socialist Poland:

“[Home-made food] was a part of general division between private and public spheres, where “public” was perceived by citizens as an inefficient, alien, and threatening state, while the (extended) family became an area of both safety and bottom-up resourcefulness.”

Food self-provisioning and direct trade at the market have been essential for people's survival. They promoted a sense of safety and national identity. Additionally, farmer's markets maintained a significant presence by providing access to hard-to-reach goods, while also serving as an alternative marketplace for exchanging goods (Bieszk-Stolorz & Dmytrów, 2021). Furthermore, family allotment gardens (*Rodzinny Ogród Działkowy* = R.O.D.) became popular during the Soviet time. They were established in the late 19th century in response to food insecurity and the desire of migrating peasants to work with the soil (Bellows, 2004; Halamska, 2016). In the Soviet times they served additionally as “an outlet for subtle nationalist resistance” by preserving cultural heritages related to food and traditional crafts (Bellows, 2004, p. 259). In 1981 the independent NGO, Polish Association of Gardeners was created to manage and ensure the survival of allotment gardens which were tolerated by the Socialist government to mitigate public discontent (Bellows, 2004; Halamska, 2016). The establishment and reliance on personal networks are described as

“specific anti-institutional tradition” which were already relevant since the partition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015, p. 151). These practices still exist and are highly valued and deeply ingrained in the Polish culture. For instance, families on the countryside often supply their urban relations with food (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015). Another example is the enduring presence of the medieval farmer’s markets in Kraków such as Stary Kleparz and Nowy Kleparz (Płaziak & Szymańska, 2019).

### **3.4. The transformation: A shock-therapy**

After the collapse of the socialist-state, Poland quickly caught up with ‘the West’ in social and economic development. The transformation from a socialist centralised to a democratic capitalist state is often referred to as a shock therapy and took place between 1989 to around 2004 when Poland joined the European Union (EU) (Churski & Kaczmarek, 2022; Marcińczak et al., 2012). On one hand, the government prioritized decentralization in form of the implementation of a self-governing municipality (Chodkowska-Miszczuk et al., 2023; Dixon-Gough et al., 2015). On the other hand, deregulation translated into an increasing importance of the liberal market and a rise of entrepreneurship (Rosner & Stanny, 2017). Causing temporarily high unemployment levels as well as rising prices particularly for groceries. As a result, setting up one’s own business became an employment alternative, e.g. as a wholesaler, corner shop or greengrocer (Borowska-Stefańska et al., 2022). Therefore, in the beginning of the transformation the farmer’s market gained popularity as it filled the demand for increased commercial activities. Within a development program of wholesale markets in the early 1990s a range of wholesale markets were created throughout the entire country<sup>ii</sup> (Gołębiewski & Sobczak, 2017). Commercial tourism also began to develop, with people coming from neighbouring Western countries to profit from Poland's low prices (Płaziak & Szymańska, 2016). However, the farmer’s markets gradually they lost significance against the emerging retail trade (Bieszk-Stolorz & Dmytrów, 2021).

Despite significant measures, the economic transformation in Poland is generally viewed as successful and has surpassed other countries which have been under Soviet influence. However, the economic growth did not include the entire country with rural areas, especially those dominated by agricultural industry stagnating or declining to this day. The success of socio-economic development is closely tied to local history and culture (Goszczyński, 2021; Perdał, 2022; Rosner & Stanny, 2017; Żmija & Żmija, 2014). This becomes especially visible when comparing regions with similar pre-conditions but different developmental processes. Which is influenced by factors such as local industry, pre-socialist activities, as well as social and cultural institutions. Whereby the political power of local authorities in shaping socio-economic change become crucial (Gwodysz et al. 2020; Żmija et al. 2014). This is further elaborated by (Halamska, 2016) who underlines the



influence of political players on socio-economic change as they “choose the task and defines the criteria for receiving funds”.

### 3.5. Post-transformation and new consumption patterns

The socio-economic and political changes, which the country is undergoing these days, are referred to as post-transformation processes. Among others Śpiewak & Goszczyński (2023) argue that they are profoundly influencing the development of AFNs in Poland. The transformation concluded with the accession to the EU. The membership enabled Poland to receive financial support from the Cohesion Fund from the Cohesion Policy which grant financial aid to balance out unequal development between the regions. For the agricultural sector this meant the accession to the Common Agricultural Policy. Involving a decentralized policy practice, market-oriented production, emphasizing multifunctional farming. In turn this provided modernization opportunities for farmers who could meet stricter controls and regulations (Sroka et al., 2019; Żmija & Żmija, 2014).

The most recent decade has been shaped by increasing political tension as the right-wing party Law and Justice (pol: PIS, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) ruled the government. Their politics threatened basic human-rights including a censorship of the media, demising women’s right fuelling huge protest movements as big as during the uprising in 1989 (Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości, 2023). During the fieldwork, a new round of parliamentary elections took place with a result in favour for the opposition party and a highest turnout since 1989. This assumingly will change the political landscape again towards more liberal values (Białyżył & Sus, 2024). This shows that polish people are actively engaging in civil activism they are mobilizing people in diverse and fragmented ways (McMahon & Niparko, 2022).

In terms of the food retail market the accession paved the way for international stores to settle in Poland. Resulting in an increase of shopping centres, hypermarkets, supermarket, and discount chains (Borowska-Stefańska et al., 2022). These are the places where most consumers buy their groceries, however, the importance of corner stores respectively green grocers should not be neglected. The mass distribution of food via discount chains is a new phenomenon which appeals to most consumers as it is convenient and cost-effective (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015). Since 2008, the number of seasonal street markets in Poland has grown by 25% compared to 2000. Their overall growth is due to their modernization and the establishment of new seasonal markets. During the Covid-19 pandemic customers valued safe and local food which increased the popularity of farmer’s markets further (Bieszk-Stolorz & Dmytrów, 2021). The way of consumption is further changing in terms of a revival of peasant culture: The way a person consumes and participates in cultural events is no longer determined by “urbanity” or “rurality” but rather by education and social class (Goszczyński, 2021, p. 251).

“Today’s Poland is experiencing a renaissance of interest in transformed rural themes within the elite cultural sub-worlds. [...] a turn towards processed folk culture in search of a national or regional identity that allows a culture to stand out in the global market of cultures. [...] Both in the rural and urban culture of the folk class, rurality is essentially reduced to largely ceremonial rituals, mostly certain kinds of festivities, which offer a unified idyllic product that fakes “locality”. “(Goszczyński, 2021, p. 251)

The autonomous peasant culture is selectively reappearing as elements of folklore in both rural and urban areas which is a common phenomenon in CEE countries. In Poland this is due to increasing internal migration from the rural to the urban areas leading to demographic issues. While simultaneously the significance of land is changing (Zegar, 2023). These processes are characterized among others by the emergence of the middle class which is described in the following subchapter.

### **3.6. The emergence of a new social class**

During the transformation and post-transformation, a new social class emerged – the middle class. They consist of wealthy, educated professionals who developed rapidly over one generation from the peasant class (Filimonau et al., 2020). They have strong roots to rurality and peasant origins through familial ties which are described by Goszczyński & Wróblewski (2020, p. 258):

“The identity of this rather ‘hastily produced’ middle class is anchored in the imaginary of peasant life defined as simple, natural, calm, self-sufficient and filled with quality. Food is an important element that stabilizes this vision of the countryside.”

They further attributes this as part of an on-going “folk revival” which is reflected in the patriotic consumer practices of these class. Thereby regional traits, rural idyll past, and strong family bond experience a revival. In terms of food, they prioritize qualities such as freshness, taste, locality, and minimal additives. In this context, ecological and fair-trade certification as well as the produces uniqueness become less relevant (Goszczyński & Wróblewski, 2020; Smith & Jehlička, 2013; Soroka & Wojciechowska-Solis, 2019). Jehlička et al. (2020) highlight the case of self-provisioning in particular as an astonishing development, as it is still practiced by the middle class. While on one hand the focus on family and fear about scarcity of is embedded and reflected in their everyday practices. They have been influenced by globalization, characterized by increased individualization, open borders, and pervasive global mass media, leading them to explore new opportunities. Their wealth enables them to try out new flavours and trends, which means that their consumption is at the interface between global and local consumption patterns (Goszczyński & Śpiewak, 2022). In order to understand the food system in Poland, it is necessary to examine the rural context, as peasant culture is an integral part of society. However, first an insight into the city of Kraków is provided.

### 3.7. About Kraków and its sustainability efforts

Kraków is the second largest city in the country with a total population of approximately 803'000 people (GUS, 2023). Since the fall of the iron curtain, Kraków has focused on preserving and promoting its cultural and historical heritage and transforming the city into a touristic hotspot. As the first city in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) area, Kraków was declared in 2000 the European Capital of Culture and further pushing the revitalization and commercialization. However, this huge number of visitors has led to the phenomenon of “Disneyfication” and “foodification” particularly in the city centre (Porębska et al., 2021). Furthermore, the city is a research hub with two of the most important universities in the country. Additionally, after large corporations in the finance, IT, service, and research sector started outsourcing their businesses into Western Poland and the capital city Warsaw, this dynamic also reached Kraków but is still developing (Dixon-Gough et al., 2015; Romańczyk, 2018).

During the socialist time, Kraków was considered a conservative and independent city with a cohesive structure as there was no physical destruction of the city during the second world war. It was often regarded as the heart of Poland's intellectual community, didn't quite fit into the plans for social transformation. Thus, the socialist authorities promoted the immigration of workers from eastern Poland to mix up the social balance and create a “loyal, socialist city”<sup>iii</sup> (Dixon-Gough et al., 2015, p. 40; Romańczyk, 2018). Environmental activism has also played an interesting role in Kraków. On one hand, it served as the location for the establishment of the first non-governmental and non-profit oriented Polish ecological club in 1980<sup>iv</sup> (Green Brigades, 1995). On the other hand, it used to be one of the cities with the worst air pollution in winter times with only recent successful efforts to diminish the pollution<sup>v</sup> (Kaczmarczyk & Sowizdżał, 2024). The region of Kraków is characterised as a place where change is happening rather slowly as it observes and adapts measure at a later stage (Gurgul, 2015; Krzywak, 2020). This can be exemplified with lack of coherent urban planning strategies amidst the “chaotic growth” in the suburban areas while gentrification progresses in the city centre<sup>vi</sup> (Romańczyk, 2018, p. 144). Recent efforts in regard to environmental challenges has been the creation of the urban greenery management (Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej: ZZM) in 2015. They are responsible for all the green spaces and other sustainable projects in the city. ZZM actively promotes sustainable initiatives on educational, recreational, and community levels. This includes providing land and financial support for community garden projects (ZZM, 2020).

### 3.8. Family farming and peasant culture in the province of Lesser Poland

The region of Kraków has a rich history of traditional, low-intensity family farming shaped by its mountainous landscape which provided little option for heavy industry (Figure 2.1) (Sroka, 2015). This agricultural tradition extends across the South-Eastern part of Poland, particularly in areas formerly under the influence of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire (Churski & Kaczmarek, 2022; Rosner & Stanny, 2017). In general, the density of agricultural land and people employed in the province of Lesser Poland are declining. The landscape is characterized by highly fragmented and mosaic structures (Figure 2) which has its roots in the Galician inheritance traditions<sup>vii</sup> (Perdał, 2022). In the province of Lesser Poland, farms have an average of 4.4 hectares agricultural land which makes them on average the smallest farms in the entire country, with a national average of 11.3 hectares<sup>viii</sup> (ARiMR, 2022).

Stanny et al. (2021) study the socio-economic development of rural areas across Poland investigating factors such as spatial accessibility, deagrarianisation of the local economy, labour market, social activity and living conditions which are often more progressed in urban areas. The rural area around Kraków is characterized by high-density, large villages with access to a well-connected urban network. Consequently, many residents commute daily and are no longer reliant on farming for their livelihoods. Instead, small-scale farms become a supplementary source of income e.g. agri-tourism or are part of the self-provisioning method (Goszczyński, 2021; Sroka & Paluch, 2014). It's common for farmers to have dual professions since the transformation which is referred to as "rolnik-dwuzawodowiec" (Halamska, 2016; Puślecki, 2015). Closer to the city of Kraków, the communes called *gminas* are even further urbanized and lost almost entirely their former agricultural characteristics. However, there also communes where small-scale agriculture still predominates as the main source of income, but modernization efforts are low. It is important to note that these communes are better developed in terms of spatial accessibility and have fewer demographic problems as similar communes in the eastern part of Poland (Stanny et al., 2021).

The still existing farms thus remain small-scaled and traditional (Figure 2b, c) They receive financial support from the state and EU funds which enables farmers to diversify their livelihood scheme (Sroka, 2015). Halamska, (2016) refers to them as "quasi-peasant farms", they have historically resisted collectivization in socialist times and modernization efforts during the transformation. These "quasi-peasant farms" are evolving alongside larger, modernized farms which rely heavily on the market and emerged post-1989 in Poland. However, in the case of the Voivodeship Lesser Poland only few large-scale farms exist while they develop numerous in the Northern and Western Part of Poland (Stanny et al., 2021).



**Figure 2:** Agriculture in Southern Poland. **2a:** Orthophotography of the highly fragmented agricultural landscape nearby Polana Wielka. Traditionally the villages are constructed along one main road with each settlement containing agricultural land strips behind their house (Source: [www.geoportal.gov.pl](http://www.geoportal.gov.pl)) **2b:** Family farm nearby Rzeszów, farmers working on a typical long-shaped field, harvesting potatoes with traditional method and tools. (Source: A. Grochala, 2023). **2c:** Insight into traditional wooden house style in rural areas (Source: own picture, 2023).

### 3.9. The development of organic farming in Lesser Poland

Scholars highlight the potential of these small-scale farms for sustainable development (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015; Sroka et al., 2023; Zegar, 2023; Żmija et al., 2019). This makes studying the development of certified organic agriculture in Lesser Poland interesting. In 2015, there were 1070 certified organic farms in the region, constituting 2% of its total agricultural land. However, by 2022, only half of these farms and the corresponding agricultural land remained (GUS, 2023) The reduction in certified organic farms and land in Lesser Poland stands in stark contrast to the nationwide trend, where organic farming has seen a general growth since 2000s. Despite a nationwide decline in-between the years 2013 and 2018 (IJHARS, 2023). The decrease can be credited to stricter conditions for obtaining subsidies and a lack of financial profit which made farmers resign from organic farming. In Lesser Poland the resignation from certified organic farm is especially big due to low production potential on the small-scaled farms and unfortunate environmental conditions such as poor soil quality (Nachtman, 2021). Certified organic production most often focuses on environmental protection, and still has little influence on the market (Śpiewak, 2016). On the other hand, non-certified organic production has a deep-rooted history as it was traditionally practiced, particularly during socialist times when access to agricultural inputs was scarce. As a result, it was inherently organic, without the need for formal certification (Biczkowski et al., 2023).

The insight into organic agriculture sheds light on the challenges of small-scale farming in the region of Kraków. Over the past century, the value of farming has declined, making it increasingly difficult to sustain a livelihood only from agricultural activities (Zegar, 2023). An analysis of successful farms near urban areas emphasizes the importance of farmer creativity, the drive to produce high-quality goods, and the cultivation of personal relationships with customers (Sroka et al., 2023). This reflects a change of consumer demand. However, most small-scale farmers belong primarily to a generation that is retiring, and the question of succession often remains unclear (Sroka et al., 2019). This situation presents opportunities for a new wave of farmers or but also reinforces the ongoing trend of deagrarianisation in the region.

## 4 Methodology

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This master's thesis explored the development of AFNs in the region of Kraków with a particular focus on the experience of people producing these networks. The aim of the fieldwork was to get insight into these people's motivation as well as perceived opportunities, and challenges. This was done through a qualitative research design based on grounded theory and ethnography. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participants observations were the main approaches to highlight the voice of the producers and their everyday life. The fieldwork was realised as part of a research stay at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. In the upcoming sub-chapters, I first inform about the research design and my positionality in the field. This is followed by insights on the research stay at the Jagiellonian University and the access into the field. Subsequently, the data collection is described which is divided into three parts: Interviews, participant observations and volunteering. Finally, an overview of the data analysis is provided.

### 4.1. Research design

Grounded theory has a long tradition of research in the social disciplines and has evolved since its introduction by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In its essence, empirical data is iteratively and systematically collected while simultaneously coded and put into categories until core categories emerge. Over time, through constant comparison, key elements in the dataset can be identified. These serve as the basis to interpret the underlying social process of the researched phenomena – in this case the development of AFN in the region of Kraków (FitzGerald & Mills, 2022; Kenny & Fourie, 2015; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). The approach outlined by Bryant & Charmaz (2007) recognizes reality as a social construct and emphasizes the researchers influence and prior assumptions on the dataset. Further, data collection is understood as a collaborative act between participants and researchers. Using grounded theory for this research was suitable due to its dynamic nature. It allowed the adaption of the research focus to the emergent data and the application of different methods.

As a complementary methodology, ethnographic approaches were integrated into the field research to add a more contextual understanding compared to solely relying on the perspectives of grounded theory (Fathi Najafi et al., 2016; FitzGerald & Mills, 2022). In an ethnography, the researcher reconstructs and interprets the everyday life and reality of the participants in a

particular context and time. It puts emphasis on the people, their internal beliefs, practices, behaviours, and values – essentially their culture (FitzGerald & Mills, 2022; Herbert, 2000). Overall, including this approach enabled getting a more immersive and in-depth research.

## 4.2. Positionality

It is essential to acknowledge that fieldwork is influenced by the researcher's subjective experience and preconceived perspectives. This is fundamental for ethnography research as well as in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Herbert, 2000; Kenny & Fourie, 2015; Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020). According to Charmaz, the positionality of a researcher can be described as “all those positions that influence his or her standpoints, such as worldview, social class, privilege, race, age, health, and relationship to the research participants in the research process” (2021, p. 180).

My positionality in this thesis can be characterized as a researcher with an outsider perspective and significant connections and interest in the processes of Polish alternative food systems. Growing up in Switzerland and having Polish roots influence the research in multiple ways. Being a white, abled-bodied Swiss allowed me to enter and exit the field easily and meant that I was perceived as someone with a better socio-economic status. Having relatives in Poland who I visit regularly gave me an idea of the Polish culture and some basic language skills. This background facilitated an easier connection between the research participants and me. Further, this research is influenced by my interest in exploring my Polish roots and my positive perception of the country, which might bias the research towards a focus on positive aspects. However, never having lived in Poland and neither having any prior ties to Kraków, limited my knowledge on the everyday life of Poland. This was a challenge on site, particularly regarding the cultural subtext and general knowledge. I navigated this through exchanges with my local supervisor and the extended duration of my research stay. Further, I had an interest in challenging the powerful Western – Eastern Europe narrative which is existing in Switzerland. In return, I had to be aware that I could not ignore existing differences.

It is also worth mentioning that I grew up on an organic farm. Through that, I have a certain perception and knowledge of farming which I challenged e.g. when considering small-scale farming as the norm in Southern Poland or the perception of organic production. Growing up on a farm made me value the effort which goes into food production, respect the work of farmers, and appreciate people who are engaging in sustainable ways of living. Having worked on a family farm made me become an ally when talking with research participants who had a similar background.

Studying geography and being interested in questions on environmental and social justice issues has influenced my positionality in the field. On one hand, by making me sympathize with activists



while also fostering to broaden my perception of activism and alterity. Further, being able as a student to live abroad is a privilege which I tried to be aware of when talking about my research participants for instance about their upbringing. Additionally, being a student distanced myself from other professions such as self-employed research participants.

In summary, having polish roots and sharing common interests with the research participants regarding the topic of sustainability and farming characterized my position as an insider. My outsider role can be attributed to my lack of knowledge of polish culture including language as well as limited insights into the experiences of being a self-employed business owner. Prior to the field work, I consulted *the Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork for Researchers in Human Geography* provided by the Department of Geography at UZH. Ultimately, I believe I achieved a good balance between my position as an insider and outsider.

### **4.3. Research stay and field access**

In the frame of this master's thesis, a research stay in Kraków at the Jagiellonian University at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management was required. Dr Magdalena Kubal-Czerwińska supervised in-situ, whereas Dr Xavier Balaguer Rasillo was supervising from the University of Zurich. The field research itself was split into two phases. The first one in the summer from mid of June until end of August 2023. After a three-week break, the second phase from mid of September until end of October 2023 continued. At that point, data began to saturate and thus the decision was made together with both supervisors to end the field research after a total of four months in October 2023. This extended stay allowed a culturally immersive and in-depth research. With increasing time, I experienced a sense of place, improved my language skills, and reflected upon cultural differences.

In the context of this research, various strategies were considered to gain insights and access to the field. They included conversations with both personal contacts and strangers, for instance initiated at the farmer's market. These interactions frequently resulted in new suggestions, informal interviews, and connections for formal interviews. Directness and a friendly approach proved effective in initiating discussions. However, establishing interview appointments relied on consistency and luck, as some potential participants did not respond further. Additionally, my local supervisor facilitated further contact with interview partners. Apart from that, active participation in Facebook groups related to gardening and asking for interview partners was a successful strategy. Messages from interested people came along suggesting about initiatives and people to reach out to, some also extended invitations for interviews. Further, reaching out to initiatives directly such as community gardens via messenger was helpful. Engaging with people through social media proved to be successful, particularly because messenger is widely utilized in Poland

and carries a similar formality as reaching out via mail. Additionally, the Jagiellonian University is a research hub on Polish transformation processes and AFNs in Poland, which proved to be a great opportunity to establish contact with local scholars for further discussions.

#### **4.4. Interviews**

The base of the field research consists in fourteen semi-structured and in-depth interviews which were conducted between end of July and end of October 2023 (Table 3: No. 1-14). They are referred to as formal interviews (compared to informal) because they were planned, recorded, and covered the whole interview guide. Conducting interviews enabled an understanding of a people involved in AFN and their personal experience to get access to less obvious information (Busetto et al., 2020). The conversations had a casual tone and were set at the location of the AFN which was investigated. Twelve of them were in the city of Kraków and two in its region (Figure 1). Half of the interviews were conducted in English. The other half in Polish with the help of a paid translator or with my supervisor as a co-interviewee and translator. Most interviews lasted between 50-70mins allowing an in-depth conversation to unfold. Before or afterwards, the interview participants often showed me around the location and answered additional questions. With their permission, I took pictures. After the interview, the findings were documented in a field booklet, including an interview transcript and notes on how the contact was established, the interview setting as well as further relevant observations.

Furthermore, informal, non-recorded interviews were conducted during the before mentioned observation activities. Most of them were with farmers at the farmer's markets and small-retail salespeople and evolved out of participant observations. They took place at the observed AFN and happened always ad hoc. That is why they were shorter and did not cover the whole interview guide. Also, in-depth conversations were not always possible because of the language barrier or time constraints. This was not a major problem as their purpose was to confirm or collect additional data on specific areas of interest. Originally those conversations were not considered as an interview and because of that they were included in the field notes as part of participant observation instead of an interview transcript. But the talks especially with farmers were just as insightful and valuable as a formal interview. The most important ones are described in Table 3 (No. 15-19).

Concerning the sampling strategy for interview participants, the objective was to talk to a diverse range of individuals actively involved in the development of AFN, so-called producers in Kraków and its surrounding region. Those involve pioneers, activist, members, and organiser of AFNs. This approach is supported by Helfferich (2009) who suggest a big variety within a narrow-defined group. The literature on Polish AFNs suggests the distinction between traditional and novel (Kopczyńska, 2020), embedded and imitated (Goszczyński et al., 2019), activist- and consumer-

oriented types of initiatives (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015). Nevertheless, I intentionally avoided focusing too heavily on these categorizations while finding interview partners. Instead, I let the contact with the research participants purposefully evolve through a mixture of professional contacts and snow-ball effect (Busetto et al., 2020). It happened naturally that most of my field data was collected in Kraków since I was living there and had more occasions to meet research participants. Outside of the city I had to rely on personal contacts. Additionally, e.g. farmers were more difficult to meet due to time constraints and lack of public transport. In the end, about half of the interview participants were somehow connected to each other through various initiatives. Whereas the other half seem to be independent from each other. I believe this is fortunate as it enables me to get insight into a larger network while still getting access to perspectives beyond this network.

**Table 3:** Overview of the formal (No 1-14) and informal (No 15-19) semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

No	date	person*	AFN	role during interview	location of AFN	location	language	length (min)
1	29.07.2023	Katarzyna	farmer's market	farmer	Targ Pietruszkowy	Kraków	English	48
2	29.07.2023	Bartosz	farmer's market	farmer	Targ Pietruszkowy	Kraków	English	15
3	01.08.2023	Jakub	small-retail sales	owner	greengrocer	Kraków	English	45
4	09.08.2023	Monika	farmer's market	organizer	Targ Pietruszkowy	Kraków	Polish	61
5	09.08.2023	Hubert	urban farm	organizer/ urban farmer	Krakowska Farma Mjeska	Kraków	English	70
6	10.08.2023	Dorota	self-provisioning: allotment garden	gardener	R.O.D. Tramwajarz	Kraków	Polish	56
7	10.08.2023	Aleksandra	small-retail sales	employee	corner store	Kraków	English	93
8	13.08.2023	Izabela	community garden	gardener	Ogród Społeczny Salwator	Kraków	English	74
9	22.08.2023	Weronika	self-provisioning: private garden	gardener	private property	Mszana Dolna	Polish	56
10	23.08.2023	Kinga	community garden	organizer/ gardener	Krakowski Ogród Społeczny Macierzanki	Kraków	English	68
11	28.08.2023	Mikołaj	self-provisioning: farm	farmer	private property	Tymowa	Polish	68
12	29.08.2023	Tomasz	self-provisioning: private garden	gardener	private property	Kraków	Polish	49
13	19.10.2023	Michał	small-retail sales	owner	organic store	Kraków	Polish	48
14	27.10.2023	Kamila	farmer's market	organizer	Stary Kleparz	Kraków	Polish	58
15	29.07.2023		farmer's market	farmer	Targ Pietruszkowy	Kraków	Polish	not recorded
16	19.08.2023		small-scale farm	farmer	private property	Raniżów	Polish, German	
17	08.10.2023		farmer's market	farmer	autumn market Boguchwała	Boguchwała	Polish	
18	27.10.2023		farmer's market	farmer	Stary Kleparz	Kraków	Polish	
19	25.11.2023		farmer's market	farmer	plac na Stawach	Kraków	Polish	

\*All names are pseudonyms

In Table 3 the interviews are described according to the type of AFN, the institution, the location, and the role respective occupation of the research participant in the AFN. However, it should be noted that there are research participants who are involved in multiple AFNs where they have different roles. For the sake of simplicity and data protection, they are only described according to the AFN which was present during the interview. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner assisted by an interview guide (Appendix A) with open-end questions as recommended by Busetto et al. (2020) and Helfferich (2009). The questions centred around areas of interest which were derived from literature study, the research questions, and first observations. The wide range of topics covered in the interview guide enabled gathering crucial contextual knowledge during the interviews. An overview of the area of interests is provided in Table 4 with the corresponding reasoning.

**Table 4:** Overview of the interview guide. Division of the interview guide into area of interest which form basis form multiple questions, additional explanation of aim and expectation regarding the area of interest. For full interview guide, refer to Appendix A.

area of interest	questions regarding	intention
description of AFN	producing in AFN size employment reach	Getting an overview and contextual data of the AFN. Who is in (paid) employment, how big is their reach. Assuring comparability with other AFN.
about the research participant	role upbringing / motivation	Understanding how the research participant defines their role in AFN, how they started in the AFN and their motivation.
perception on the AFN	opportunities challenges values	Understanding what the research participant perceives as opportunity, strength, challenge, and weakness of the AFN. Value: Getting insight into belief system and recognizing their AFN as valuable.
social context	customers social network	Getting insight into customers / participants in their AFN. Reflecting on network within and between AFN.
rural transformation	connection rural-urban rural development	Asking research participant to reflect on the connection of their AFN to rural areas. Conversation about rural development and rurality.
time scale	past- history future – succession	Reflection on developments in the AFN and future succession.

The guideline was established with an emphasis on posing questions which would encourage the interview participants to reflect on their AFN, while simultaneously recognizing together the value in their actions as proposed by Charmaz (2021). It was relevant that the interview participants sensed my sincere interest and perceived the value in their work. During the interview, the participants could speak freely and took mental notes to not interrupt their flow of speech. This

created room for additional questions whilst following the thread of the interview guide. The aim was to engage in a discussion which would cover each area of interest and giving it the appropriate amount of space needed during the interview. Regarding ethical considerations, all participants were informed about their rights to decline the obtained data at any given time and to decline any questions. Further, anonymization of their personal data is ensured. No sociodemographic data was collected. However, much of the necessary information was naturally provided during the interviews.

#### **4.5. Observations**

Participant observations are one of the primary methods in ethnography. The researcher adopts a position in between a pure observer and a complete participant depending on the situation (Herbert, 2000). This can be simplified on one hand, into participant observation whereby the researcher is actively participating in the observed setting, on the other hand, non-participant observation with a limited interference and observation from the outside by the researcher (Busetto et al., 2020).

During the first phase of the field research (June – August) observations happened primarily ad hoc and integrated into daily activities. For instance, at the farmer's market I initiated a non-participant observation where I observed the people, their behaviour, and products sold. If appropriate engaging in small talk allowed me to become an active participant of the observation. As the conversations expanded, I disclosed my research to the participants and asked for their consent, which occasionally led to informal interviews. However, this approach blurred boundaries between personal and research activities, and my limited language skills were a challenge when interacting with Polish-speaking participants. In the second phase of field research (September – October), I adopted to the constraints of the first phase by scheduling observations. I made use of already established contacts to carry out planned observations, e.g. at the food cooperative in Kraków or the autumn market in Boguchwała. This approach enriched the observations as together with my informant(s) we reflected on the situation, and they were able to translate if necessary. Observations were supplemented by photography as well as occasional voice recording to capture the atmosphere in-situ and current thoughts. The findings were then documented in the field booklet similar to the interviews. Herbert (2000) and Charmaz (2021) emphasize the influence of the subjective experience of the researcher on the interpretation of the observed situation. Therefore, I regularly reflected on my positionality and the execution of field research both in the field journal and through discussions with supervisors. This practice helped me to understand my role as a researcher better and what ethical considerations to take. In the Appendix B a summary of the most relevant locations of observations is attached. A unique and significant participant

observation happened while volunteering on an urban farm which is described in further detail in the following subchapter.

#### **4.6. Volunteering on the Krakowska Farma Mjeska**

As stated above, the data collection is a collaboration between researchers and participants. Thus, it was important for me to establish an equal relationship with the research participants. Therefore, the decision was made during the conceptualisation of this thesis to conduct voluntary work to give something back and ideally establish a mutual beneficial relation. Through the contact of my local supervisor, I learned about the urban farm where I met the responsible farmer who invited me to visit me at the farmer's market. Following my observations and interviews, I inquired about ways to return the favour. They then recommended that I volunteer at the urban farm and emphasized the ongoing need for additional help. It became evident that volunteering at the farm was the most efficient approach. The location was easily accessible, and the meetings fixed on a weekly basis. The work was straightforward requiring minimal introduction or orientation from others.

In total, I attended eight times the Wednesday's meeting between July and October 2023. I participated as a barter for about half a day either in the morning or the afternoon. The volunteering was valuable for me, it allowed me as a researcher to observe and participate in an AFN during the whole period of fieldwork. I watched the garden grow and change over the season, valued the sometimes-monotonous gardening work, and experienced the joy of harvesting produce afterwards. I got to meet people who are interested in AFNs, engage within the group dynamics, and form a more personal relationship with the research participants. As most volunteers spoke English, it was easier for me to learn more about their background and motivation, whereby I made sure that I informed them of my intentions and asked for their consent to include the conversation in the research. In conclusion volunteering at the urban farm was one of the most rewarding and insightful participant observations. I felt like a part of the community as I establish friendships with the other volunteers over the time. In turn, it also needed the most reflection on my positionality and role as a researcher. Originally, I wanted to volunteer as a gesture of gratitude, but I discovered that showing genuine interest and talking with the research participants about something they are passionate was greatly appreciated already by them.

#### **4.7. Data analysis**

The data analysis is based on the approaches described by Rädiker & Kuckartz (2020) who present a guide for analysis of grounded theory as well as for ethnographic research. First, the field data got harmonized into a field booklet which contains interview transcripts, fieldnotes from

observations, photo-documentation, and reflections from the fieldwork. The interviews were transcribed verbatim according to the suggestions by Rädiker & Kuckartz (2020, p. 19) with the help of transcription tool Whisper AI. In a following step, the transcripts of the English interviews were manually corrected. For the Polish interviews, the assistance of translators was needed, who either summarized sections or provided a literal transcription of the interview. Finding translators was challenging, but necessary to ensure the quality of the transcripts.

After having structured the data in the first few steps, a systematic analysis was carried out using MAXQDA2024. However, it should be noted that the analysis started already during the field research as part of constant comparison where data is iteratively collected and analysed (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). The first coding cycle involved thematic coding according to the areas of interest (Table 3) as well as in-vivo e.g. new wave of farmers and open coding e.g. notion about taste. During this process, the data was organized into main categories, relationships were visualized in mind maps, and codes were juxtaposed with concepts. Gradually, the categories and codes become more numerous and the analysis more complex. This phase also involved the specification of the research questions abandoning the rural towards an urban-rural focus. This process is described by Rädiker & Kuckartz, (2020:11) as a phase that allows the researcher to “to take a step back, to consider all the information, to adopt different perspectives, and to reveal one’s own prejudices and previous experience.” Afterwards, a second round of systematic analysis followed which focused on organizing the codes and categories around the sub-questions on the opportunities and challenges of the research participants. Attributing the data into of these two categories is not as evident as it may seem. Often, they intersect or contain both challenges arising out of the opportunities respectively opportunities arising out of challenges. This highlights the complexity of the development of AFNs. Nevertheless, a systematic and arguably meaningful analysis was achieved. The concept maps of the systematic analysis are in the Appendix C.

## 5 AFNs in the region of Kraków

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This chapter aims to provide answers to the sub-question on the existing AFNs of the research site, explores who the producers are and what their motivation is. Throughout opportunities and challenges are presented. The empirical data is based on the field research conducted from June to October 2023 in Kraków and its surroundings. First, seven types of AFNs are described, providing an insight into the range of existing AFNs in Kraków. It is important to acknowledge the presence of numerous other initiatives beyond the scope of this field research. Some additional initiatives are briefly discussed at the end of this section. All names of those who participated in the research are pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

### 5.1. Private and allotment gardens

The first two AFNs in this chapter which has been research in the region of Kraków are private gardening and allotment gardening. Both concern the case of food self-provisioning within a familial community and are therefore presented together. In rural areas in Lesser Poland, people often have enough land to cultivate food on a plot behind their house, may it be gardening on a few square meters of land or in form of a non-commercial family farm on a few hectares. Whereas in urban areas, the gardens are not in the immediate vicinity but on the outskirts of the neighbourhoods or at the city border. Some have a private garden, and others own the right to cultivate an allotment garden (Figure 3). In 2019, the city of Kraków counted 105 allotment gardens (unknown number of plots) over an area of 500 hectares (Rada Miasta Kraków, 2024). Allotment gardens are cultivated mostly by elderly individuals, but more recently they became popular amongst the younger generation (Bellows, 2004; Błażewicz, 2022).

The gardens contain both vegetables and fruits, frequently a greenhouse and often an orchard. Growing food is tightly connected to supplying a larger familial network of relatives with fresh, healthy, and natural food. The non-commercial small-scale farming can also include a few animals such as chicken, goats, sheep, geese and rarely cows. The surplus of food is then processed into sauces, jams, and pickled veggies. This is illustrated with the example of Weronika, an elderly woman who lives in a smaller city in Lesser Poland and cultivates organic beetroots:



"I am most happy about these beetroots, because I plant so many of them that they are available all year round for friends, neighbours and acquaintances." (Weronika, gardener, 22.08.2023)

These beetroots are then processed into a pickled beetroot juice (*kiszony barszcz*) whose home-made recipes she proudly explains and thereby emphasizing its health benefits. She then shares the juice and beets with her extended family network which is greatly appreciated. The strategy of self-provisioning was also part of the program when allotment gardens were established. Dorota, an interview participant says that her allotment garden association was established for the employees of a public transport company which is reflected in its name R.O.D. *Tramwajarz* [*Tramway workers' family allotment garden*]. Similarly, there have been gardens for teachers and other professions. Dorota highlights the allotment garden's particular role when it was first established in 1979:

"In the beginning [...] these were difficult times for Poles and allotment holders had an obligation to grow vegetables here [...] What's more, there was a passage in that first contract that surplus vegetables should be transferred to other employees [work colleagues who had no allotment garden]. [...] Of course, no one complied with this [...] because there was no surplus there." (Dorota, allotment gardener, 10.08.2023)

However, nowadays both private and allotment gardens serve equally as a recreational space and the opportunity of growing food is gradually losing its importance. During the field research, the neat appearance of the allotment gardens in Kraków stood out to me (Figure 3). They are characterized by well-kept lawns and decorative plants, which stand in contrast to the utilitarian character of the traditional vegetable gardens. It is common to have small houses installed on the plot with water and electricity access. Research participants told me that many people go on vacation in their allotment garden despite the official ban on permanent residence. The following statements highlight the recreational aspect of having a garden plot in an urban area:

"It serves as a refreshing escape from city life, just a 20-minute walk away, and that is a motivation for me." (Tomasz, private gardener, 29.08.2023)

"[There] is certainly some kind of need now, of such a place where you will be able to, in addition to vacations, come for the weekend, right? When one has children to let out to run around. Especially, if someone lives in a block of flats, because if someone lives in a house, there are no such problems." (Dorota, allotment gardener, 10.08.2023)

Furthermore, both types of AFNs have different forms of institutional and social governance. First, an obvious mechanism of control are the fences. In allotment gardens there is no access for outsiders, the whole area as well as each garden are surrounded by fences and secured by locks. Additionally, an interview participants tell me about a burglary leading her to install a security system. Further, the allotment gardens are managed by the allotment garden associations, they define rules on garden activities and management. These normative values are reproduced within

the gardening community. Which affected Hubert, a former allotment gardener as he recalls how his permaculture garden disappointed people. He received warning from the association because plants from his permaculture gardens threatened to overgrow onto the neighbour's property.

"It depends on the local organization, [...] and mine was not very positive about my permaculture style. They sent me some warnings, and I was tired about it, and I sold it after five years. [...] also, a lot of people who were looking in my działka [Eng: plot], and they were very disappointed with my permaculture style." (Hubert, former allotment gardener – now organiser of urban farm, 09.08.2023)

A form of control is enforced at both institutional and social levels. In this case, it had a negative impact on Hubert because the community around him did not appreciate his alternative gardening methods. A similar experience had Izabela who installed a permaculture garden on her parent's land in the countryside:

"Of course, the countryside thinks what [do the other] people say. It was so funny because my dad he gave me a very hidden part of the land. I was happy because it was in the sun, so it was perfect [...] he kept asking me maybe you want some [pesticides] and he's like it will not grow without help." (Izabela, community gardener, 13.08.2023)

Now, however, the social control comes from the neighbourhood community. Her initiative was met with scepticism from her parents because of the unconventional method and was therefore hidden from the neighbourhood's judgment. This highlights the importance of community and institutions within the network. Their support enables or hinders the establishment of more innovative approaches such as a permaculture garden.



**Figure 3:** Two different garden plots in the same allotment garden association in Kraków. **3a:** A traditional fruit and vegetable garden. **3b:** A modern garden mainly used for recreational activities. (Source: own pictures, 2023).

Lastly, the certain exclusivity of the gardens is presented. Especially in urban and peri-urban areas, access to allotment gardens can be a challenging. People who have the financial means to buy a garden or who have inherited a garden are given access to a garden. This is of particular importance as allotments (and arguably certain private gardens in urban areas) provide an

opportunity to secure capital for the future. In the case of allotment gardens, the land belongs to the association and the gardeners cannot sell the plot themselves. Instead, they sell the right to lease the plot as well as existing infrastructure such as garden sheds and valuable plants. Sometimes, however, these plots look abandoned, and nothing is grown on them apart from a meadow with a few trees. However, as the allotments are on semi-private land, they are threatened by potential infrastructure projects such as national roads, as one research participant noted. Nevertheless, these plots have become much more popular over the years and have therefore increased in financial value (Błażewicz, 2022). This indicates a certain exclusivity character within the gardens in urban areas towards access recreational space, the possibility of self-provisioning as well as financial security in the future.

## 5.2. Community garden

Community gardens are a recent phenomenon in Poland and have experienced high popularity in Kraków especially in the last decade. Kraków counted 18 community gardens in the year 2022 (Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej w Krakowie, 2022). There is no data available regarding community gardens outside of Kraków. The gardens are essentially a new interpretation of an allotment garden where a community is growing food together. However, compared to allotment garden the focus on food cultivation is more important and the community extends beyond familial relations. The significance of recreation, community engagement, and food cultivation varies among the different gardens. They are initiated by a person or a group of people from the same neighbourhood. The gardens are located on former meadows or in the forest, on the borders of neighbourhoods near recreational areas such as playgrounds or parks. The urban greenery management in Kraków (ZZM) is actively promoting them by providing a financial starter kit for tools and soil, as well as municipal land for the gardens. Within this opportunity they also provide educative workshops on how to garden and other subjects of interest. ZZM describe their support in initiating a community garden on their website the following way:

“The support we provide is multifaceted. On the one hand, it will be substantive support consisting in the development of a project, appropriate selection of plants to the nature and functions that the garden is to fulfil. On the other hand, we want future gardeners-community workers to have the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of gardening.” (ZZM, 2020)

The involvement of the municipal green administration underlines the institutional influence on the development of AFNs. It is questionable how this is perceived by the members of community gardens. On the one hand, they provide essential support; on the other, there is a slight criticism of the top-down approach, as Kinga notes a lack of community in some gardens (see quote below on true community garden).

The members of community gardens belong to an emerging middle class. They tend to be young, well-educated and have a desire to engage in a community and grow food. Some have families and want to make use of the opportunity to grow their own food and provide a space for their children for them to be outside. Some members want to experiment with different gardening styles and others have the desire to engage in a community or in the neighbourhood. Each garden attracts a particular community, and the appearance of the garden reflect the essence of that community (Figure 4). One community garden which was observed during the fieldwork was located on a hill in a forest surrounded by other assumingly private gardens. It was only accessible by a grass path and hidden behind shrubs and trees. Being in this garden felt like an escape from the city. A member of this community gardener Izabela describes the garden the following way:

"This is a place [...] to experiment with the gardening ideas and to learn slowly because there is no pressure that you need to produce something. [...] At the same time [...] for my mental health it is, essential to be part of something like this, you know? Like after an hour, here, half an hour, I'm getting closer to my inner peace." (Izabela, community gardener, 13.08.2023).

To summarize, the community gardens usually consist of a recreational and a gardening purpose. Playgrounds, hammocks, tables, and benches characterize the recreational areas. The garden areas show a broad range of plants, from vegetables and fruits to orchards. Some gardens are distinct due to the diversity of sorts they plant, others focus on permaculture methods for cultivating. Thus, the appearance of the gardens differs greatly, while some are carefully arranged with designated spots for each plant, others blend into the natural landscape with less visible structures (Figure 4). Some gardens have designated plots for specific gardeners while others share their harvest and distribute the work around the garden. Kinga gives an insight how they distribute their work force in the garden and describes her understanding of a true community garden:

"Two of us are good at the vegetable parts and two of us are good at the technical stuff like cutting the grass or setting up some constructions like the wooden constructions [for the beans]. [...] [But] it depends on the garden because there are some gardens in Kraków, where you pay once a year, and then you have your own raised bed. But to us as gardeners from here [...] the true community garden is where you together decide about everything: You work together, you harvest together." (Kinga, community gardener, 23.08.2023)

The community is the central aspect of the gardens. There are interactions inside the community for instance the decision-making aspect or having enough work force. However, the gardens usually also extend their network beyond their community, for example with the neighbourhood. The Facebook pages of community gardens in Kraków show a range of events happening in these gardens from workshops on forest gardening to spring celebrations and garden tours. Building a community is one of the main challenges within these community gardens. The initiative depends on the commitment of active members, thus first it is important to find them. This poses to be

difficult as people have a general lack of time availability for such time intensive projects. People with an activist background tend to have an advantage in networking because they can reach out to people, they've worked with before. However, being an activist in many initiatives can also tire people out over time as stated by one research participant who decided to step back from her responsible position wanting to focus on gardening for the moment.

Community gardens have also an educational aspect as they invited to experiment and learn about gardening. This assumingly reflects a community which is more open towards innovative approaches. This is further emphasized by the rare usage of pesticides. Both community garden members which have been interviewed during the research avoided using pesticides in most cases and made use of natural fertilizers. Education in this sense means that conventional production methods are questioned and experiments with alternative production methods are common. Further, the promotion of civic values such as decision-making together and combining different skills towards a common goal.



**Figure 4:** Three different community gardens in Kraków. **4a:** Community garden in family neighbourhood next to playground. Shed financed by ZMZ with their logo on it (yellow circle). Plots are collectively maintained. **4b:** Community garden in forest, in this part of the garden the plots are individually cultivated. **4c:** Community garden in family neighbourhood next to playground. Wooden infrastructure probably financed by ZMZ. (Source: own pictures, 2023).

### 5.3. Urban farm

The urban farm called *Krakowska Farma Mjeska* lies on the outskirts of Kraków and was initiated in 2019 (Figure 5). On a piece of land owned by the University of Agriculture the members cultivate vegetables from March until October. These are sold through pre-ordered vegetable packages on a weekly basis to the inhabitants in Kraków. The packages include products sourced from both the urban farm and occasionally from the farmer who, along with others, founded the urban farm.

They are prepared by volunteers who exchange their time for harvest goods. This is known as the barter system. The volunteers meet every Wednesday to harvest and prepare the vegetable packets in the morning (Figure 5), while the garden is tended in the afternoon (Figure 5). Usually at least one of the three responsible employees are on-site and will keep an overview of the orders and distribute the work to the volunteers. Occasionally, there are events such as picnics or movie night which contribute to the community feeling. The community is very diverse and fluctuating due to its inherent voluntary aspect. An organiser of the urban farm explains the type of members they have:

“Generally [...] we can divide [the members] into two groups. One is more hippy people and like students and people who have less money but more time. They come, and they work, and they take veggies. And the second is people who want to escape from the office, and they relax working here. For them it's an opportunity to move a little bit, to touch the ground.” (Hubert, organiser urban farmer, 09.08.2023)

While volunteering on the farm, I observed a core group of members regularly visiting the farm and many first-time volunteers. The core group of volunteers seem to be motivated to provide a change in the (food) system. They implement their activism also in other initiatives, as they among others practice dumpster diving, volunteer on other farms in Europe, are self-employed bakers, or are learning to become a farmer. The main purpose of the farm is not run a profitable business but instead to create a space and community with a focus on education and recreation.

“The urban farm creates a social value when people come, they can work for veggies or they ground themselves a bit, they work with soil, and it has some psychological effects. It's calming and they socialize with other people.” (Bartosz, organizer urban farm & farmer, 29.07.2023)



**Figure 5:** The Krakowska Farma Mjeska **5a:** Overview of the urban farm. **5b:** Insight into the packing station for the pre-ordered vegetable packages. (Source: own pictures, 2023).

The community aspect of the urban farms creates also civic values. In their barter model the volunteers can work in the field as much as they want and in exchange can harvest as much produce from themselves as they feel like. This exchange based on trust and mutual respect is promoting a sense of shared ownership and responsibility within the community.

#### 5.4. Food cooperative

During the field research, approximately half of the interview participants had a connection to the Wawelska food cooperative enabling me the opportunity to investigate its operations (Figure 6). I visited the food cooperative on one of their weekly deliver days, helping out preparing the orders for the members to pick-up throughout the evening. Simultaneously, there happened to be an informational evening for new members which I joined as well. This and further informal interviews with its members (who happened to be interview participants for a different AFN) provide me insight into the food cooperative. The aim of the food cooperative is to establish direct trade with local farmers to ensure a short, transparent, fair, and ecological supply chain. Moreover, the cooperative employs a limited first-come-first-served online order mechanism to guarantee to the farmers that all their offered produce is sold, thereby adapting to the farmers operation scheme. The voluntary work of the members is the basis of the functioning of the cooperative. Each member is expected to contribute a few hours a month on a specific task such as preparing food packages, establishing, and maintaining contact with farmers, cleaning the facilities, maintaining the IT infrastructure, checking orders, or organizing information events for new members.



**Figure 6:** The Wawelska Kooperatywa Spożywcza. **6a:** Logo outside of the cooperative. **6b:** Inside the cooperative, the order is counted or weighted, packed up and distributed. In the background permanent stock of visible. **6c:** Members can pick up their orders from their green box. (Source: own pictures, 2023).

The food cooperative operates on the intrinsic commitment of both the producers and the consumers. The network is characterized by a collective decision-making process where each member's opinion, ideas and contributed is treated equally. This means that also new members have the opportunity to establish new ideas within the cooperative underlying its dynamic and bottom-up nature.

From an outside perspective this cooperative could be considered to have an activist-oriented as described by (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015) which is suggested by the high value on self-responsibility, egalitarian decision making and active involvement of volunteers. However, this observation is not complete as the food cooperative as it is unclear how big the involvement of all members is or whether it revolves around a core group and further the infrastructure with a stock of labelled products this involves elements of a consumer-oriented initiative.

## 5.5. Farmer's market

Farmer's markets are one of the most common types of AFNs in the research site and exist in urban as well as rural areas (Figure 7). In 2022, there were a total of 15 farmers' markets in Kraków on municipal property and an unknown number of farmers' markets on private property. In 2013 a total of 11 farmer's markets on private land were counted, the current number is unknown (Płaziak & Szymańska 2019). In the whole Voivodeship of Lesser Poland, there are 146 permanent marketplaces in 2022 (GUS, 2023). They operate on squares, streets and market halls and conduct daily or weekly trade. On the market, especially food products but sometimes also household items are traded. The food supply chain is shortened, and one can buy traditional and homemade products such as the regional cheese *oscypek*. However, one can also buy fruits like melons in the off-season indicating a non-local origin. The traders include family farms selling vegetables and fruits the whole year or seasonally as well as private people who are occasionally selling products from their own small-scale business e.g. raspberries from the garden, homemade cinnamon rolls or sirups. However, many traders are middlemen and -women who are buying their products at the wholesale markets. These are huge private wholesales markets mostly located at the outskirts of the city where national and international products are traded. They play a central role in the Cracovian food chain. Big and small restaurants, shops and market sellers are buying their products there in large quantities for a lower price than at the regular farmers' market. Most often the markets are owned by food trading companies with limited liability (Ltd). During the fieldwork I talked to many farmers and had the opportunity to talk to organisers of two farmer's markets, namely the ancient farmer's market *Stary Kleparz* and the more recently established organic market "Targ Pietruszkowy".





**Figure 7:** Farmer's markets in Kraków. **7a:** *Stary Kleparz* in the city centre opened Monday-Saturday. **7b:** *Targ Pietruszkowy* in Podgórze district open on Wednesday and Saturday morning. **7c:** *Bieńczycki Plac Targowy* in Nowa Huta district. (Source: own pictures, 2023).

The *Stary Kleparz* (Figure 7a) is in the city centre on municipal land and its origin as a marketplace date back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1992, it is run by the trading company *Spółka Kupiecka "Stary Kleparz" Sp. Z o.o.*, which is composed of the permanent traders at the market. When entering the market, the first half consists of permanent stalls offering a variety of goods such as bakery, butchers, household goods, flowers. In addition, there are modern businesses such as coffee shops and wine stores. Some of these booths operate with one salesperson who communicates through windows while in others the booth can get accessed. The second section is an open market hall with numerous tables where farmers can reserve space to display their products. The unique aspect of this market is that customers can request specific amounts of products not only of vegetables but also of other products such as gains. The following observations give insight into the atmosphere of the farmer's market at *Stary Kleparz*:

The market opens very early at 6am [...] I observe mostly middle aged to older women and men selling at the farmer's market. The prices of the products are determined by the seller and customers usually don't negotiate about the price. Maybe they'll say a comment about the quality of the product or that something is expensive and will then move on to another seller if it is too expensive [...] There is a lot going on, many colours and smells, you can tell by the temperature that you're outside but still you're kind of inside [...] It is a busy place but not a very loud place, no one is shouting to advertise their fresh products [...]. The atmosphere is friendly, and the market sellers usually give a sample of their products to try to the customers. (Fieldnotes from an observation at the farmer's market *Stary Kleparz*, 17.06.2023)

At the *Stary Kleparz*, many producers have a long family history of trading there, as the organizing committee as well as traders of the market consists of people whose relatives have already worked at the market. For instance, the market's organizers mother and grandmother have already been selling products at the market. The market organizers highlight the community aspect

already been selling products at the market. The market organizers highlight the community aspect between the traders as well as between trustful relationship to their customers. When asked about the competition to discount chains she explains the following:

“Our customer will come anyway, right, because they want to have a fresh product, because they want to have a choice, because they want [...] to feel the atmosphere, because they want to talk. My mother has customers like that [over multiple generations] where the grandmother came, then the mother, and eventually their children.” (Kamilla, market organizer, 27.10.2023)

Kamilla's insights shed light on the enduring significance of traditional markets like Stary Kleparz, where familial ties and a sense of community form the backbone of the trading experience. Despite the competition posed by discount chains, the market's appeal lies not only in the freshness and variety of its products but also in the unique atmosphere and interpersonal connections it offers.

The *Targ Pietruszkowy* (Figure 7b) stands in contrast to other farmer's markets in Kraków. It was founded only recently and offers organic produce only. It emerged from a neighbourhood initiative in 2013 due to the lack of a market in their district and led to the non-profit association *Targ Pietruszkowy*. Under the name *pietruszk* (Eng: parsley) they are organizing the farmer's market, educative workshops, visits to farmers for the community and cooking demonstration. This market distinguishes itself from other market forms with its defined rules regarding who can sell at the market. The produce should be local, max. 150 km away from Kraków. The farmers should have an officially organic certificated farm or declare that they are not using pesticides for their production which is controlled and subsequently certified by the *Targ Pietruszkowy* organisation itself. They also want to offer direct trade. In addition, farmers are required to sell without intermediaries. This regulation should ensure that the profit from the market goes directly to the farmers. The initiative's first year was financed by an international grant as a seasonal market. The big success in the first year led to the establishment of an annual market and *Targ Pietruszkowy* foundation. The non-profit foundation is also organizing other initiatives such as an online food box delivery and workshops e.g. about food waste. A co-organiser of the market explains their type of customers and what makes it attractive:

“It is difficult to say exactly who our customers are. They are from young to old, from poor to rich, from the mother who wants to give her children their first solid food. [...] there are also older customers who, despite the higher prices [...] prefer to have 10g of a real ham, to feel the good taste, than to buy a ham full of antibiotics in the store. [...] Another [reason] is the lifestyle, as we have a good amount of vegan and vegetarian clients. Over the years the clients learned that buying [...] at the market allows them to directly support the farmers. [...] Going to the market on Saturdays is embedded in the client's life, as they're also visible in pictures from ten years ago. It has become a way of life.” (Monika, market organizer, 09.08.2023)

This description exemplifies what is understood under the notion of quality, it is about the good taste and a natural product without any antibiotics or pesticides. Further, it highlights how this perception of quality can be found across the whole population, from young to elderly people. Additionally, it is important to recognise that there is a relationship of trust between the customers and the farmers. They learned over the years that their able to directly support the farmers through their consumption and thus it has become a way of life.

## 5.6. Small-retail sales

Another element of the food scenery are seasonal and permanent small-retail sales where fruits and vegetables and sometimes also other food products can be bought. They are essentially the continuation of farmer's markets but reduced to a single stall. They stand in contrast to large brands and are increasingly being displaced by them in Poland. They need to make sure they stand out in the food industry. On the one hand, there are single market stalls with an easy setup of a parasol and boxes filled with fresh vegetables and fruits which are (re-) installed on a daily, weekly, or seasonal basis in front of other food shops or at a frequently visited street or square. Some of these are also found in tourist destination where they sell local produce. On the other hand, there are corner stores (Figure 7) and greengrocer (Figure 7) which are referred to as *warzywniak*, *warzywa i owoce*, *sklep warzywny*, *sklepik ogólnospożywczy*, *sklep spożywczy*. These shops consist of a proper building of a few square meters and an outside market stall. Some of these shops have been family businesses which often established in the late 1990s during the transformation whereas others are initiated out of opportunity.

Both the single market stalls and greengrocers are usually located in residential areas which are highly frequented creating a meeting point for the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, there are also a few which are located inside of shopping centres. These stores offer a diverse selection of products, selling local and occasionally international items based on the owner's preferences. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are often displayed outdoors, complemented by preserved foods such as jams and pickles available indoors. The vendors typically source their goods from wholesalers, which ensures a high level of product quality. The high quality is described by Jakub a greengrocer to be his main goal:

"This is our main goal that we don't sell like cheap stuff with the low quality, it may be a little bit more expensive, but the quality must be the top of the top. So, this is our main goal that anybody that comes to the shop just insert their hand into any shelf they want and the product that they're gonna get is perfect all the time" (Jakub, greengrocer, 01.08.2023).

When asking Jakub how he makes sure to obtain these high-quality products he refers to having trustworthy intermediaries and long-time experience in this wholesale market industry Further,

he is also fostering direct transactions with acquaintances and friends. In informal interviews with greengrocers this observed short food supply chain is confirmed. A lot of produce is bought from the wholesales market Kompleks Handlowy RYBITWY. Similarly, other small-store owners and employees argue that offering high-quality is their main effort. Michał, a research participant opened the first spice store in Kraków which gradually expanded into an organic food store 23 years ago. He offers certified organic products from well-known brands, especially from Germany. Naturally one could assume that organic certification might substitute the search for quality food. However, he says he does not necessarily rely on these certifications immediately. When he works with small organic farmers, he wants to meet them and see how they produce before he makes a deal with them. He acknowledges that this effort goes hand in hand with increased prices for customers:

“It's not reachable for everyone and it never was because the organic products tend to be more expensive than the regular ones at the market. [...] It is impossible for such a high-quality product to be for everyone.” (Michał, owner organic shop, 19.10.2023).

This statement underscores the potential exclusionary mechanisms associated with the financial accessibility of organic food purchases. Thus, for these market-oriented AFNs one of the main efforts lies in marketing their business as something unique and building a loyal customer basis. Being unique can take different forms and revolves around quality, maintaining good and long-lasting relationships to customers, offering products which go beyond the choice of the common food chain stores. A research participant, who is employed in the family business describes the impact their business had on the neighbourhood:

“We know them, like, for 30 years. So, we know their children and they grant their children. So, it's like a long history [...] And [the customers] say, oh, it's nice here. I'm coming here. I talked to you last month that I had some, I don't know, stomach issue and we remembered that. We are asking them, how is their stomach. And some old people, they say that they have no one to talk to. And the only chance they have is here, right?” (Aleksandra, employee corner store, 10.08.2023).

The organic food shop owner was pioneering with this project as both spices and later certified organic produce were relatively unknown. Thus, in the beginning they had to put a lot of effort to educate their customers about how to cook with the spices and as well about the values of organic food. Organising cooking workshops and fostering a relationship to his customers led him to build a loyal customer base. In the case of the greengrocer and the corner store education also becomes an important topic not necessarily directly related to organising workshops but rather in the everyday interaction with customers. They are putting an effort on educating the clients e.g. about the appearance of food, food waste and sustainable usage of packaging:

“We’re telling them that you can try this one it’s really good, you know it looks [bad], but it tastes perfect and if they try and [they say] it’s okay you’re right.” (Jakub, greengrocer, 01.08.2023).

“We also, try to explain and we try to convince people that you don’t, if you have three apples, you don’t have to take three plastic bags seriously.[She elaborates further:] People buy things by looking and sometimes for example, when I try plums, the ones that are softer and maybe they don’t look so nice, they are much better. [...] Some people understand that, and some people don’t.” (Aleksandra, employee corner store, 10.08.2023).

The biggest challenge these small store is facing is the lack of governmental support they receive. Rather strict hygiene rules and for instance unsatisfying regulations regarding food waste which cannot be donated for free frustrates the business owner. This was especially visible during the pandemic.

“Our political leaders, they treat micro and small businesses like they are not worth a lot because they pay low taxes. Huge, huge companies like corporations, well, they pay more. So, they decided that it’s better to help huge companies than small ones. And that’s why a lot of small shops, they just closed in the pandemic.” (Aleksandra, employee corner store, 10.08.2023).

“So, basically in Poland it’s really hard to run a business the taxes are really high and everyone from the government they’re just trying to punish you with money.” (Jakub, greengrocer, 01.08.2023).

Further, it is challenging for the businesses to find loyal employees as the workload is high and the payment in relation rather low. Despite their small size, these independent stores contribute to an AFN by operating autonomously, shortening the food chain, and promoting a sense of community. This is in contrast to larger chain stores, which often offer standardized products and prioritize quantity over quality (Bachórz, 2018; Płaziak & Szymańska, 2019). In addition, the diversity of independent stores, ranging from traditional to modern, further enriches the local food retail system.



**Figure 8:** Two of many small-retail sales in Kraków. **8a:** Common corner store in neighbourhood. Managed by a second-generation family business established in the late 1990s. **8b:** Modernized fruit and vegetable shop taken over by the new owner in 2022. (Source: own pictures, 2023).

## 5.7. Other AFNs

The presented investigations on AFNs in the region of Kraków is not complete. For instance, there has been discussion on community-supported agriculture schemes by research participants. Katarzyna, a farmer considers this as the ideal to secure her livelihood as a farmer:

“I would like to try it because I think it's the best system. People who are [...] in this CSA system are the best clients because they are ready to take everything which is seasonal. [...] It's very supportive to for the farmer. [...] I talked to some farmers who [are part] of this system [and they told me] it is important to know that you're selling [your produce] for sure and it's not so, important to have all the money [in advance of the season].” (Katarzyna, farmer, 29.07.2023)

In addition to the AFNs that take place on-site, there is also a considerable amount happening online. It appears that there was an increase around 2015, when many of these buying groups were created (Fundacja Partnerstwo dla Środowiska, 2024). However, further research revealed that not all of them are active anymore, as the websites are inactive or have been closed. There seems to be a trend where many so-called buying groups have emerged, which are essentially similar to a food co-operative, such as the *Wawelska Food Cooperative*. They consist of an online shop, where customers can order local and organic products in advance, which are then prepared by the farmers themselves for the collection or delivery day. Both the *Farma Mjeska Krakowska* (urban farm) and *Targ Pietruszkowy* (farmer's market) also incorporate elements of this type of online market in their business. The urban farm bases their operation on the online ordered packages. Whereas the *Targ Pietruszkowy* also introduced an online order system which was crucial for their survival during the Covid-19 pandemic as it substituted for the on-site farmer's market. However, they state that the market on-site is post-pandemic again more popular than their online orders. More in-depth investigation is beyond the scope of this master's thesis, but it is important to note that these buying groups existed or still exist.

## 6 The perspective of the producers

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The second sub-question seeks insight about who the producers of AFN are and investigating their motivations. Within the diverse spectrum of AFNs in the region of Kraków, a broad range of backgrounds and motivation have become evident. Through formal interviews, questions were asked about their motivational drivers and family upbringing. In addition, discussions were held to identify the perceived values cultivated within their AFNs. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked to articulate their perspectives on ideal food consumption practices in Poland. These responses provided insights into their belief systems and priorities regarding the AFNs in which they are involved. A goal of this thesis is to emphasize the voice of the people, therefore, fitting statements from the research participants are included throughout the chapter in italics.

### 6.1. Resentment and new wave of farmers

Polish people have a great rural heritage; thus, it was of interest to investigate whether the participants of AFN have a rural and thereby agricultural background. Most research participants had some rural background in closer or distant family. The farmers at the traditional farmer's markets usually stated to have inherited a family farm. Their motivation is tightly connected to main the tradition of family farming. A farmer at the Stary Kleparz (farmer's market) explains his view of his livelihood, that if he's going to produce food, he is as well going to sell it, that's normal for him. However, there are also other famers among the research participants who are satisfied to maintain their farming heritage by self-provisioning their family and diversify their livelihood beyond farming.

Nevertheless, among the research participants who did not have an immediate connection to a farm, there was a disconnection to rurality evident. Tomasz, a gardener who inherited a piece of land from his grandparents, remembers his grandmother's *typical peasant's lifestyle*, which is family-oriented and involves a lot of hard work in the field. In rural areas this memory can lead to a feeling of *resentment* in young people wanting to distance themselves from the *hardships of their impoverished roots* as described by Mikołaj, a first-generation farmer:

"It's as if they aimed to erase the connection to their humble origins, wanting to distance themselves from the impoverished area. [...] It's driven by an aspiration to achieve something different. [...] In essence, there is a general sense of shame associated with their peasant heritage. The desire is to have everything modernized, with tiled interiors, exterior

siding, and sleek panel fences. This pursuit of modernization is seen as the pinnacle, providing a sense of dignity and status. [...] [However,] many of those who leave, some of them eventually return and work here, because, for example, when children grow up, they often decide to bring their family back to live here. Those who worked elsewhere still desire to establish a family here. Therefore, this resentment is not directed towards the land itself but rather towards the traditional way of life that has existed until now." (Mikołaj, farmer, 28.08.2023)

Based on Mikołaj's observations, it is evident that while some young people seek to distance themselves from their rural upbringing, there remains a deep attachment to the land. An important factor contributing to this connection is the high value of family. Further, the statement highlights the desire to modernize the rural heritage which does not only concern infrastructure but also the lifestyle. A community gardener recalls the work and struggle of her family's farm, which influenced her to adopt permaculture methods in her garden and as a way of life. Indicating a commitment towards a new assumingly sustainable lifestyle but also a connection to her rural heritage:

"I feel like [as a] child I really wanted to escape from this kind of work because from my memory it was always a lot of work, a lot of struggles, a lot of digging. And I feel like permaculture shows that you don't need to put this work. And it's not about being lazy, but it's about looking different, you know? [...] Permaculture is not just about the garden, but about the lifestyle in general." (Izabela, community gardener, 13.08.2023)

In other cases, the absence or lack of rurality is motivating people to discover their roots to rurality again, as this stem often from an ideological motivation as it evolves changing gradually their whole livelihood. This can take on different forms such as in the case of a first-generation farmer who has the desire to recreate and maintain rural values that are connected to the land and the culture in a particular way by keeping a certain traditional way of life inspired by the Polish peasant culture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other participants of AFNs have a vision to create a sustainable and self-sufficient alternative. Some pursue this desire in becoming an activist and participating in initiatives such as the urban farm, the food cooperative and community gardening while others are creating their own farm. This new generation of farmers is referred to by Katarzyna as *new wave of farmers*. She further highlights that it takes a lot of courage and is not the most obvious choice:

"I always wanted to try it [moving to the village and becoming a farmer], but I thought that I don't have enough courage to do this. I was thinking that if you want to be a farmer you have to own the land from your family or have to buy it. [...] But actually, two years ago we just rent a house with a field. It was surprising for me that it's possible to be a farmer without [owning] land." (Katarzyna, farmer, 29.07.2023)

The motivation of these new wave of farmers is tightly connected to create a sustainable change and to inspire other people. Often, they had a previous occupation and out of different opportunities became a farmer.



"I used to be engineer in Holland [...] and then I start the farm and I see this transition it was inspiring to a few people at least. Also, to inspire other farmers to go to organic to see that this production is also for small-scale [farming] attractive." (Bartosz, farmer, 29.07.2023)

Further, a research participant characterizes the new wave of farmers as interested in agroecology and moving in an activist context. Having an activist context is critical, as it supports the creation of community as emphasized by the organiser of the urban farm. Moreover, there seems to be a lot of collaboration efforts between the new wave of farmers in educating each other and exchanging ideas. This is crucial as both, Katarzyna and Mikołaj emphasize that becoming part of the rural community can be challenging for first-generation farmers, thus outsiders.

## **6.2. Motivation of producers**

Producers of AFNs are motivated by a diverse factor that influence their participation and commitment to these initiatives. The motivation is often connected to the strengths arising from the AFNs especially concerning growing quality food, establishing a community and educational aspects on the food system. Which in turn can boost further motivation for their participation. In general, there seems to be a range between people who become involved in AFNs because of their ideological values, such as the new wave of farmers described above, and those who join these AFNs out of opportunities. For example, a small-business owner tells how his friend introduced him to the greengrocery business. Similarly, an organizer of a farmer's market was part of her neighbourhood association. Due to a higher time availability, she took more responsibility which ultimately led her to co-organize the farmer's market in a paid position. The following section uses different statements from research participant to exemplify the individual and diverse motivations the participants of AFNs have:

"The first thing is doing cool stuff. The second thing is spending a lot of time in fresh air. The third thing is just to move your body [...] and then learning new things, because I learned a lot here about growing stuff, but also, about ecology, about permaculture [...] and the fifth place would be [growing my own] food." (Kinga, community gardener, 23.08.2023)

"I'm really happy about this project. I have a lot of satisfaction that we created it. It gives me first an opportunity to live in the city and have direct connection with the ground, with the plants, with the food. And to move, work in the movement. The first thing I can think is the opportunities of having half of my food from my own production, ecological, which is amazing. And I really can see the difference of the quality of the food. And the opportunity of meeting people." (Hubert, urban farmer, 09.08.2023)

Their primary aim arose from engaging in a community which requires time availability, that is a crucial factor in the development of an AFN. Community engagement seems to revolve around being active and creating a meaningful outcome for themselves or their community. The meaningfulness depends on the goals respectively function of AFNs and the personal values and beliefs

of the producers. Some are drawn to AFNs as it allows them to engage in a community with like-minded people. Another motivation described by them revolve around being active and in contact with nature. Hubert underlies having a connection with the ground while still being in vicinity of the city. Being in contact with nature involves a recreational aspect as well. Research participants describe it as *meditative* to work with the soil and giving them *inner peace*. Further, Kinga highlights an educational aspect which concerns learning about food production and the different methods. While Hubert emphasizes the opportunities to be involved in a community and meeting like-minded people. Ultimately, both state their motivation and satisfaction of growing their own food. Which is highlighted again by Tomasz:

Satisfaction for me comes from having something of my own, cultivated and grown from the start. There's a distinct taste, and I avoid using any chemicals, making it a much healthier option compared to store-bought produce. While it might be more expensive considering the effort involved, my motivation isn't financial. It's the fulfilment of having my own produce, being able to check the progress in the tunnels daily and witnessing the entire growth process. (Tomasz, gardener, 29.08.2023).

Tomasz highlights the distinct taste he experiences from his own produces. This is an important and recurring topic during the analysis. The research participants often refer to a certain taste they know from their childhood which they want to recreate. He further perceives his food as much healthier since he doesn't use any pesticides. Similarly, other gardening initiatives often mention try to avoid using pesticides. Some are only using them occasionally while others incorporate the permaculture methods. The usage of pesticides is often argued around the notion of soil. The people who avoid using any chemicals on the soil want to protect it from further destruction and belief it to be one of the most important resources. However, people who more frequently use pesticide state it is because of the poor soil quality. They are part of a growing movement that is questioning the way food is conventionally produced and consumed.

"Minimum pesticides there is nothing like no, pesticides [...] that doesn't exist really If someone tells me that there is nothing on it. I don't believe it because it won't grow. The ground is not so good as it was, a couple years ago. They have to put just something to make it grow that's the way it goes, unfortunately." (Jakub, greengrocer, 01.08.2023)

"The soil is the most important because what we are doing, the world-wide with this manufacture, [Juliette: mass production] mass production of food, mass chemical, conventional agriculture is destroying the soil, destroying the biodiversity [...] and this is what we do with the soil here, we enrich the soil, we don't put it upside down, we add organic matter." (Hubert, former allotment gardener – now organiser of urban farm, 09.08.2023)

Furthermore, the desire for autonomy and self-determination motivates people to engage in a market-based initiative. This enables them to escape from the constraints of conventional

employment structures such as Aleksandra, who is working in her family business after having a corporate job in the past.

“Yes, that's why I said okay I earn less here, a lot less I must say but I'm more peaceful I'm healthier actually.” (Aleksandra, employee corner store, 10.08.2023).

## 7 Discussion

The empirical data of the field work shows a broad range of AFNs which exist in the region of Kraków. The producers involved have diverse backgrounds and motivations and they are dealing with different opportunities and challenges on a daily basis. First, the findings are discussed in the context of the literature on AFNs and the Polish context, highlighting the opportunities and challenges that arise within these AFNs. Subsequently, the main research question is addressed. Table 5 describes characteristics of AFNs that are relevant for this discussion.

**Table 5:** Description of AFNs in the region of Kraków according to characteristic provided by literature on AFNs. Own representation.

Alternative Food Network in the region of Kraków	Short food supply chain (Renting et al., 2003)	Institutional associations (Śpiewak & Goszczyński, 2023)	Motivation of members with quality food as a general motivation
<i>private garden</i>	self-provisioning	community-based	self-provisioning, recreation
<i>allotment garden</i>		bureaucracy-based community-based	self-provisioning, recreation
<i>community garden</i>		community-based bureaucracy-based	self-provisioning, community engagement recreation, education
<i>urban farm</i>	self-provisioning face-to-face	community-based civic-based	community engagement education, recreation
<i>food cooperative</i>	proximate, extended	community-based, civic-based	community engagement, education, civic action
<i>farmer's market</i>	face-to-face, proximate	market based community-based (bureaucracy-based)	supporting farmers self-employment
<i>small retail sales</i>	proximate, extended	market based community aspect	self-employment, education

Before delving into the features, a note about labelling different initiatives: As the literature on the CEE context has shown, research prefers to label the AFNs between imitated, embedded, novel, modern and traditional initiatives (Goszczyński et al., 2019; Kopczyńska, 2020). For this research it is considered useful to distinguish between modern (or novel) and traditional (or embedded) initiatives to refer to the time of their emergence, and not necessarily whether they incorporate modern or traditional values and methods, as these traits appear to varying degrees in all AFNs. The novel initiatives e.g. community gardens, urban farm, and food cooperative typically emerged after post-transformation. Whereas traditional AFNs such as farmer's market, small-retail sales and private as well as allotment gardening have a longer history. Similarly, the distinction between imitated, embedded and mixed AFNs is not suitable for this research Goszczyński et al. (2019). I argue that despite their different origins, these initiatives are constantly adapting, incorporating elements of tradition and embeddedness as well as modernity. Thus, for this research all examined AFNs can be considered mixed AFNs.

### **7.1. AFNs enable alternative livelihoods**

During the fieldwork seven different forms of AFNs were identified. They all have in common that they have shortened their food supply chain. In this case it is useful to describe the characteristics of these shortened chains through the approach presented by Renting et al. (2003). The distinction between face-to-face, proximate and extended relations highlights the different forms of SFSC in the market-based initiatives. For initiatives focused on gardening, it is appropriate to refer to them as self-provisioning rather than face-to-face SFSC, since no actual trade takes place. It shows that multiple strategies can coexist within a network, such as face-to-face relations at farmers' markets, where farmers sell the products themselves, but also proximate relations, when the products are traded through intermediaries who buy them at the wholesale market. Extended relations take on a specific notion in this research, as they are often found in modern initiatives, where labels replace the embedded relationship. For example, there are often labelled products at the small-retail sale. For instance, a research participant at the corner store recalled how some customers found their way into their shop since they were the only store in the city offering a milk product from a specific brand. This firstly exemplifies how this label replaced the immediate face-to-face interaction. Secondly, it highlights how these small-retail sales contribute to a higher diversity of products offered in the food selling industry.

This analysis shows one of the main opportunities which arise out of the AFN namely that they facilitate an alternative livelihood. This has become necessary since in the recent two decades the pressure on small-scale farming to diversify their livelihood has been rising greatly (Sroka et al., 2023; Zegar, 2023). Face-to-face trading enables farmers on farmer's markets to secure their

livelihood. This can be illustrated with the case of the farmer's markets *Targ Pietruskowy*. The market organizers underline that they give the farmers a place where they can sell their organically grown or processed produce for their actual value. The focus on organic farming in the third chapter highlights that the value of organic food is limited in the region (Nachtman, 2021; Soroka & Wojciechowska-Solis, 2019; Śpiewak, 2016). In fact, the initiative of the organic farmer's market Targ Pietruskowy shows that it is necessary to create a niche market for organic produce or else the farmers have to undersell their produce due to mistrust from the consumers. It is a place where customers are conscious about their food choice and are ready to pay more. Yet, there is also an educational aspect integrated in this as the customer must first learn about its value. Further, it is crucial to establish a relationship which is based on trust.

In general, farmer's markets are characterized, among other things, by their flexibility, as the producers can sell their goods spontaneously and without complications, despite the considerable organizational structures in the background. This gives people, often elderly, the opportunity to sell single goods such as raspberries or walnuts next to the market stalls or on the street in front of the market. Something that could potentially provide a substantial income for retired people. This is also part of the diversified livelihood scheme as described in the literature (Halamska, 2016). Also, the other AFNs studied provide a platform for individuals to sustain a livelihood. For example, the food cooperative which, based on transparency and community, seeks to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between customers and farmers. Furthermore, as well as in the case of small-retail sales which have been developing in particular during the transformation in the 90s and enabled the opportunity for people to be self-employed.

Alternative livelihoods can also take the form of self-provisioning, a practice deeply rooted in the Polish food system. This is illustrated by the examples of private and allotment gardening. The notion of embeddedness described in the literature proves to be especially useful to understand how these more traditional initiatives are functioning (Bilewicz, 2017; Brinkley, 2017; Goszczyński et al., 2019). Having a vegetable garden, fruit trees and thus one's own supply of homemade food is an embedded and traditional practice in Poland as described by scholars (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019; Kopczyńska, 2020; Smith & Jehlička, 2013). An example for the cultural importance of food sharing amongst relatives shows the term 'słoiki' (Eng: jars). Young people migrating from rural areas to cities for studies or work are often referred to by the term 'słoiki', named after the jars, used to store the food they receive from family members. It is an essential strategy to cope with higher living costs in the city. This term represents their practices of returning home and resupplying food on the weekend while simultaneously maintaining close ties with their families and their place of origin (Bachórz, 2018; Global Informality Project, 2022).

Additionally, alternative livelihoods can also be investigated with the alternative economies model from Gibson-Graham (2014). This enables recognition of modes of trade beyond the market and non-market dichotomy. In this sense, the barter model at the urban farm, cooperative exchange at the food cooperative, and informal produce exchange between farmers at the farmer's markets become evident as an essential part of the livelihood scheme.

The first wave of research on AFNs considered them to be substantial for rural development (Goodman, 2004; Marsden, 2004; Renting et al., 2003). In this research it remains unclear to what extent AFNs are providing extensively to rural development in Poland. The findings suggest that the opportunity of livelihood diversification within AFNs rather functions on a niche market than on the broad scale. However, the interest in SFSC is rising, which can be seen in the growing Polish literature on SFSC (Serafin, 2018, 2018; Solarz et al., 2023, 2023; Struś et al., 2020), as well as in practice, as the organizer of the urban farm explains that their urban farm model is also visited by institutional actors.

## **7.2. Strengthening communities and promote civic action**

The types of AFNs can be studied by their different institutional associations which influence their development as proposed by Śpiewak & Goszczyński, (2023). In general, it can be noted that the community-based initiatives are dominating the scene of AFNs in the region of Kraków. Followed by a non-neglectable institutional influence in both traditional and novel initiatives which can be considered a top-down approach in the development of AFNs. This is in opposition to the emerging bottom-up approaches which are promoting civic values and thereby undermine the low social capital in the Polish culture described by scholars (Goszczyński, 2021; Rosner & Stanny, 2017).

The community-based initiatives are organized and influenced around the community which it concerns, such as the familial networks in the case of self-provisioning. They are mainly based on trust between the members. For example, trust between customers and producers but also between the members of food cooperative that everyone is contributing to the voluntary work. Further, the urban farm bases their barter model on trust and self-responsibility. In community gardens, the community aspect revolves around members learning and growing food together. The sense of community can also involve corporations between farmers who support each other in the form of sharing knowledge and offering inspiration. Community is an essential feature of AFNs, and an important driver of the motivation and opportunity members seek. In the Polish context, this is particularly important in view of social capital, which is often cited as an obstacle to innovative projects. (Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011; Rosner & Stanny, 2017). The community aspect in these AFNs enables to overcome that gradually. However, one of the main challenges is

building and maintaining this community. For instance, in the case of market-based initiatives it involves building a loyal customer base and for non-market-based AFNs finding committed members. People from both, the market, as well as the non-market-oriented initiatives state that this is one of the most exhausting tasks on an everyday basis they face. Since ultimately their initiatives depends on the people who want to consume or engage in it. However, there are differences across the landscapes of producers and of AFNs. Especially members with an activist background have an advantage as they have an easier reach to a network of people from their previous engagement.

The AFNs in the region of Kraków are also strengthening civic values. For instance, the urban farm is self-organized and an independent bottom-up initiative. The same institutional associations can be ascribed to the food cooperative, whereas both promote self-responsibility and community corporation. The urban farm promotes further environmental protection through their ecological and permaculture methods. Whereas the food cooperative focuses on decision-making processes and solidarity with local producers. Thus, they resemble the most what is considered in literature to be an imitated AFNs from Western AFNs (Goszczyński et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the specific Polish context in which these AFNs are developing which makes it evident that there is no imitation as these initiatives are rather an adaptation. AFNs in the study area play a central role in promoting community and civic aspects which can be considered to be part of the “anti-institutional” traditions heritage as described by Bilewicz & Śpiewak (2015, p. 151). These efforts not only provide individuals with opportunities to learn about gardening and community engagement, but also foster trusting relationships between consumer and producers and solidarity with local producers.

### **7.3. The institutional characteristics of AFNs**

Additionally, there is a strong institutional character present in the development of AFNs in the region of Kraków. Which take on one hand the form of formal and informal control as described by Śpiewak & Goszczyński (2023). For instance, allotment gardens are governed by their allotment garden association. Their regulations extend to the community of members and thus a sort of control takes place on an institutional level as well as on a social level. In the example of allotment gardens this can lead to a social exclusion of members because they are not being accepted for the innovative approaches in this case about permaculture methods. This social exclusion mechanism is not based on class division as suggested by Goszczyński & Śpiewak (2022) but rather can be interpreted as a form of mistrust towards innovation as described by Goszczyński & Knieć, (2011).

On the other hand, there is also a supportive aspect evident with the involvement of institutions. The findings show that more novel initiatives are influenced by a top-down element which mainly



provide financial support and no evident regulations (at least non were mentioned by the research participant). This concerns the community gardens in Kraków which are being supported financially as well as educationally and most importantly in form of land leasing by the urban greenery management. In the case of the farmer's market Targ Pietruszkowy the first year was financed by international funds. Both of these institutional influences proved to be an opportunity to successfully establish an AFN. However, it is unclear how this is perceived by the members in general. The shift from this institutional involvement from regulations in allotment gardens towards financial and educative aspects could be recognized as a characteristic of post-transformation processes. Some AFNs also establish their own institutional mechanisms, such as certification schemes within farmer's markets, which could suggest a gap in governmental support or involvement.

Social exclusion has been studied also under the perspective of the lack of corporation between the different types of AFNs (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015). This can be confirmed in particular for the market-based initiatives, as they are independent of each other or even against each other in terms of being competitors. However, as each of the small-retail sales and farmer's market strive for uniqueness and are located in their own neighbourhood they are able to create their own niche markets. Thus, the biggest challenge here is the lack of corporation between these market-based initiatives against the conventional food chain stores. Furthermore, the corporation between the self-provisioning focused AFNs and more general novel initiatives appears to be interconnected, as shown by the linkages between the research participants of the formal interviews. How this networking takes place is unclear; the community gardens suggest a higher level of corporation than others due to their institutional characteristics.

#### **7.4. Reconnection to rural heritage through quality food**

To answer the main research question on how the development of AFNs is tied to post-transformation processes it is useful to go back to the literature which describes post-transformation processes and to identify them and describe what the implications are on the daily life of these producers. First, scholars from the CEE context note that AFNs which are not considered to be typically Western have been overlooked in research. These typically Western AFNs are characterized by increased requirements for production & production, reduced distance between consumers and producers, as well as new form of market governance (Forssell et al. 2015). Yet, it has been neglected until recently to study the historical developments and cultural features of other contexts as this enables to recognize AFNs beyond the Western scope of knowledge production as suggested by Jehlička et al. (2020). Studying the research on Polish AFNs has brought light to many embedded practices which are quietly sustainable (Kopczyńska, 2020; Smith & Jehlička

2013) and are also characterized by a SFSC. And substantially these underlie a specific post-transformation model. In the aim to understand the development of AFNs in the region of Kraków this model is integrated and referred to as post-transformation processes. From a historical perspective this refers to the dynamics which have been especially relevant since Poland has become part of the EU. However, naturally also processes before this point are relevant in the development of AFN.

One process which has been discussed in this chapter entails the long history of everyday embedded practice such as food self-provisioning, farmer's market trade and small retail-sales in the Polish context. Throughout the history however, they have been tied to a specific "anti-institutional" traditions to maintain the independency from invaders for instance the partition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and specifically under the Soviet rule in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015). Food in this case enabled to maintain a national identity (Bachórz 2018). This process explains the continuation of small-scale farming specific for the region of Kraków. Which are getting protected and even promoted from the current Polish government. Yet, they still face increasing economic pressure to diversify their livelihood to sustain a living (Sroka, 2015). This is the point where the development of AFNs comes in, allowing the "the quasi-peasant farmers" to survive (Halamska, 2016). AFNs provide a livelihood for these producers and daily recreate the meaning of the specific rural heritage.

Another relevant dynamic is the emergence of the new middle class which desires sophisticated consumption choices and has the affluence to afford these more expensive products (Filimonau et al., 2020). This new middle class has close ties to their rural roots which are rediscovered around the notion of quality (Goszczyński & Wróblewski, 2020). The emergence of AFNs is associated with a "turn to quality" towards transparency and different improved characteristics which are of higher quality such as local, ethical, environmentally friendly, healthy, and many more (Goodman, 2004; Rosol, 2018). The findings show that this can be confirmed as the main goal of AFN revolves around eating, offering, or producing healthy, natural, tasteful, fresh food. To summarize: quality food. In this research context it is tightly connected to family relations and past memories concerning food. Interestingly, research participants often referred about the taste of apples or fruits in general which used to be better and are now nowhere to be found. The findings present further that there is less association to local, ethical or environmentally friendly food. Rather the term 'natural' describes food which is not (heavily) processed, for instance traditional home-made food. This leads to an emerging consumer demand which AFNs are able to fulfil in their market-based way. It makes it further evident that, despite resentment towards the rural heritage, there remains a deep connection to it. Through eating quality food, people are seeking to reconnect with that heritage. In other cases, it also motivates people to reconnect with nature

through participating in recreational activities on a daily basis concerning AFNs. As this goes hand in hand with reflecting on the own food consumption and rethinking the relationship to food, this motivates people to pursue their passion in form of their livelihood. Thus, it is leading to the emergence of the new wave of farmers. Further, the discussion has shown how AFNs are underlying an institutional involvement from outside and also from inside by fostering educational and community aspect.

Food in this notion becomes more than just eating and is tightly connected to recreation, community, and way of thinking. Ultimately, the development of AFNs promotes the creation of additional value on food which has been desired among the emergence of the new middle class. It further fills a gap respectively maintains a connection to the rural heritage which can be linked to a folk revival.

### **7.5. Reflections on the research**

Grounded theory was a fitting choice for this study because it is traditionally used to develop new theories, methods, or empirical findings. The research represents a first effort in the field of AFNs in Poland, focusing specifically on a particular region and encompassing a diverse range of AFN practices. The ethnographic approach facilitated an immersive and everyday experience in the field. Allowing to capture the subtext of the research site. However, its subjective is immediate in the field as well as during the analysis. This is where the semi-structured formal interviews become valuable. As the analysis gets enriched with the voice of the research participants. This methodological triangulation ensured a comprehensive and multi-perspective research. Further, it aligns with the research tradition of (polish) AFNs enabling comparable research (Bilewicz, 2020; Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015; Goszczyński & Śpiewak, 2022; Kopczyńska, 2020; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2019). Thus, overall, the chosen methodology was appropriate for this research. Further, volunteering proved to be mutually beneficial.

Acknowledging the scope and findings of this study, it is important to identify certain limitations that may affect the interpretation of the results and provide directions for future research efforts. First, while there has been an effort to ensure diversity within the sample, it is important to recognize that the range of participants may not fully capture the full spectrum of experiences within AFNs. The diversity of perspectives within these networks may be overlooked by relying on only one or two representatives per AFN. Additionally, the absence of broader inclusion of all the actors involved, including institutional representatives such as those responsible for the urban greenery management, represents a notable gap in this study. Their insights could provide valuable perspectives on the dynamics of AFNs and increase the depth of understanding. Language barriers also represent a potential limitation, as they may have impacted communication and the depth of

insights gathered from participants. In addition, relying only on qualitative methods limits the range of data collected and potentially overlooks quantitative insight.

## 8 Conclusion

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This master's thesis explored the development of sustainable alternative modes of food production and distribution in the region of Kraków. The purpose has been to give an overview of specific AFNs in Kraków, and to shed light on individuals within the networks examined. More specifically, this thesis attempted to explore perceived opportunities and challenges of individuals within the context of AFNs. I examined these findings in the context of post-transformation processes in the region of Kraków which has been especially relevant when investigating AFNs in CEE countries (Goszczyński & Knieć, 2011; Smith & Jehlička, 2013). Post-transformation refers to the significant events occurring in the last twenty years since Poland joined the EU (Sroczyńska, 2021). These processes entail the emergence of a new middle class, a change in consumption behaviours, the continued relevance of small-scale farming in the region of Kraków and a selective reappearance of the peasant culture (Bachórz, 2018; Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015; Goszczyński, 2021; Halamska, 2016; Sroka et al., 2019). While cities undergo increased socio-economic development, rural areas experience stagnation, characterized by de-agrarianisation and population issues (Rosner & Stanny, 2017; Sroka et al., 2019).

I sought to highlight the daily life and the voice of the people in such networks through a qualitative approach. The research design is based on grounded theory including ethnographic approaches. During my fieldwork in Kraków and its broader region surrounding from June to October 2023, I explored seven AFNs. I employed methods including observation while volunteering at AFNs, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants and organizers of such initiatives.

The findings cover a range of initiatives that all revolve around short-food supply chains which can be characterized as face-to-face, proximate and extended relations (Renting et al., 2003) as well the case of self-provisioning. The initiatives started from individual self-provisioning, such as private and allotment gardening, which are embedded practices and tied to the rural heritage in Poland (Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2019; Kopczyńska, 2020; Smith & Jehlička, 2013). More recently these self-provisioning initiatives have expanded their social networks beyond the scope providing a family network. These novel initiatives include community gardens and the urban farm, food cooperative and some farmer's markets. They emphasize next to recreational aspects which involves the aspect of being in touch with nature, as well an educative opportunity whereby the AFN

becomes a place to experiment and learn about different aspects of the food systems. This involves growing food, addressing issues such as food waste, sustainability, healthy eating habits, soil conservation, and environmental protection. These important practices which are tied around the community foster the creation of civic values. It further includes decision-making together, establishing trustful relationships between farmer and consumer and ultimately questioning their food consumption. The scope of AFNs in the region of Kraków also involves market-based initiatives which promote the livelihood security for farmers through a shortened food supply chain such as the farmer's markets as well as greengrocers and corner stores. They are embedded in the food culture of Poland and through their focus on quality can fulfil the quality demands from the consumer (Bieszk-Stolorz & Dmytrów, 2021; Bilewicz & Śpiewak, 2015). As they adapt to the changing consumption behaviour, they also incorporate elements of education and community engagement. This is highlighted by the case of the organic store who is organizing cooking workshops as well as the farmer's market who educates about how to reduce food waste.

The institutional involvement plays a significant role in the construction of AFNs which already has been shown by Śpiewak & Goszczyński (2023). Such involvement can provide opportunities such as land and financial fundings. However, they pose a challenge in the form of informal and formal control. Further in some instances there is a lack of institutional support evident as in the case of small businesses who perceive a lack of governmental support and strict regulations. Moreover, members of such initiatives have to build a community and loyal client base themselves, which are inherently bottom-up processes and thus one of the biggest challenges the members of AFNs networks face.

Overall, it is emphasized that AFNs take on an important aspect of community, citizenship and institution building, the creation of which in turn is part of their everyday lives. These practices enable to overcome the in the literature often described low social capital of Polish people. This means there is a scepticism towards innovative projects from the community as well as lower trust in institutions (Goszczyński, 2021; Rosner & Stanny, 2017). This leads to a desire for self-responsibility among the people and whereby food is an important mechanism to gain control and maintain a certain national identity (Bachórz, 2018; Goszczyński, 2021). In this sense, AFNs in the region of Kraków provide a unique opportunity for producers in which they can reflect and reconnect to their rural heritage. This reconnection varies in intensity from person to person. Some view this as a recreational pursuit for instance in the case of new wave of farmers, while others make it the purpose of their life.

This research highlights the important contribution of studying traditional forms of food systems, particularly the sustainability inherent in everyday practices such as self-provisioning in private

and allotment gardens. As Jehlička et al. (2020) emphasize, exploring these practices not only reveals their resilience, but also challenges the dominance of Western knowledge paradigms. By decentring Western perspectives, this study argues for the recognition and integration of diverse local knowledge systems, especially from non-Western contexts, thereby enriching our understanding and approach to sustainability in food systems.

Further research could include investigating the opportunities and challenges of small retail sales, with an emphasis on their ability to build a community within a local neighbourhood. Furthermore, quantitative approaches could be used to systematically analyse the socio-economic background of participants in the context of the emerging middle class and thus focus on possible mechanisms of social exclusion. Finally, it would be interesting to further investigate the role of the institutional involvement of the green municipality administration (ZZM), especially their involvement in for example the creation of community gardens and other related sustainable initiatives such as educative workshops. How does the collaboration work, how is it perceived by the members of community gardens, and how do individuals within the ZZM perceive their role. This is related to understanding the role of other actors besides food producers and consumers in general, such as other organizers of AFNs. Such research allows for a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of how AFNs would develop in the context of the region of Kraków. However, such research would also contribute to understanding the development of AFNs in general.

# Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The understanding of embeddedness is deriving from Granovetter's (1985) interpretation of Polanyi's concept in 1944. He focuses on embedding social networks and personal relationships to overcome economic issues. This differs from Polanyi's understanding who perceives embeddedness broader including cultural and political aspects. He states that re-embedding these values into economic transitions enables to subordinate the market under the social and natural sphere and thereby parting from the self-regulating and rational market logic. Thereby the re-embeddedness is recreated in counter-movements such as AFNs (Misleh, 2022; Richards, 2015). Granovetter (1985) however, reject the dichotomy of dis-embedded and embedded markets and argues that economic market is never completely detached from its social context which has been shown in empirical analysis (Bilewicz, 2017; Richards, 2015).

<sup>ii</sup> One notable wholesales market, the Kompleks Handlowy RYBITWY, was established in Kraków in 1991 (Gołębiewski & Sobczak, 2017) and serves as a central point for research participants such as greengrocers to restock their inventory.

<sup>iii</sup> During this time the city experienced its greatest growth. This also included the establishment of Nowa Huta as a flagship real-socialist city which today is known as a district of Kraków. It was built on fertile lands with its workforce drawn from the surrounding villages, primarily from peasant families. Giving farmers a working-class career path in return. However, the mostly catholic workforce created a site of resistance and bringing their agricultural heritage into the city (Dixon-Gough et al., 2015; Romańczyk, 2018).

<sup>iv</sup> This grassroots movement emerged amidst the rise of Solidarność and addressed environmental concerns caused among others by the energy-intensive industry (Green Brigades, 1995).

<sup>v</sup> The heavy pollution was due to heavy industry, the geographically unfortunate location, and the intensive combustion of coal and wood. However, very recently the city made a lot of efforts to improve the air quality for example with the implementation of ban for the combustion of solid fuels. Fighting the pollution with success e.g. with the ban of burning solid fuels (Kaczmarczyk & Sowizdżał, 2024).

<sup>vi</sup> For instance, suburban areas lack adequate public transport infrastructure, there is a worsening issues of housing affordability which stimulates further socio-spatial segregation. Moreover, citizen engagement and municipal voting turnout remain low. Revitalization efforts from the municipalities remain often on a surface-level without sufficiently addressing the local communities (Romańczyk, 2018).

<sup>vii</sup> According to the Galician inheritance traditions it was custom to split the land of the family evenly between their children, thus resulting in further landscape fragmentation (Perdał, 2022).

<sup>viii</sup> The biggest farms are in the North-Western parts of Poland in the province of West Pomeranian (Zachodniopomorskie) with an average of 32.8 hectares (ARiMR, 2022).



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# Appendix

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**Appendix A1:** Interview guide English

**Appendix A2:** Interview guide Polish

**Appendix B:** Locations of most relevant field observations

**Appendix C1:** Concept map analysis for challenges

**Appendix C2:** Concept map analysis for challenges



**14. Past - History**

- 14.1. What changed since you started and how is this affecting you?
- 14.2. on a social,
- 14.3. economic,
- 14.4. political level?
- 14.5. Did you ever stop producing?
- 14.6. What change in your production after the introduction of privatization and market economy of Poland in 1989?

**15. Future - Succession**

- 15.1. How do you imagine your AFN to evolve in the future?
- 15.2. Who will take over your AFN in the future?
- 15.3. What is your view on the younger resp. older generation?
- 15.4. In an ideal world, in your opinion, what Poles should eat

**End**

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- I. Is there anything you want to add / say?
- II. Is there a product to which you have a special attachment and if so why, can you elaborate?
- III. Can I take a picture of (you) and your product?
- IV. Do you have anyone else in mind who might be interested in an interview with me?

# Appendix A2: Interview guide Polish

**Wywiad nr:**                      **AFN:**    **data:**                      **miejsce:**

*Wywiad będzie nagrywany i anonimowy. Rozmówca ma prawo do odrzucenia dowolnego pytania lub przerwania wywiadu w dowolnym momencie i może później zrezygnować z udziału w moich badaniach.*

## Krótki opis AFN

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- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>1. Produkcja w AFN</b><br>samowystarczalność, klienci,<br>rodzina, przyjaciele, sąsiedzi | 1.1. Co produkujesz?<br>1.2. Dla kogo produkujesz?   |
| <b>2. Wielkość AFN</b><br>zwierzęta   | 2.1. Jak duża jest Twoja farma/ogród?<br>2.2. Ile masz zwierząt?   |
| <b>3. Zatrudnienie / Pomoc</b><br>Wolontariusze, nieznajomi                                 | 3.1. Kto produkuje razem z tobą?<br>3.2. Ile osób zatrudniasz?<br>3.3. Czy płacisz swoim pracownikom?<br>3.4. Czy jesteś zatrudniony?                  |
| <b>4. Zasięg</b>  | 4.1. W ilu lokalizacjach prowadziłeś działalność?<br>4.2. W ilu miejscach sprzedawane są Twoje produkty?<br>4.3. Kto jeszcze otrzymuje Twoje produkty? |

## Osoba i jej rola oraz wychowanie (jak ludzie opisują samych siebie)

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- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>5. Rola</b><br>dwuzawodowiec   | 5.1. Jaka jest Twoja rola w AFN?<br>5.2. Czy zmieniłeś swoje stanowisko?<br>5.3. Jaki jest Twój zawód?  |
| <b>6. Start</b><br>aby rozpocząć/rozpocząć<br>(wewnętrzny vs. zewnętrzny)<br>edukacja, wsparcie, hobby, | 6.1. Jak rozpocząłeś pracę w [AFN]?<br>6.2. Skąd czerpałeś inspirację?<br>6.3. Czy Twoja rodzina posiadała farmę/ogród?<br>6.4. Czy jesteś pierwszym w swojej rodzinie/kregu społecznym, który podąża tą drogą? |

## Produkcja w AFN

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| <b>7. Możliwości</b> | 7.1. Co lubisz w swojej pracy?<br>7.2. Jakie były możliwości?<br>7.3. Jakie korzyści czerpiesz ze swojej pracy? |
| <b>8. Wyzwania</b>   | 8.1. Czego nie lubisz w swojej pracy?<br>8.2. Jakie były wyzwania?  |

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| <b>9. Jakie wartości produkujesz?</b><br>Świeża żywność, zaufanie,<br>lokalność, zrównoważony<br>rozwój, tradycja, folklor | 9.1. Dla Polski?<br>9.2. Dla ludzi/edukacji?<br>9.3. Dla środowiska?<br>9.4. Dla siebie?<br>9.5. Dla gospodarki (długo- czy krótkoterminowy zysk)?<br>9.6. W jaki sposób ludzie korzystają z AFN? |
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## Kontekst społeczny AFN (jeśli to konieczne)

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| <b>10. Klienci</b><br>Bogaci, biedni, młodzi,<br>starzy, wykształceni, Polacy,<br>obcokrajowcy, sprzedawcy<br>detaliczni | 10.1. Kim są Twoi klienci?<br>10.2. Jak zmienił się typ klientów od czasu rozpoczęcia działalności?<br>10.3. Jak wyglądają relacje z klientami?<br>10.4. Co zmieniliście w swojej produkcji ze względu na zapotrzebowanie klientów?<br>10.5. Czy dostrzegasz jakieś trendy?      |
| <b>11. Sieć społecznościowa</b><br>Lokalne, krajowe,<br>międzynarodowe   | 11.1. Czy jesteś związany z innymi ludźmi?<br>11.2. Jak wyglądają twoje relacje z innymi ludźmi?<br>11.3. Kto jest Twoją konkurencją?<br>11.4. Czy ktoś cię kopiuje?<br>11.5. Jaka jest Twoja opinia na temat [innych AFN]?<br>11.6. Czy jesteś zaangażowany w lokalną politykę? |

## Transformacja obszarów wiejskich

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| <b>12. Połączenie</b><br>wieś-miasto, dynamika<br>władzy, zewnętrzna,<br>wewnętrzna | 12.1. Czy możesz opisać mi związek Twojej sieci AFN z obszarem miejskim/wiejskim?<br>12.2. Jak wybrałeś miejsce swojej działalności?<br>12.3. Dlaczego nie działałeś na obszarze miejskim/wiejskim?   |
| <b>13. Rozwój obszarów wiejskich</b>  | 13.1. Czy AFN wspiera rozwój obszarów wiejskich?<br>13.2. W jakim kontekście obszary wiejskie są istotne dla produkcji AFN?<br>13.3. Jak myślisz/myśli Pan, jak można poprawić sytuację rolników obecnie, a wraz z tym wspierać rozwój obszarów wiejskich w Polsce? |

**14. Przeszłość - Historia**

- 14.1. Co zmieniło się od czasu, gdy zacząłeś i jak to na ciebie wpływa?
- 14.2. W sprawach społecznych,
- 14.3. ekonomiczne,
- 14.4. poziom polityczny?
- 14.5. Czy kiedykolwiek przestałeś produkować?
- 14.6. Co zmieniło się w Twojej produkcji po wprowadzeniu prywatyzacji i gospodarki rynkowej w Polsce w 1989 roku?

**15. Przyszłość - sukcesja**

- 15.1. Jak wyobrażasz sobie ewolucję AFN w przyszłości?
- 15.2. Kto przejmie AFN w przyszłości?
- 15.3. Jakie jest Twoje zdanie na temat młodszego i starszego pokolenia?
- 15.4. Jak, w idealnym świecie, według Ciebie, Polacy powinni jadać?

**Koniec**

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- I. Czy jest coś, co chciałbyś dodać / powiedzieć?
- II. Czy jest jakiś produkt, do którego jesteś szczególnie przywiązany, a jeśli tak, to dlaczego?
- III. Czy mogę zrobić zdjęcie (Ciebie) i Twojego produktu?
- IV. Czy masz na myśli kogoś innego, kto mógłby być zainteresowany wywiadem ze mną?

## Appendix B: Locations of most relevant field observations

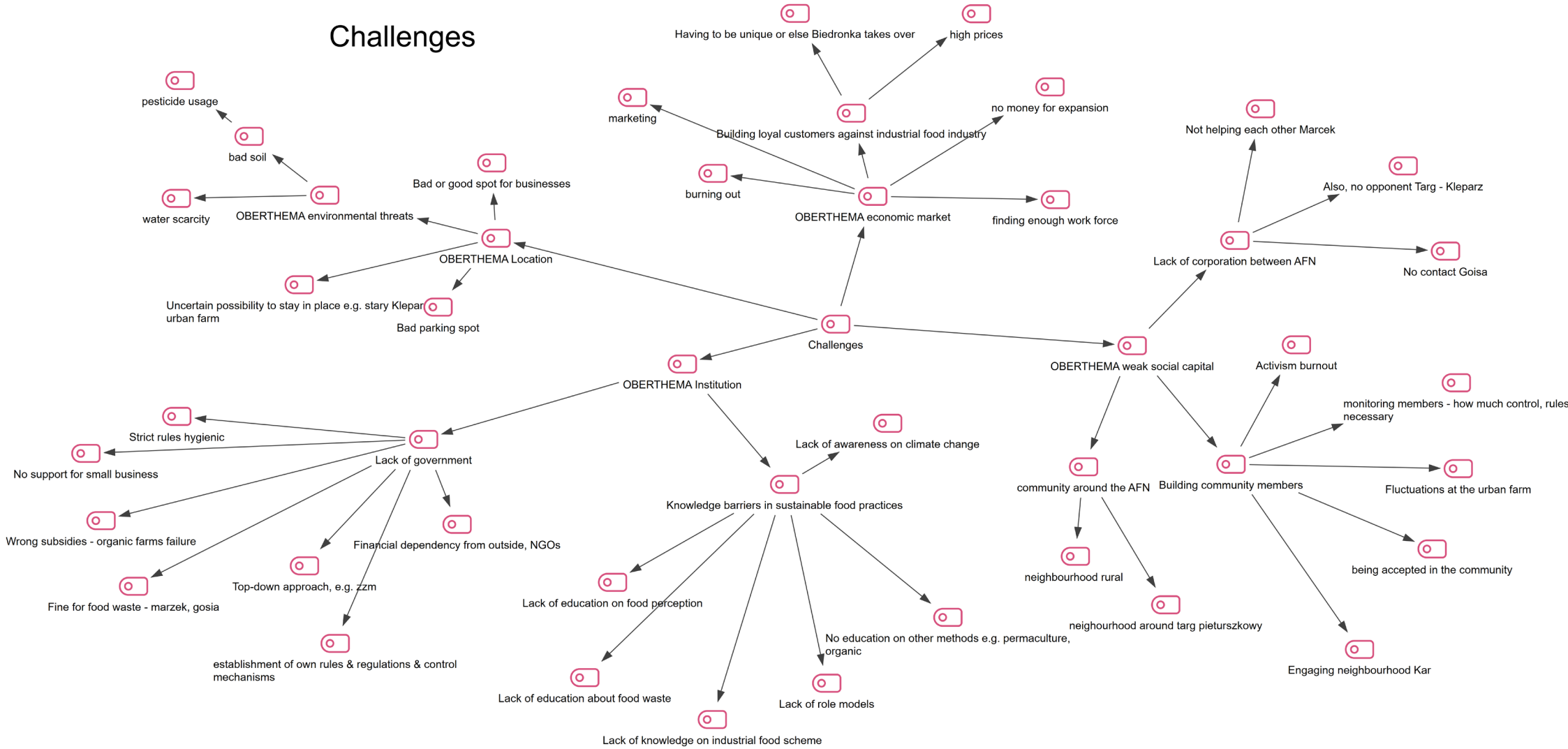
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*Overview of relevant observations including official names of location in polish. Observations took place between mid of June until – end of October 2023 in and around Kraków, Rzeszów and Zamość.*

Alternative Food Network	Location
Farmer's market in Krakow	Stary Kleparz, Nowy Kleparz, Nowy Plac, Hala Targowa, Bieńczycki Plac Targowy, Plac na Stawach, Kompleks Handlowy Rybitwy
Community gardens in Krakow	Ogród Społeczny Salwator; Ogród Społeczny Macierzanki; Letni Ogród Kultury w Pychowicach; Rodzinne Ogrody - Przestrzeń Dzikich Odkrywców
Specific AFNs in Krakow	Krakowska Farma Mjeska (urban farm) Wawelska Kooperatywa Spożywcza (food cooperative)
Other observations in Krakow	Greengrocers, allotment gardens, private gardens
Other observations outside of Krakow	Private gardens and farms farmer's market: Podkarpackie Centrum Hurtowe AGROHURT S.A. (Rzeszów), Targowisko Miejskie in Kielce, 18 <sup>th</sup> autumn garden market in Boguchwała

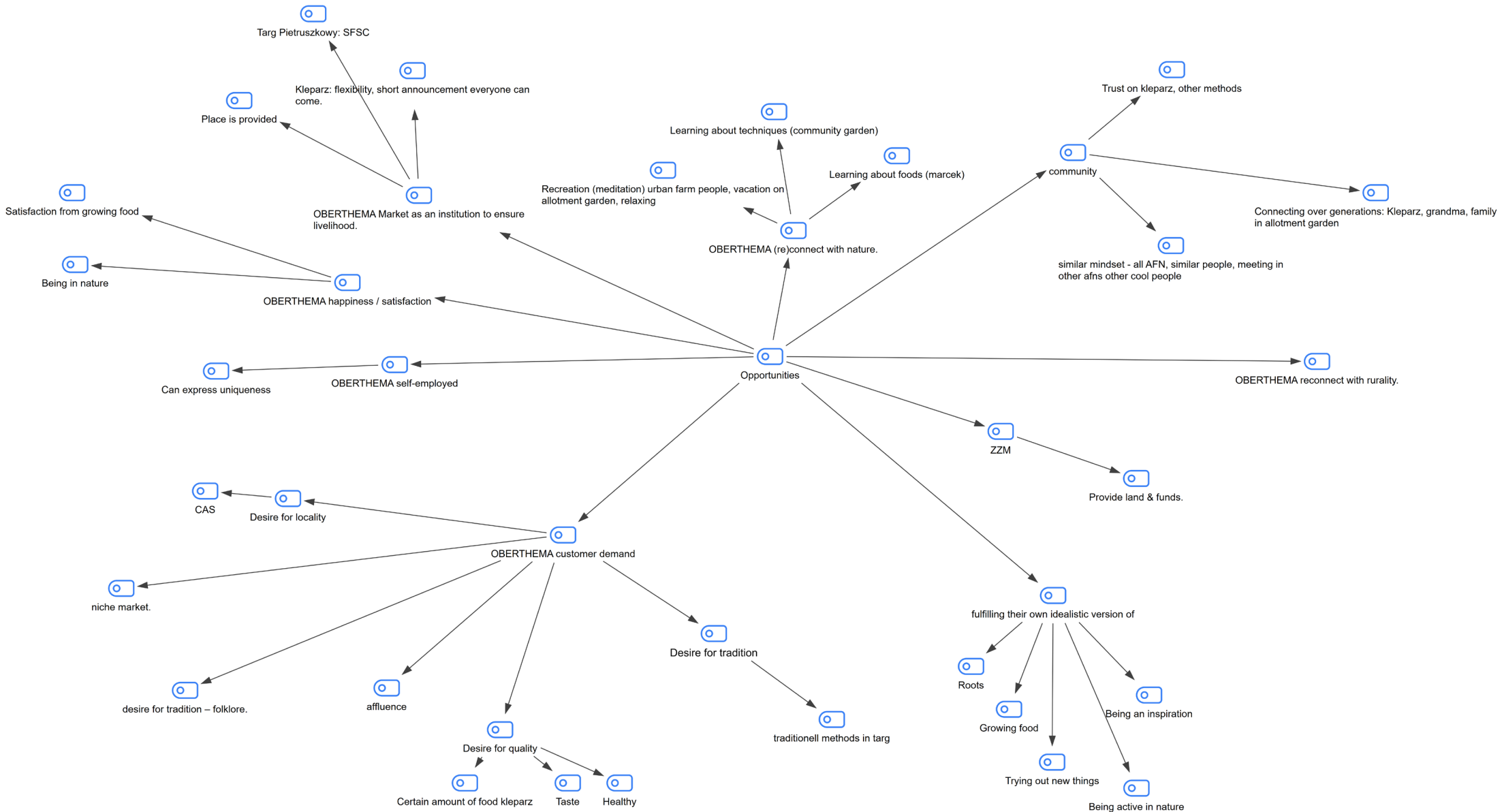
# Appendix C1: Concept map analysis for challenges

## Challenges



## Appendix C2: Concept map analysis for opportunities

# OPPORTUNITIES





## Personal declaration

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I hereby declare that the submitted thesis is the result of my own, independent work.  
All external sources are explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

Zürich, 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juliette Abbt'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a horizontal line extending from the end.

Juliette Abbt