



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Limited research has analyzed how the values espoused by Western alternative food systems, such as taste and territoriality, are adopted and refashioned in post-socialist societies. Muscovites now echo the global quality turn that reconnects consumers to their food sources. This research qualitatively explores the perspectives of the cosmopolitan consumers of the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative and various leaders of food system change in Moscow. Findings examine how perceptions of these actors shape the development of Moscow's alternative food network, particularly in regard to their constructions of place and the unique tastes they associate with regional localities. It also questions the extent to which social relationships among these actors attempt to bridge the growing rural-urban class divide in Russia. While the shift in consumer values reveals positive associations between food quality and territoriality, it raises concern of the socially embedded practices that perpetuate urban exclusivity and marginalize rural Russian farmers.

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Cultivating Taste and Place in Russia:  
Perspectives from Moscow's Alternative Food Network

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Erica D'Alessandro

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Erica D'Alessandro, Author

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*To Lena and Ivan, who showed me Moscow*



:: CHAPTER 1 ::  
INTRODUCTION  
THE RISE OF AN ALTERNATIVE AGRI-FOOD  
NETWORK IN MOSCOW

Nestled in the center of the expansive VDNKh trade show complex, better known as the *All-Russian Exhibition Center*, the *Friendship of the Peoples* fountain serves as a visual reminder of collectivization's great agrarian dream. The fountain depicts sixteen female statues carrying the harvestable bounty of their representative localities, each embodying their socialist republic's contribution to the centrally planned economy. Their agricultural ornaments serve as the only physical representation of the region's distinct cultural and gastronomical identities. Evoking romanticized notions of collectivism, the fountain was created to symbolically unite Soviet citizens and remind them what they had achieved together under communism. Yet the fountain more subtly tells a different story, one of how disparate nationalities and ethnicities were coerced to join the Soviet system. For the citizens who suffered famines and shortages during a time when "wealth was equated, first and foremost, with an abundance of food" (Kurkovsky 2007: 15), the fountain recalls the hardships of rural life and the peasant subsistence economy's reliance on dense social networks to meet their basic needs. What *Friendship of the Peoples* does not explicitly depict are the deleterious effects communism had on the Soviet, and subsequently, Russian, food system, as well as the state's inability to balance regional identities with a unified Soviet one.

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Figure 1.1: *The Friendship of the Peoples* fountain at VDNKh, more commonly referred to as the All-Russian Exposition Center.

This thesis expands on the construction and expression of place-based identities in the context of an emerging alternative agri-food network (AAFN) in post-socialist Russia. The championing of agriculture depicted by the *Friendship of the Peoples* fountain does not reflect the socio-economic reality of Russia's contemporary small-scale farmers. As inhabitants of rural regions remain marginalized by Moscow governance, it is crucial for anthropologists to understand how cosmopolitan Russians fabricate images of the rural space, how they forge relationships across geopolitical regions and the rural-urban divide, and how these relationships espouse the moral and social values of alternative food systems.

Initiatives within an alternative agri-food framework<sup>1</sup> aim to reconnect rural food producers with urban consumers (Bubinas 2011; DeLind 2006), emphasize economic development for small-scale producers (DeLind 2002; DeLind and Bingen 2008), tout quality distinctions based on place and taste (Barham 2003; Paxson 2010; Trubek 2008; Trubek and Bowen 2008), encourage communication and face-to-face interactions between food system actors (Allen 2004; Goland 2002; Kneafsey 2008; Selfa and Qazi 2005), promote innovation and information sharing (Fairfax et al. 2012), and build trust through transparent supply chains models (Kloppenburg et al. 2000). The widespread sharing of technology and information across cultures has prompted the extension and replication of AAFNs beyond the West.<sup>2</sup> This exploratory research aims to fill a gap in the literature regarding how the values of Western AAFNs are adopted and translated by actors in Moscow's food system in order to fit the unique cultural and social conditions of their local context.

Previous ethnographies of food consumption in post-socialist Russia have focused on how Russians assert themselves against Western influence through nationalism and nostalgia for the Soviet era (Caldwell 2002; Klumbyte 2010; Patico 2008). This study details just the opposite: how Russians interpret the values of Western-based food movements and modify them to reflect their current distrust in the market economy and the Russian government, but also to counter and complement the socially embedded beliefs and practices of their collectivist past. Through the narratives of two

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<sup>1</sup> The term "alternative agri-food network" is used throughout the text synonymously with "alternative food network," "alternative food district," and "alternative food system." If any distinction should be made between the terms, "network" and "district" imply nodes of interconnected actors within the greater food "system." The use of the word "alternative" is contested in more detail on page 15.

<sup>2</sup> I use "West" to refer to states within the European Union, the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and other countries not formerly part of the Soviet Union, where alternative food systems have developed to the point of mainstream recognition. As the evolving concept of an AAFN may not be pinpointed to a specific geographical origin, the "West" or "Western" appear the most appropriate terminology to collectively describe the geographic locality of food movements occurring beyond the post-socialist sphere.

understudied perspectives within alternative agri-food research—cosmopolitan consumers and AAFN project leaders—this thesis will illustrate the ways in which actors challenge Russia’s conventional food system and craft new post-socialist identities through their engagement in market alternatives. Examining the significance of the Russian consumer experience during the Soviet and post-socialist eras provide a deeper contextual foundation for the manuscripts that follow.

### *Why Russia?*

In the over twenty years since the transition from the collective to the market economy began, the ways in which Russian society has adapted to the social, cultural, and political changes wrought by the economic shift have become increasingly evident. Anthropologists working in post-Soviet societies must find a balance between overgeneralizing and downplaying the effects the Soviet experience had on identity creation, consumption, and class distinction in contemporary Russia. The perpetuation of Soviet identity influences cosmopolitan consumers’ perceptions of socio-economic disparities, market fluctuations, and everyday constructions of value. In contrast to Soviet collectivism, the negative effects of globalization, corporate capitalism, and growing class divisions have carved out space in post-socialist Russia for new material indices of value rooted in social exclusivity (Patino 2005, 2008).

In light of Russia’s historically recent economic transformation, anthropologists must ask how this transition has affected the development of social relationships occurring within Russia’s contemporary food system (Patino and Caldwell 2002). Previous research has stressed the remnants of embedded Soviet values in moral, collectivist, and anti-market ways (Wegren 2005). I argue that instead of using embedded values as a default for explaining contemporary consumption practices, these values are continually refashioned to fit the social and cultural complexities of the post-socialist society,

creating a hybrid of old and new that complement the peculiarities of the local context. Such an analysis holds greater implication beyond cosmopolitan Moscow, as it may be applied to other former post-Soviet republics seeking to understand how locally constructed values are negotiated by their collectivist past. Embracing the positive elements of socialism while disengaging from the negative remnants of Russians' shared history becomes the foundation of institutions built on newly forged social relationships (Gerkey 2013).

#### *Why consumption?*

Consumption acts as a vital expression of culture and a reflection of social change. Defining consumption incorporates analysis at the points of production, market access, transportation, the purchasing experience, and physical embodiment (Dixon 1999). Exercised through everyday behaviors, practices, and social norms, consumption represents the result of conscious and subconscious desires, distinguishers of values, and expressions of identity and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Key theorists such as Bourdieu (1984) and Appadurai (1986) brought the study of consumption to the field of anthropology from economics. Yet even within the discipline, analysis and theorizing of consumption often situates social actors in passive positions. It also tends to address social relationships within markets in regard to the economic terms of supply and demand (Miller 1995). In lieu of seeing social actors as inherently *social*, these analyses see consumption in the market economy as occurring within a vacuum (Appadurai 1986; Goodman and DuPuis 2002).

Observing the mundane, day-to-day behaviors, practices, and rituals of consumers most comprehensively approaches the study of consumption in the anthropological sense. Through consumers' daily habituated practices, the goods they purchase become socially embedded and evoke cultural identities, power differentials, and the effects of

the market economy within a local context (Dixon 1999; Patico and Caldwell 2002). Understanding consumer motivations speaks to how choice becomes normalized, even mechanized, by social and political change (Humphrey 2002). How consumers construct notions of place and how it affects their consumption habits reflects the dynamic social relationships and economic disparities that exist within a defined space. To complicate this image, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) argue that contemporary consumers construct their sense of self in relation to a global community of consumers. When cast in an international context, consumers seek new forms of social distinctions that may no longer have roots in local places or spaces (Miller 1995).

#### *Why food consumption?*

Food, in particular, acts as a significant expression of consumption as it is both physically embodied and socially embedded. Societies construct value around food because of the intimate relationship the embodiment process entails (Patico and Caldwell 2002). Food consumption also constructs social relationships, using commodities to identify socioeconomic variables in order to reconfigure and create identity (Bubinas 2011). Unlike other commodities, food takes on symbolic properties that suggest how consumer preferences and practices have the power to reshape food systems and culinary cultures (Selfa and Qazi 2005). Ultimately, the consumption of food expresses power on the part of the consumer: by forging connections with other social actors within a network, greater food system change may occur (Goland 2002).

#### *Russian consumption in context*

Consumers living in the centrally planned Soviet economy fell subject to chronic food shortages, inefficient regional trading networks, and a paucity of technological innovation (Zimmer 1985). This economic structure caused high transportation costs between regions that specialized in the state-sponsored production of particular goods

(Kumo 2004). While the Soviet economy failed to meet even the most basic needs of its citizens, it promoted the idea that the quality of life under socialism surpassed that of Western societies. Soviet consumption enforced strict social and moral codes, encouraging the development of an alternative economy around dense social networks of communication and informal exchange (Humphrey 2002; Patico and Caldwell 2002; Ledeneva 1999). These social networks existed across the Soviet Union but featured most predominantly in rural spaces.

Distrust in the state to meet their daily needs pushed Soviet citizens toward small-scale subsistence agriculture. Seen in few late industrial market economies, a significant population of contemporary Russians still heavily relies on household-level cultivation for survival (Humphrey 2002; Pallot and Nefedova 2003, 2007; Southworth 2006). Many household producers grow and sell their products from the *dacha*, rural second homes that line the peripheries of large cities in Russia. Pallot and Nefedova (2007) call for a more nuanced approach to understanding the motivations of these small-scale producers in the post-socialist environment: "If the 'entrepreneurial impulse' that undoubtedly exists in the household sector is to be harnessed to restart the farmer movement, it is obvious that much thought needs to be put into the development of incentives that would encourage households to invest in their smallholdings" (200). Yet *dachas* also provide a spatial reference for understanding the emerging inequalities fostered by Russia's transition, as they increasingly serve as displays of wealth or are characterized as spaces of leisure rather than production in a now privatized real estate economy (Zavisca 2003).

Consumer choice is a relatively new notion for contemporary Russians (Patiko 2003). The post-socialist environment presented a wealth of novel retail outlets that changed the way Russians interacted with material goods. A crisis of consumer values arose with

Russia's transition to the market economy (Humphrey 2002), as new and old cultural patterns continue to be reshaped at the national, regional, and local level—the latter of which most clearly illustrates the range of interpersonal relationships that have coincided with the shift (Patico and Caldwell 2002). To what extent has Russia's economic transition affected the consumption of food at the local level, adjusting Soviet traditions to fit the contemporary era? In one sense, the economic shift impacted Russians' food acquisition strategies, through which they must continually negotiate and construct values around material imports of Western culture, including food. Changing perceptions of quality accompanied the increased everydayness of foreign goods. Throughout the marketization of the early 1990s, the political role of Western goods traded places with domestic products: whereas imported foods were once othered and special, buying domestic became an act of resistance against the homogenizing effects of the new market economy (Boym 2001; Caldwell 2002; Humphrey 1995; Patico 2008).

Cook and Crang (1996) describe these local-level responses as products of *geographical knowledges*, or a localized understanding of the paths commodities take through the global food system. Discourses around food rely on "cultural meanings of places and spaces to operate their deployment of various constructed knowledges where food and cultural objects and actors associate them from what settings they should be situated, encountered and used" (Patico 2008: 103-4). To a certain extent, these place-based values of the Soviet regime have survived in the memory of post-socialist consumers who continue to seek food systems rooted in place and taste. Globally, increasing distrust in conventional, industrial food systems has prompted consumer awareness and reception of more alternative methods of food production. Though the global food system continues to champion conventional agriculture, personal health and food safety concerns push consumers to seek products based on quality over quantity (Goodman 2003; Murdoch et al. 2000).

The expansion of the free market and the increase in outlets for food consumption in Russia have forced small-scale producers to further differentiate themselves in adherence with evolving consumer preferences. Post-socialist, urban, cosmopolitan consumers aim to increase their economic status and express their values through their consumption of quality food while they simultaneously assert their new Russian identity within a global community of consumers (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Patico 2003). Small-scale producers must respond to contemporary demands no longer defined by collectivism. Consumption becomes a significant social act through which post-socialist citizens now see themselves in symbolic relation to a society that rejects nostalgia for Soviet times (Berdahl 2005; Fehérváry 2002; Humphrey 1995, 2002; Patico 2008; Rivkin-Fish 2009). Through a juxtaposition of the global and the local, consumer narratives most comprehensively express how urban Russians experience the post-socialist market economy (Patico and Caldwell 2002).

## THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis, a compilation of manuscripts, illustrates the data collection, findings, and analysis that emerged from nine weeks of fieldwork in Moscow, Russia. The study qualitatively explores the perspectives of the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative's consumers and various innovators of food systems change. The actors within this post-socialist alternative food network elucidate the extent to which relationships construct values of quality based on place and taste. I specifically focus this study on food system members with relationships to *LavkaLavka*, as the cooperative has fueled the development of Moscow's alternative food network.

Chapter 2, *Bridging the Rural-Urban Divide in Russia: Innovators' Perspectives on Moscow's Alternative Food District*, discusses the ways in which alternative food network innovators mitigate the social, economic, and political obstacles that challenge the growth of their projects in Moscow. In particular, it looks at the crucial role innovators play in connecting network actors to help bridge the rural-urban divide between Russian farmers and cosmopolitan consumers. Chapter 3, *Reterritorializing Food in Post-Socialist Spaces: Valuations of Place and Taste by Consumers of a Moscow Farmer Cooperative*, assesses consumer perspectives of attributes that define food quality, such as origin labeling, ecology, artisan production methods, and taste. It addresses how socially embedded remnants of the collectivist era, such as Soviet regionalism and *dacha* culture, both complement and distract from the *LavkaLavka* cooperative's ability to foster a notion of *terroir*. Each manuscript individually details the appropriate literature, particular methods, relevant research findings, and a comprehensive discussion. Finally, an overarching conclusion in chapter 4 bridges the narratives presented in each manuscript and raises questions about the direction of Moscow's alternative food network. It also presents practical applications for the findings, study limitations, and recommendations for further research.

## METHODS & POSITIONALITY

*LavkaLavka* was not unknown to me before my fieldwork. I had encountered the cooperative two years before on an exploratory trip to Russia, during which I lived and worked on one of their producer's farms and helped *LavkaLavka* translate their website from Russian to English, as well as reached out to expatriates living in Moscow. Rekindling a relationship with the cooperative for this research felt organic—a natural entry into the growing community of alternative food network actors, many of whom had entered the scene since my initial trip.

I worked side-by-side with employees of *LavkaLavka* in order to find participants to interview. The cooperative was interested in my findings, feeling they would better advise their organizational development. The dual purpose of my research—for my own study and that of the cooperative—affected the events I attended and questions I asked of consumers. In order to meet the cooperative's interests, I focused on details that would better inform their marketing, such as where consumers shopped, how often they purchased food, and what they bought. In addition to the consumers who self-identified to participate in the research, many employees and consumers directed me toward initiatives beyond *LavkaLavka*. I relied on these social connections to help connect me to other actors in Moscow's alternative food network. Some of the subsequent interviews happened by chance: I walked into a café and struck up a conversation with the co-owner about his alternative food project. A majority, however, were planned in advance, utilizing semi-structured interview questions that afforded the conversation flexibility and the ability to pursue topics raised by the participant.

My interest in the topic aided my ability to converse with participants who were equally as passionate about food systems issues. However, despite the enthusiasm I received from some, many obstacles plagued my fieldwork. Social science research is not as

common in Russia, especially in agri-food studies, so finding willing participants was a challenge. While I cannot speak to the consumers or project organizers I did not interview, I worried my nationality and Russian language skills affected my ability to garner interest in my research. Russian friends quickly reassured me that general societal distrust was to blame, regardless of my country of origin. In fact, my positionality often worked to my benefit during interviews: many participants were anxious to hear my take on Russia's alternative food movement and how it compared to the networks of alternative agriculture I had studied in the U.S.

Utilizing the internet was a key means for reaching out to potential research participants. As the cooperative is primarily based online, ignoring this medium would have excluded a majority of the cooperative's consumers. However, focusing as heavily on it as I did excluded the voices of those with little or no access to a computer. The fact that many of the social interactions between *LavkaLavka*, consumers, and producers occur online both helped and hindered my ability to recruit study participants. Consumers trusted my research when they saw the cooperative's endorsement. However, online interactions were potentially less effective than in person communication in explaining my study objectives, which may have prevented others from participating. Eventually, with enough engagement through social networking sites, I was able to attract a diverse sample of interested and informative participants.

:: CHAPTER 2 ::  
BRIDGING THE RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE IN RUSSIA:  
INNOVATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON MOSCOW'S  
ALTERNATIVE FOOD DISTRICT

ABSTRACT

Organizers of the innovative projects that define Moscow's burgeoning alternative food district have adopted and adapted attributes of Western alternative food systems to fit the particularities of their cosmopolitan post-socialist environment. These organizers emphasize reconnecting social actors within an alternative framework, promoting consumer education of quality food, and bridging the rural-urban class divide in Russia. This exploratory research uses a qualitative approach to examine how project innovators construct their alternative food network through a complicated web of social relations. Findings suggest innovators seek more outlets for collaboration but the extent to which these unions include rural actors was limited to a certain class of "businessmen farmers," whose social and financial mobility set them apart from the majority of Russia's rural inhabitants. These class-based connections raise questions about the long-term cultural and socio-economic effects an influx of wealthy, cosmopolitan farmers will have on rural Russia.

MOSCOW'S ALTERNATIVE AGRI-FOOD NETWORK

Everyday consumption habits, retail structuring, and restaurant culture transformed dramatically with Russia's introduction to the global market economy. Much

anthropological research has focused on how this economic transition altered the informal social networks Soviet citizens relied on in their food acquisition strategies (Caldwell 2002; Patico 2008; Patico & Caldwell 2002). With the economic transition, material individualism supplanted the sociality of commodity transactions under communism, importing cosmopolitan consumer values alongside a surfeit of novel products from the global marketplace (Rivkin-Fish and Trubina 2010). Contemporary urban Russian consumers have become accustomed to seeing trans-national retail chains, highly processed food, and increased market competition for both high and low-end products. Embodied in material possessions and food consumption, growing class disparities have emerged alongside soaring economic growth in post-socialist Russia.

Since the transition to the market economy, consumers have also experienced the deleterious effects of a food system remodeled by globalization and corporate capitalism. Muscovites, now armed with the purchasing power of capitalism, have begun to express their discontent with the conventional agri-food system. Urban Russians increasingly seek alternatives through innovative social projects centered on generating consumer access to high quality food. This unconventional approach favors small-scale, entrepreneurial activity that has brought a diverse array of actors together under the encompassing framework of an alternative agri-food network (AAFN) within the past five years. Initiatives within this framework focus on shortening market supply chains between producers and consumers that reconnect urban Muscovites to their rural food sources.

This research examines the nature and extent of the social connections forged by a group of project innovators leading Moscow's nascent alternative agri-food network. An in-depth exploration of their relational attributes and communication strategies reveals

a rich understanding of the values and goals innovators transmit across the network. I aim to describe how everyday social interactions and consumption habits in this post-socialist society reflect a Russian interpretation of the values of trust, inclusivity, and reciprocity detailed in Western alternative agri-food literature (e.g., Allen 2004; DeLind 2002; Goodman 2003; Hinrichs 2000; Kloppenburg et al. 2000; Murdoch et al. 2000). How are project organizers within Moscow's alternative food network engaging with one another, with producers, and with consumers? How do these social relationships compare to the ideals espoused by Western AAFNs? How are partnerships between urban projects and rural food producers helping to bridge Russia's rural-urban divide? What does the present level of social engagement suggest about the future of Moscow's alternative food system, a change in consumer mentalities, and the revival of small-scale agriculture in Russia's rural regions?

I approach these questions through an exploratory, qualitative analysis of the extent of collaboration and social connectivity between the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative and other innovative food projects in Moscow. I adapt the *industrial district* concept developed by Alfred Marshall (1890) as applied by Brusco (1982) and Fairfax et al. (2012) to describe a model of food-related entrepreneurial activity in Moscow that has created a shared industry within a specific place. Through the narratives of innovative district actors, I question the ways in which alternative food initiatives work to educate consumers and edit their understanding of quality food. I also explore the nature of project leaders' engagement with small-scale Russian food producers across the rural-urban divide.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOSCOW'S DISTRICT

No initiative has been more visible in promoting the objectives of Moscow's alternative food network than the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative. The cooperative consists of over 100 farmers who produce and sell their products to Muscovites through *LavkaLavka* via an online order and delivery system, as well as physical storefronts. Beyond solely connecting rural farmers to urban consumers who value the quality of the food they produce, *LavkaLavka* makes connections between taste and place, celebrating the distinct local ecologies of Russia's climatically diverse territory. Their model is not simply a market outlet for farmers: the cooperative believes their efforts have the power to revolutionize how Muscovites define and value quality food.

But *LavkaLavka* is not alone. Within the past few years, a variety of initiatives have helped foster a wider conversation around food in various ways: supper clubs, food trucks, pop-up cafes, farm-to-table restaurants. While the growing presence of alternative food projects in Moscow reflects the global consumer 'turn' toward quality (Goodman 2003; Murdoch et al. 2000), alternative initiatives in post-socialist societies may exhibit different motivators and goals given the nature of their entrepreneurial socio-economic environments (Spilková et al. 2012). Unquestioningly adopting values and practices rooted in Western AAFNs overshadows expressions of Russia's rich cultural history that may enhance or deter the adaptation of an alternative framework specified for the local context. Actors within Moscow's budding AAFN may source inspiration from various Western movements and projects, but they also find unique ways to repurpose them to fit their cosmopolitan environment. This refashioning prompts an exploration into how tenets of Western alternative frameworks such as trust, social inclusivity, collaboration, and human ties have translated to a local setting wrought with corruption, growing class divisions, distinctions along a rural-urban divide, and neoliberal individualism.

### *District representatives*

Over the course of nine weeks of fieldwork in Moscow, Russia in 2013, I spoke with eight organizers leading various alternative food projects and observed their initiatives operating with a shared goal: to change Russian consumers' definition of quality food. I targeted project founders and co-founders, directors, and organizers of alternative food initiatives because these leaders position themselves to affect food system change and have the greatest understanding of the network of social relationships within their industrial district (Fairfax et al. 2012; Feenstra 1997). These findings represent only a portion of the interviews conducted during this period of research. Alongside project leaders, I conducted a case study of the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative and interviewed a sample of consumers (n=15) and employees (n=6) to gain a more in-depth understanding of how consumer beliefs and practices influence the innovation and direction of the district. While their findings are not explicitly depicted, their narratives informed my analysis and provided conceptual understanding of the district as a whole.

Moscow served as an ideal site for my research because it acts as the nucleus of Russia's urban-based social movements. Conducting research over the summer months in the city proved useful as it afforded me the opportunity to attend and participate in outdoor food festivals, markets, new store openings, and a conference on urban food system challenges. Participants were limited to representatives whose projects focused, in some capacity, on food quality, farmer-direct marketing, or small-scale, organic agricultural cooperatives. However, initiatives spanned beyond Moscow's city limit—an important factor when considering the social and cultural dynamics created by these rural extensions. Two participants were producers involved in rural farming projects that practiced sustainable, organic methods of agriculture. Another two connected rural farmers to urban consumers through farmer-direct supply chain models. The remaining

four project leaders worked on various advocacy and urban food projects that sought to cultivate social relationships over food.

Sampling was based on personal recommendations from other actors within the alternative food network and research on Moscow's food system. In addition, I used online social networking sites, websites, and events to find and reach out to leaders of food-related initiatives. I held individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews that generally lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half with each innovator. Questions during the interview focused on the details of organizers' projects and their motivations to start their initiatives. I also asked participants to describe their social ties to other actors in the district, the nature of these connections, and how important these relationships were to the success of the district. Finally, I questioned them on their perceptions of class divisions between rural and urban Russia, as well as the greater food system challenges they saw infringing on the development of the district. All interviews were conducted either in Russian, English, or both, depending on the participant's preference. A Russian interpreter was present during interviews held in Russian to help translate consumer responses into English. Interviews and field notes from participant observation of various food projects and events were transcribed and coded based on salient themes.

#### *Applying the industrial district model*

Alternative food movements encourage the construction of new associational networks that circumvent the industrial model of agriculture, build relationships with consumers, and foster notions of quality that are specifically tied to a place or a method of production (Marsden et al. 2002; DuPuis and Goodman 2005). The inability of the global food system to respond to the continual innovation of social actors at the local level highlights the disadvantage of its scale and vertically integrated structure (Selfa

and Qazi 2005). Using the word “alternative” denotes attributes of a food system that include shortened supply chains, direct points of sale between consumers and producers, transparency in marketing and communication, and consumer access to information regarding growing techniques and product ingredients. Yet the label “alternative” implies a dichotomy with the conventional food system that encourages producers and consumers to align with one system over the other. Kneafsey (2008) feels this dualistic nature only further normalizes and legitimizes the methods of conventional, productivist agriculture. In addition, polarizing the two genres of production does not categorize the extent of hybrid, profit-driven “alternative” initiatives that have emerged as a result of market forces, such as the industrial organic food system in the U.S. However, one might argue that this binary exposes the exceptional aspects of such hybrids, as well as the tension they must navigate in order to be successful.

One method of categorizing the initiatives embodied in AAFNs that places less emphasis on the network’s alternativeness is the industrial district model. Developed by Alfred Marshall (1890), use of the model provides insight on how networks of specialized industry may overcome market forces that challenge the collaborative goals of AAFNs. Industrial districts emerge from repeated social interactions aligned with a particular type of trade occurring within a defined space. Calling these districts “industrial” refers to their power to foster an industry composed primarily of small or medium-sized businesses that cooperate to increase their market influence. District producers use craftsmen and artisan techniques as an alternative to the unskilled, transferable factory labor that has driven industrialization and globalization.

The district relies on communication and social interactions between its participants to create a *common enterprise*, or shared goal (Fairfax et al. 2012: 26). Connected by a

unified economic activity, small-scale artisans, entrepreneurs, and social activists prioritize innovation that focuses on quality over profit and cooperation over competition. Competition naturally exists, for “without competition within the district and from outside it, it is difficult to create and sustain the risk taking that underlies innovation” (Fairfax et al. 2012: 28). Development rooted in quality, on the other hand, supports the rise in skilled laborers who—in food systems in particular—appropriate place-based knowledge to give a district a sense of *terroir*, or taste of place. The focus on building local markets helps members earn steady capital—though this is often not the primary focus of their entrepreneurial venture.

Repeated face-to-face interactions of actors within a district increase opportunities to engage with fellow entrepreneurs and invites collaboration. The mutual support of district actors creates flexible and porous boundaries for production and production sites that are less explicit than other sectors of industry. A district may offer services, space, or machinery to individuals that would be inaccessible to those outside of the district. These socially based networks improve and attract new talent who continue to integrate knowledge and increase expectations of quality in the district. In addition, regulatory management by district actors encourages the ease of entry for new participants and the movement of capital from urban to rural areas.

The industrial district model has been used to describe many pockets of specialized industry in all fields, including niche industries existing within conventional food systems. Brusco (1982) cited the industrial district concept to explain the revival of small-scale, artisan food industries and businesses in Italy’s Emilia-Romagna region. Similarly, Fairfax et al. (2012) modified a version of the model to describe the innovation and expansion of the social web of food producers and advocacy groups in the San Francisco Bay Area. While traditionally industrial districts are small and focus on one

kind of industry, in Moscow, the scope of production encompasses both rural and urban actors leading highly diverse food-related projects. Adapting Marshall's industrial district concept to the Russian context explains how individual and institutional actors in Moscow promote collective learning by engaging a shared culture rooted in place. The application of the model to place-based food systems stresses the importance of face-to-face relationships, as well as how local processes respond to global change, how consumers value food quality, and how trust among actors allows districts to diminish the principles of the industrial agricultural model while still participating in the market economy. These food-related districts enjoy longevity because they seek permanent social change in the way participants understand and value food production and consumption.

Civic activism also leads to a more cohesive district and drives its development. DuPuis and Gillon (2009) propose that civic engagement is largely responsible for creating and perpetuating the values of alternative food networks. Yet Marshall's original conception of an industrial district rarely focuses on individuals and their influence on the greater network of social relationships. Fairfax et al. (2012) argue this happens because key weaknesses of the district often appear beyond the reach of even its most dedicated actors, whom they deem *mavens* for the Bay Area (30). I refer to these *mavens* in Moscow as *innovators* to characterize their novelty to the post-socialist space, as well as to describe the creative ways they pursue the goals of the district. Not only do they promote district ideals, they actively shape the common enterprise, as well as encourage communication and social interaction between district members. Spotlighting the actors spearheading projects in Moscow that espouse values of food quality and social trust is crucial to understanding the nature and extent of the social relationships within the district.



Figure 2.1: Fley café utilizes a farmer-direct marketing model.

#### *District wide quality turn*

The focus on artisanal production in Moscow's industrial district parallels Goodman's (2003) quality turn in the food system when consumers begin to seek fresh, organic, fair trade, or GMO free products over the homogenized products of conventional food systems. Over time, the *common enterprise* of food quality attracts more participants who grow and diversify the district by raising expectations, encouraging innovation, and improving practices (Fairfax et al. 2012). This enterprise emerges not only from the district's growth, but also from regular communication among participants regarding their common goals. The quality bar rises with new entrants who, in turn, continually challenge the status quo. The actors in Moscow's alternative food district hail from

diverse backgrounds, employ different types of food-related projects, and express varying goals for their initiatives. However, common themes emerged from our conversations that complement the adaptation of Marshall's district model and suggest that innovators are committed to a common enterprise.

I came across the quaint farm-to-table shop and café named *Fley* by recommendation from a consumer of *LavkaLavka*. Tucked away in an alley of Moscow's *Kitay Gored* neighborhood, the warmth of the earth tone decor felt in sharp contrast to the shop's concrete facade. Igor, the project's co-founder, offered me coffee and directed me to a booth where we struck up a conversation. *Fley* has a similar mission to *LavkaLavka* but it operates at a much smaller scale, sourcing from about 10 farmers and household producers (*Figure 2.1*). When I asked Igor if he felt more Muscovite consumers were expressing interest in quality food, he noted this mentality shift: "People have started thinking. Thanks to *LavkaLavka* they have started." His quote highlights how the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative has paved the way for Igor and others, acting as an inspiring model to emulate.

In fact, all innovators I spoke with confided they had seen small but positive changes to Russia's food system within the last few years. Viktor, an advocate for *Slow Food Russia*, echoed Igor's sentiments about *LavkaLavka*'s influence in the district. Huddled over shortened tables at a hidden Indian restaurant around the corner from *Fley*, I asked Viktor, a charismatic, self-proclaimed "lifestyle guru," what suggestions he had to help develop the district. He explained:

*All we need to do is to make it prestigious, trendy. Turn the focus to the quality of food—local food. You know, why it's good, why it's important. And this is probably the reason why LavkaLavka is so enormously prosperous and big and growing and so on. I think when I started dealing with Slow Food four years, five*

years ago, there were three internet businesses with delivery. Now there are about 15 probably! So it became a regular normal thing for many families that they have something delivered to their homes straight from the farm.

Viktor noted that the consumer quality turn was the emphasis of *LavkaLavka's* marketing, which had come to define the district's *common enterprise*.



Figure 2.2: Pop-up cafés organized by *Mestnaya Yeda* in conjunction with an urban food conference at the *Strelka Institute* in Moscow.

I met another project organizer, Nastia of *Mestnaya Yeda* (Local Food), at a hip new café called *Double B*—a place for Moscow's hipsters to congregate and nurture a budding affection for coffee in a traditionally tea-drinking society. Over the whirl of the espresso machine, Nastia spoke rapidly and enthusiastically, divulging her personal

struggle to gain consumer support. *Mestnaya Yeda* acts as a platform for food startups to test their business concepts at various pop-up markets around the city (Figure 2.2). It holds educational seminars for food entrepreneurs on methods for developing a business plan, securing capital, avoiding debt, and sustainably expanding their venture. When I asked Nastia about whether or not quality was a crucial component of *Mestnaya Yeda's* organizational philosophy, she described the care entrepreneurs took when choosing their ingredients: "I can tell you they buy tomatoes from the farms like this, like *LavkaLavka*. I know all of them try to choose the best products for these kinds of food because it is their business and their idea and their passion. They want to make the best." While these budding restaurateurs did not always use organic ingredients, they attempted to source directly from farmers when possible and prioritized quality through both conventional and alternative channels.

As the district continued to expand and adopt new members, innovators questioned best practices for ensuring the high level of quality that characterized its food projects. Aliona, co-founder of the *Stay Hungry* supper club, spoke of how the district might maintain its standards and eventually export them to other parts of Russia. She envisioned the alternative food network in Moscow spreading as far as Yekaterinburg to the east and Rostov-on-Don to the south, promoting the idea of franchising food initiatives like her own that had experienced success in Moscow. *Stay Hungry* had already evolved from an exclusive monthly supper club to a more visual *tour de force* in the district that held large social gatherings centered around on food. I attended one such event in a hidden courtyard between Moscow's Soviet era high rises that featured many of the food entrepreneurs who got their start through *Mestnaya Yeda* (Figure 2.3). Igor of *Fley* also admitted to thoughts of expansion but had more doubts than Aliona: "We are thinking about making a chain but it will be difficult to control the quality of the products the bigger it gets. This is one of the biggest problems. The control is very

important.” For Igor, the pursuit of quality triumphed over the profit of expansion. Keeping his project small ensured its honesty and transparency.



*Figure 2.3: A Stay Hungry supper club event, held in a hidden courtyard between Moscow high-rise apartment blocks.*

The need to control the district’s standard of quality at the site of food production was concern also stressed by Oleg, a charismatic small-scale farmer I met at a food conference held at the posh *Strelka Institute* in Moscow. Oleg wanted to create his own farmer cooperative in his rural village of Voronezh, 516 kilometers south of Moscow. Different from most Russian farmers, Oleg had studied methods of sustainable agriculture abroad in England and returned to his family farm to encourage neighboring farmers to adopt growing techniques that used organic methods. He commented on

how the desire for profit combined with the increasing market for organic and local food in Russia had contributed to inaccurate portrayals of food origins and quality. He claimed that consumers had become skeptical of “local” labeling “because lots of producers just put ‘local’ so they can get some additional customers. There is no true meaning behind it. No legislation so far, no restrictions or organization that can actually control it, none that you can trust.”

*Business or social project?*

District innovators spoke of economic relationships with producers and consumers that referenced social and moral qualities. Nastia claimed her project was “not a business really. It’s like a social activity from customers who understand, ‘Okay, I will support these guys.’” Igor also felt that profit was not the priority of his café model: “All of this business is not about one thing, like to make really big money and buy cars. We just have this one business to prove that it’s in plus. Not very big plus but we eat. Our friends eat. All of the people have salary. This is more important in this business.” Both Nastia and Igor rejected profit as their main goal, highlighting how much innovation and quality direct the development of the district.

Boris saw *LavkaLavka* as a hybrid, motivated by the need to finance their operations but more so by the desire for greater food systems change. “So I think that *LavkaLavka* is not only a business project. It’s a kind of social and business project.” He described the business side as offering market access for organic small-scale farmers. They are in the process of creating Moscow’s first true farmer’s market, where farmers and consumers interact daily under a system of strict ecological standards enforced by *LavkaLavka*. The social side, Boris describes “is to change the situation in agriculture...to make people move to the villages to become farmers...if we talk about social aim, it’s like a kind of agricultural revolution. Because we think in Russia we have in a lot of land that we

haven't used for at least 20 years, maybe 25 years." We spoke intimately about the inner workings of the project in the courtyard behind *LavkaLavka's* new store in Moscow's opulent *Patriarchii Prudy* neighborhood. No project has gained more public support in the district than *LavkaLavka*. While the farmer cooperative has earned the respect of devoted consumers and followers, others criticize *LavkaLavka* for the high prices of its products. Boris confided that the cooperative often failed to make a profit and sought to make their products more accessible to all. While Boris spoke of revolution, he also recognized that cultural change required investment beyond *LavkaLavka's* control.

#### *Changing consumer mentalities*

Developing a more direct farmer-consumer relationship was one of many strategies cited by district innovators as a way to challenge consumer definitions of quality food. When I asked Boris about whether or not he had seen a shift in consumer mentalities since *LavkaLavka* was founded, he replied:

*I think it is starting right now. If we are talking about gastronomic stuff, it's a huge movement in Moscow. A lot of people are cooking and are trying to make restaurants and pop-up restaurants. It's very popular. But right now, not many of them are thinking about the food they get, where it comes from. They just think about cooking and think about making some good burgers, which is okay. It's delicious, but where does the meat come from? It's probably frozen and shipped from Brazil. Most of them don't think about it. But some of them already think. I see that some restaurants are starting to think about it—especially writing on the menu that this came from the farmer. It's very slow, but it's starting. And I think we are one of the main reasons this is happening.*

Boris' critique of the gastronomic movement suggests that the social motives behind the district's *common enterprise* may not be uniform or publicized. It is evident that

actors within the district have different missions—even if they all seek to raise the quality bar of the district's entrants. For example, the *LavkaLavka* project focused on territoriality and taste, while *Stay Hungry* focuses on building social networks and fostering communication over food. *Mestnaya Yeda* addressed food system issues, but more in regard to access, innovation, and entrepreneurship for budding restaurateurs.

Yet regardless of project orientation and motivation, changing consumer mentalities began with countering negative Soviet era consumption practices and expectations. Oleg mentioned how consumers' lack of discern for food quality was a product of Soviet era food shortages:

*People don't really get the meaning of good quality products. I mean, the majority population, they don't really understand the quality as it should be due to all the Soviet times when the food wasn't, like, something extraordinary. [It was] something you needed to obtain in order to survive. For the nineties and the majority of the 20th century in Russia, food was considered 'If it's edible, well, then it is good.'*

The transition to the market economy has brought changes to how Russians' value food in more ways than one. Cosmopolitan consumers, despite their soaring wealth, did not inherently extend their valorization of material goods to food. Yulia, creator of the project *Cook & Talk*, which brings strangers together over global cuisine to encourage cross-cultural communication, commented on this dissonance:

*Now it is more [that] the culture of individualism is developing, growing. I think we took it from Europe and from America...Most of the population in Moscow, I think they don't pay attention to what they eat. For them, what's important is price, quality—but like is it a suitable price and quality. Or can I buy it near my house? And I don't care about the story of how it was produced. I think this is most of the population...We don't have a strong middle class; we have more*

*poor people who are close to middle class. And we have people who can afford any wonderful food and maybe they don't really buy it.*

Igor echoed Yulia's sentiment that Moscow's elite cared less about quality and more about aesthetics and price: "There are a lot of rich people, a lot of Mercedes for millions and they have expensive clothes. Like when they go to supermarket they don't think. They just buy, buy, buy. Cheap? Okay! Maybe some discount or sale. And they just don't think about themselves. They just think about the things to show their big status." How this financial capital did not equate to cultural capital in regard to food presented an embedded social barrier district innovators sought to surpass.

#### *Educating consumers on food quality*

Educating the kinds of wealthy consumers Yulia and Igor described requires not only a shift in mentalities, but repeated exposure to quality food. Boris felt it would take time, perhaps decades, to see a holistic change in Moscow consumers. Oleg was hopeful that in addition to time, communicating narratives of what defined quality might be the first step toward educating consumers. He described his hopes for reconnecting consumers to their food sources:

*What I can see here is the beginning of the beautiful story, a beautiful way of communication...Because when you are involved in some beautiful story, you feel like you are part of this beautiful story. This is a way of bridging people, putting them together. And you put all this trust into action...you involve people in this. You create this fairytale all together...It's like great American Dream, yeah? It's not the dreams of different people—maybe they are absolutely different—but they believe all together in it sometimes. Maybe it was the beautiful idea of communism until the 90s. It took enough educated who started questioning this.*

Despite Oleg's conviction that this dream was possible, he felt it would take much work to create value in the farmer-direct supply chain model: "This is about the culture of consuming. Just putting the farmer with the good product is not enough." He continued, "You need a push and pull in this market...You need to prepare the public for this. You need to prepare the people—the consumers—to develop their taste."

Boris had witnessed the effects of *LavkaLavka's* educational efforts. He described how consumers who once sought out *LavkaLavka* products as a status symbol eventually recognized and embraced the social aim of the cooperative:

*They started to buy food from LavkaLavka because, for example, it's delicious, or it's fashionable, or it's healthy. And then they start to communicate with us, like read our Facebook [page]. Getting our food, they understand, 'Okay, they are not cheating these farmers.' And 'Oh what are they saying about responsibility?' 'Oh yeah, something about farmers.' Then the mentality is changing. One year, two years after, he is already buying not just because it is delicious or healthy, but because he likes that he is helping some farmer to build a better farm, to live in a better world.*

Aliona also recognized this transition in the district as more people began talking about product origins and rural farmers. Over coffee at a cozy café below the old Soviet apartment where *Stay Hungry* housed their weekly suppers, I asked her how large of a role she felt *LavkaLavka* played in raising social awareness around territoriality and organic production methods. She confided that Boris "got people talking about this. Because farmers existed and nobody cared. Now everybody cares and that's important." While "everybody" might in reality only extend to Aliona's social network or to other actors within the district, her comment clarifies key challenges of the district: social inclusivity and bridging the rural-urban class divide.

## RELATIONSHIPS, TRUST, AND BRIDGING RUSSIA'S RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE

Alternative food districts do not create environments in which actors instinctively see themselves as social equals, nor do collaborative efforts always build trust. Inherent trust in others implies less screening for transparent, accurate information (Uzzi 1997). Without scrutiny, social actors within Moscow's industrial district may capitalize on consumer trust by commodifying intangibles, such as the rural idyll or a peasant agrarian lifestyle. When consumers place trust in such romanticized imagery, producers find dishonest ways to construct value in order to earn a profit (DeLind and Bingen 2008). David Goodman states: "in the absence of a common landscape of shared behavioral norms, moral economies, and institutional protections against risk, trust provides a problematic foundation for quality food networks" (2003: 4). Even within alternative frameworks, market interactions vary from instrumental approaches to food acquisition to more collaborative, risk-sharing exchanges that fabricate stronger relations of trust (Feagan and Henderson 2009). Thus trust is not intrinsically reflexive or apolitical, nor is it reflective of equitable, transparent relationships across alternative food systems (DuPuis and Goodman 2005).

Fukuyama (1995) defines trust as expectations created by cooperative behavior and rooted in shared norms and ethical values that become normalized only when exhibited by all members of a community. Nurturing higher levels of trust between consumers and producers is crucial for the success of alternative food districts for many reasons. First, trust in market-based systems coincides with market accountability. A market system would not operate unless it was rooted in some form of a social contract dictating the rules of behavior (Dudley 1996). Second, trust functions to promote cooperation. Encouraging a cooperative environment in alternative food districts helps ensure that everyday interactions are not devoid of trust. Third, trust is often unevenly distributed. The presence or absence of trust among actors of a society informs how

people experience social life in a particular place (Secor and O'Loughlin 2005). Finally, institutions and governments designate actors of specific classes as more or less trustworthy than others. These powerful institutions directly or indirectly enforce rules about how social classes of consumers should interact, subsequently altering the organic nature of trust and cooperation (Latusek and Cook 2012).

#### *Government distrust*

Initially, reliance on personal relationships for everyday goods arose out of distrust in Soviet authority, institutions, and totalitarian law (Latusek and Cook 2012). Still expressed by Russians today, trust was a highly valued attribute of Moscow's industrial district innovators that stemmed from repeated social interactions, transparency, and an emphasis on quality. While innovators trusted each other, they scoffed at questions regarding whether or not they trusted the government to help institute standards and laws to regulate the district and legalize their activities. Many of the alternative food district's initiatives were considered illegal at the time of research, mainly due the inability of jurisdiction to keep up with district innovations. I asked Igor if he thought it would help farmers to have government regulations that standardized organic certification laws and he immediately replied, "No. Even then, no. Because it's Moscow; it's Russia. There is corruption everywhere and you can buy everything. It's a problem. It's even not a problem about the government that they believe it, but it's a problem that the people believe it." Oleg shared Igor's sentiments about the government's inability to help regulate quality: "I truly believe everything where the government is involved will [result in] disastrous consequences for the farmers, for the people, for the consumers. Because basically, we have now, in theory, all the organizations needed to maintain or review the quality of the products. And we can see that they are not working."

Aliona's sentiments best summarize many innovators' feelings toward the Russian government's involvement in the district: "It's hard to respect a government that doesn't respect you. Actually, you know, I would love to, but that's a problem." She continued:

*The political situation is that thing that makes most of my friends think about moving somewhere else. And the only thing that makes them stay here is this guerilla thing that we are doing right now. Because there is this feeling that, you know, we have a chance. We can make it. We can change it. We can change the history. Okay, not in the great scale, but anyway, we can change something. We can help our friends and some people who are not able to do something because they are just different. So we can make something. And after that we move, we stay, we decide—whatever. But like three years ago, I was sure that in a year or so I was moving. Now I am not even thinking about it because I don't have time to move right now! I have so many things to do here and I have to do that. You know, it's like the mission that we have right now.*

Aliona's vision of the district incorporated a desire to help others succeed and create alternative spaces for actors to express their alternativeness. Driven by passion and purpose, Aliona spoke of district innovators' commitment to change Russia's food system, even with a totalitarian government standing in their way.

#### *Collaboration and competition*

Collaboration among district innovators was expressed to varying degrees. Yulia of *Cook & Talk* felt she had seen a growing number of food-related projects in Moscow within the past few years. A consumer of *LavkaLavka* herself, she found ways to integrate farmer's products into her dinners that showed commitment to helping other projects in the district grow. I asked her if she saw a cohesive goal uniting the district's initiatives: "I think it is getting together. There are different events. Like, there are

different platforms where this communication is seen: magazines, websites, portals. But there is maybe no one huge resource of information about where to find the whole picture." She attributed the district's lack of cohesion to the fact that individual projects' missions still took precedence over collectivizing goals.

Nastia of *Mestnaya Yeda* felt that her organization could increase district collaboration. She envisioned a collective food union, one that would bring together all food initiatives within the district under one roof, one mission. Nastia spoke of how collaboration and power in numbers would help her and other less influential actors overcome logistical, financial, or legal barriers, like renting a large enough space to house a festival or exchange information about government protocols. She further explained her motives to unionize: "Because, I don't know, together we have more power. But everyone thinks 'Oh they will steal my idea' or something like this. So we just make small steps for this...Because together we can make changes. But big guys, like *LavkaLavka* and so on, don't understand yet." She yearned for more collaboration, telling me a story of how frequently she had contacted *LavkaLavka* to suggest working together on her pop-up market concept. She claimed Boris ignored her requests until he attended one of *Mestnaya Yeda's* events. Now, Nastia and Boris are combining their efforts to create a pop-up market solely for farmers. Collaboration resulted from direct social interaction within the district: "open communications among participants create[s] a recognition that the activity is common and that 'everyone does better when everybody does better'" (Fairfax et al. 2012: 26).

In speaking with Boris of *LavkaLavka*, his impressions of collaboration within Moscow's alternative food district reflected his wariness to readily embrace all projects touting the district's common enterprise. He argued: "When I see some farmers' projects which are trying to sell farmer's food, I am very happy if they are honest and they sell real farmer's

products, not just saying it. It's good. We can't make this only one." He cited other positive examples of projects with similar farmer-direct models, including Igor's project, *Fley*. When I asked Boris if he considered these other projects as competitors, he strongly reinforced his earlier point:

*No, I think together we can change this situation. But there are some projects that are just lying. They don't sell farmer's products, they are just saying [they do]. I don't think it's very good. Not because of competition, but because they are selling lower priced food from the factory and saying it is [from] farmers. It's not about competition; it's about the opinion of people who like buying food from this company but it's the same as an Ashan chicken. So they are using these farmers and saying the food is from farms and it's not true.*

Other actors—especially those who worked directly with farmers—shared Boris' concern for market co-optation. They worried that the rising demand for farmers' products would produce dishonest projects that conflated the quality of their farmers' food with the level of products found at giant multi-national supermarkets like *Ashan*. Innovators sought to prevent dishonest retailers from entering the district for fear that their lack of transparency and attention to profit would compromise the common enterprise.

#### *Building relationships between innovators*

Project coordinators referenced the importance of fostering personal relations among district innovators to help promote collaboration over competition. Aliona felt *Stay Hungry* actively forged social connections within the district. She claimed:

*Stay Hungry helps to know each other; it helps to find other people. So it works like that. And people start talking, talking, talking and we make this culture. It's very new for Russia. Because actually, in our past—maybe as an anthropologist, you will understand that, you know—when there was Stalin's period and after Stalin's period, it was unaffordable to talk to unknown people because you will*

*go to somewhere in Siberia soon because you can say something wrong. So in my childhood, there were lots of elder people who were saying, 'Shh! You shouldn't talk too much! You should learn and sit and you shouldn't talk.' My generation, our generation, may be the first generation who feels comfortable talking to strangers.*

No longer burdened by the social norms of her Soviet past, Aliona told me she found it easy to make connections and collaborate with other actors in the district, citing numerous examples throughout our conversation. When I commented on how cooperative the interactions seemed, how much they resembled a community, she exclaimed, "Yes! That's the most incredible feeling I ever had: that I am a part of a great community. We do everything together and that's great. We became great friends after we all started."

#### *Building relationships between producers and consumers*

Creating relationships among all actors of Moscow's district extended to consumers and producers as well. Igor spoke of the relevancy of building relationships with consumers when he described the atmosphere of his farm-to-table café, *Fley*: "It's extremely important. Because a lot of people just come and take their coat off and talk to you. It's a place where they can come and just speak. In Moscow, I believe it is very important...Like the chef speaks with the customers and advises them to cook and that. And everyone loves it." When I asked Boris of *LavkaLavka*, how he interpreted his organization's role in fostering relationships among district actors, he detailed his desire for consumers and producers to have more direct social ties: "[The] ideal thing is when they communicate to each other without us—this customer and the farmer at the farmer's market or on the website where they can talk to each other. We just help to have this food delivered and we are helping to build this communication." To Boris,

district innovators solely acted as facilitators for the webs of network actors united over quality food.



Figure 2.4: An illustrated map of LavkaLavka's producers near Moscow.

Igor extended the importance of relationships between innovators and consumers to include nurturing relationships with farmers as well: "About half of the farmers, they have become our friends. And you can just call to them and say, 'Oh it's my very good friend and he needs meat by Wednesday, please.' And he says 'Okay, we'll look and see which cars go to Moscow. No problem.'" This human connection within a faceless market economy was crucial for Igor, who complained that Russian consumers were too detached from their food sources. The idea of creating stronger connections built on

mutual assistance between all actors resonated with Yulia of *Cook & Talk* as well: "It was so appropriate for me to have a connection with farmers, with different people who are in the market. So different food events, festivals, they are, of course, combining local producers and restaurants. And they are bringing them together. I think it is a good tendency for them to collaborate and communicate between each other."

### *Perceptions of rural life*

District innovators represent a crucial link between urban consumers and rural producers in Russia. Multiple district innovators mentioned their goal to change consumer mentality extended to altering consumer perceptions of rural inhabitants as well. Boris described how urban consumers viewed rural life: "It's the question of how the people who live here in Russia, if they are ready to understand these farmers' reality. They are not ready." When I asked Boris why he felt this was the case he responded, "Just because we have such the history that we have." His comment highlights the degree to which Muscovites remain socially and culturally separate from rural producers. In addition, the negative stigma of farmers cultivated during the Soviet era still influences cosmopolitan consumers' perceptions of contemporary Russian agrarian life.

The simultaneous disappearance of Soviet social networks and a growing class divide in Russia raises questions about the role Moscow's alternative food district may play in mitigating class-based expressions of value while simultaneously encouraging a more socially-driven economy. Relationships between material and moral indices of value have tense histories among different classes of Russians (Patino 2005). Power relations within society dictate how value is negotiated by everyday consumption in the post-Soviet economy (Berdahl 2005; Caldwell 2002; Klumbyte 2010; Patino 2005, 2008). Displays of wealth or material capital may not represent one's moral standing in society

but they do affect social relationships. New kinds of lifestyles never imagined by Soviet citizens entered the realm of possibility as a result of the shifting social norms and material aspirations of the market economy (Rivkin-Fish 2009; Fehérváry 2002). Between the dichotomy of the poor and the wealthy, the growing middle class in Russia struggles to consume high-status products in order to assert their place in the social hierarchy (Rivkin-Fish and Trubina 2010).

Despite the collectivist agenda, class differentiation existed under socialism in the form of occupational professions and social trajectories. Soviet institutional discourse constructed ideologies around *workers* and *intelligentsia* titles in such a way that it positioned the two groups in opposition with each other (Rivkin-Fish 2009). Class identities hold less weight in the post-socialist social environment where the market economy has created new occupations and material distinguishers of socio-economic status. The “politics and poetics” surrounding the rural peasant farmer constructs tropes of tasteful products by which “low, peasant foods are re-evaluated by wealthy, niche consumers, both because they epitomize healthier, more ethical lifestyles and because they are seen as better nutritionally than *haute cuisine*” (Grasseni 2012: 202). The social inclusion and exclusion of Moscow’s industrial district reemerges along the rural-urban divide, where Russians most clearly witness class polarization between the abject poverty of rural regions and the seemingly exponential wealth of cosmopolitans (Humphrey 2002; Patico and Caldwell 2002).

I spoke with Anna, a former *LavkaLavka* employee now running a farm at an art park called *Nikola Lenivets*. Though we met in Moscow, she now lives and works roughly 200 kilometers from the city. When I asked Anna whether or not she felt a class divide between urban and rural Russia existed, she described a world similar to her childhood in Soviet Latvia, saying, “around *Nikola [Lenivets]*, people are normal country people.”

When I inquired further as to whether or not many of the people she referred to were farmers, she sighed and continued:

*No, a lot of people do nothing in the garden. They go into the market and buy potatoes...In Soviet Union, there were a lot of people growing food for themselves but now not a lot of people are doing this. Maybe the grandmother who did this is gone. Maybe TV is more popular than gardening. Who knows? I see people who do nothing and also grow nothing for themselves. In Nikola it's a different situation. But I see it in other places.*

Aliona described a similar image of farmers that has carried over from Soviet times. In reference to how people felt about farmers before *LavkaLavka* championed their tenacity and skill, Aliona claimed, "Nobody cared. What farmers? They are drunk all the time." When I asked whether or not a negative stigma lingered, she quickly responded: "There is still this thing. I go to farms, I see how they live. These people—not all of them—but they are still not these, you know, *businessmen* farmers. They are earning their first money and after that they get drunk."

Differentiating the "drunk" farmers from the "businessmen" is vital in order to understand length to which innovators extend their industrial district to rural producers. Many of *LavkaLavka's* farmers may be characterized as people of relative wealth who chose to leave their well-paying jobs in Moscow to farm in rural Russia. *LavkaLavka* has provided the means for such a transition that still connects the former businessman to familiar territory: the urban market. Boris claimed, "We understand that it's also a question of money: how to make good money for living if you go farming. I think it's also a social thing that people who live in the city will understand. We're trying to help them understand that being a farmer is a cool thing, a good thing. A thing of your choosing." *LavkaLavka* has created a bridge between urban and rural Russia and is

trying to change social perceptions of farmers, but what implications does the influx of former businessmen have for rural Russian society?

Cosmopolitan, highly mobile, and well-resourced consumers classify the primary participants of Moscow's alternative food network. Their social mobility asserts them the flexibility and power to reimagine their environment, as well as set standards for material definitions of value (Weiss 2012). This construction also excludes the priorities of consumers who cannot financially participate in this exchange (Allen 2004). One of the greatest challenges for AAFNs is how product valuation is constructed and whose moral indices are represented. In the process of creating Moscow's alternative food district, actors risk glossing over the exclusivity of their network—especially when initiatives stem solely from urban innovators and consumers, neglecting rural producers in the process. Direct sales between farmers and consumers do not necessarily foster feelings of morality or reciprocity; elitism may be embedded in the food exchanged through these market connections (Weiss 2011). While some AAFNs put democratizing values at the forefront of their initiatives, other artisan-based food districts continue to exclude untrained palates and reproduce class divisions through the fetishization of connoisseurship (Paxson 2010). While the district model does not automatically suggest economically equitable network relationships, it does promote awareness and communication among district actors who are better positioned to collaborate and pursue more socially inclusive initiatives. Network actors aim to bridge the gaps in the district's common culture, dismissing elitism and class barriers to entry.

Historically, Russians have found unique and creative ways to blend elements of the social and market economy. This practice suggests that there is potential to build relationships within Moscow's industrial district on the tenets of trust and social inclusivity. As the marketplace becomes resocialized by local actors, "the exchange

relationship itself opens up possibilities for a new class consciousness based on mutual acknowledgement and understanding” (Bubinas 2011: 164). Class divisions become abstracted by hurdling the social barriers of exclusion. Cosmopolitan actors in Moscow are positioned to use their social mobility in proactive, inclusive ways that celebrate local narratives. Social relationships that build trust through either engaging with or subverting the market model reconnect actors to one another, to the land, and to food traditions. In turn, relationships encourage producers to develop their processing and production practices to match innovator interest for quality, transparency, and sociality in alternative food networks.

#### *The future of Russian agriculture*

Multiple innovators recognized the dire state of the Russian economy and felt a new age of sustainable agriculture offered a potential solution. Igor himself felt pushed to leave Moscow and pursue farming: “The economy is not very good and I believe this is one of the reasons why people have started to come back to these roots.” He continued, “Now in Russia it is a big wave. A lot of young farmers, a lot of young people like me have said, ‘Thank you very much, but I am going to farm.’ But it’s really difficult in Moscow. With the laws, with the bribes, bureaucracy—with everything. But people are starting to think about it.” Anna, who was already farming, talked about sustainability in regard to her position as a paid employee of the *Nikola Lenivets* art park project. When I asked her what she would do if this contract were terminated, she replied with a laugh: “When the park maybe dies, we don’t die because we are growing food.” Viktor also expressed hope that more investment in rural Russia would reap rich rewards: “If we promote and make good opportunities in regions to develop the agricultural sphere, it will give opportunities for the future. And the agricultural sphere will not die.”

Optimism for the future of agriculture in Russia was high for these district innovators, even if they acknowledged it would take time to change consumer mentalities and convince people they could support their livelihoods in rural areas. This insight and concern for the next generation was an attribute that some innovators felt only those within the district shared. Aliona captured the sentiment of shortsightedness:

*You see, because of these communistic things, most people want to work, get money, go home, work again, get money, go home. They don't care how they work or if they can do better. They can do business...The biggest thing is that no one thinks of the future as like 10 years, 20 years. The future is like next month, to pay for apartment, for example, to pay for whatever. But what about a few years? Like my children and my children's children? No, I am not thinking about that—this kind of business that will make my children live good. I am not thinking about that. I am only thinking about fast money.*

Multiple actors expressed concern that Moscow's consumer-driven society would have adverse effects on the future of the industrial district and the state of Russian agriculture. While focused on short in lieu of long-term goals, widespread consumer support for sustainable economic development, especially in Russia's rural areas, remains yet to be seen. This questions whether or not the district's aim to educate consumers will extend to rural Russia, engage small-scale agricultural producers, and help create more socially inclusive relationships between urban and rural actors.

## ANALYSIS OF DISTRICT CHALLENGES

Adapting the industrial district model is a useful tool for visualizing the ways in which innovators within this alternative agri-food network communicate and work toward a common enterprise. As Fairfax et al. (2012) note: "The most important dimension of industrial districts is that as they develop, they generate innovations more rapidly and

deeply than dispersed actors are able to accomplish” (28). This commitment to innovation was seen in the district’s ability to counter the hegemony of the dominant global industrial food system through localized, quality-driven initiatives. Moscow’s district innovators seek collaboration and cooperation. Though Nastia of *Mestnaya Yeda* cited competition with *LavkaLavka*, it did not appear to distract other innovators from pursuing their goals in ways that contributed to the positive development of the district. None of the innovators interviewed mentioned that a quest for profit dictated their involvement in their venture. While food origins mattered to some and not others, quality food acted as the overarching tie that bound the district together—the common enterprise.

Actors feared the district would fall subject to market co-optation and untrustworthy government standardization. In response to these concerns, innovators called for methods of regulation and control that they saw possible through a more cohesive, unionized network of district actors. They expressed their desire for cooperation most clearly in their concern for how the district’s expansion would affect the quality of its outputs. While some innovators saw franchising as a means of social inclusivity, especially for Russia’s rural regions, others feared the district moving in this direction would result in an inability to control quality. These innovators did not establish a cohesive definition of what constituted development or progress, but a desire for a more concrete and collective district mission was suggested as a means of staying true to the common enterprise. This want for collaboration was also expressed in regard to transparency: fighting against the economic, political, and social forces that might challenge the district’s ability to operate. The commitment of innovators to legality and “clean” businesses counters the corruption of Russia’s totalitarian authorities. To work within the realms of government jurisdiction, district actors turned inward to one another, to the relationships they trusted. It remains to be seen how the district’s social

network will help innovators mitigate challenges to future development within the confines of Russian bureaucracy.

Not all elements of the industrial district model appear appropriate to apply to Moscow's alternative agri-food network. The modified framework described by Fairfax et al. (2012) does not take into account how actors negotiate innovation and development within a post-socialist economy. Russians' complex experiences with collectivism remain embedded in contemporary social and economic interactions. This shared history makes the Moscow alternative food district truly unique. District innovators sought to distance themselves and their generation from the negative remnants of Soviet culture. As relics of the Soviet era still affect everyday consumption in post-socialist Russia, district initiatives must disembed the kinds of consumer mentalities that hinder their development.

Innovators' responses generated ideas for how to go about disembedding the persisting Soviet consumer mentalities in three crucial ways. The first was by bringing food into the status of "high culture" (Patico 2008). Members of Soviet *intelligentsia* considered topics of gastronomy and cuisine "low culture" in comparison to the social, natural, and biological sciences, as well as mathematics. In addition to this mentality, the Soviet food system created consumers who saw food as a *need* and not as something of *value*. Soviet citizens were more concerned with the process of acquiring food—a product of food scarcities and widespread poverty. Many citizens utilized food acquisition strategies that relied on densely woven social networks in order to meet their basic needs (Caldwell 2002). While the district aims to re-embed food distinguished by quality, the relics of these social networks could act as a unique cultural attribute to help innovators stress the value of face-to-face communication and personal connections within the district.

Second, district innovators must also fight against the “New Russian” consumer mentality (Humphrey 2002; Patino 2008) that uses material objects to showcase wealth and social status. The mentality of this culturally specific consumer base prioritizes the adornments of their exteriors over the quality of the food they put in their bodies. These Russians have the financial ability to invest in the innovations of the district but many fail to find value in quality food. Encouraging “New Russian” consumers to purchase the district’s food—not simply because it is fashionable—was a slow process of educating consumers that might even take decades. As Oleg noted, the district’s mission requires a method for preparing consumers to value the tenets of moral economies and alternative agri-food networks: taste, product origins, transparency, and personal connections. While many innovators communicate these values to consumers, how will more method-driven educational efforts counter “New Russian” materiality? Changing consumer definitions of quality food must be at the forefront of the district’s agenda if it hopes for socially inclusive expansion. Given that the market economy in which the district operates spawned “New Russian” consumption and materialism, this will not prove an easy task.

Finally, district innovators’ descriptions of Russian farmers reflect lingering Soviet class distinctions of *worker* from *intelligentsia*. The perpetuation of this division draws interesting parallels between the rural farmer and the district innovator. The actors I spoke with commented on the dynamics of these rural-urban relationships, many of which reflected a *worker-intelligentsia* complex. Thus, innovators are perhaps best positioned to dispel the negative stigma of the collective farmer from Soviet times. It is important to note that in the industrial district model, actors create the culture of the district. Innovators have the ability to overcome this binary social construction to change the perceptions of small-scale farming in Russia. Whether or not including more

marginalized rural inhabitants achieves this goal remains a lingering concern for the district.

A desire to bridge the rural-urban divide explained how district innovators see the future of agriculture in Russia. While tangible connections between these two social spheres were developed, Fairfax et al. (2012) caution: “key elements of the district agenda are beyond the reach of even the most diligent innovators” (29). Do projects within the district, especially the farmer-focused ones, possess the kind of cultural and social capital necessary to promote the image of the farmer as a respectable profession? And is this image of the modern Russian farmer socially inclusive? The district actors I spoke with focused on supporting more “businessmen” farmers as a means of rural development. These farmers live in rural Russia by choice. They also remain directly connected to Moscow’s elite consumer base—a luxury not afforded to all rural Russian farmers. Reinforcing a divide between these new “businessmen” farmers with the rest of Russia’s rural inhabitants hints at the same social schism created by “New Russians” in the post-socialist economy. This correlation may be countered by educating consumers that all rural farmers, not only those who are businessmen, possess the potential to produce quality products. Whether all members of the district will adopt this mindset is unknown, but it is worth considering the potential long-term social effects an influx of “businessmen” farmers will have on rural Russia. Will this urban to rural migration help or hinder efforts to bridge the social class divide?

Social interactions were at the forefront of district innovators’ minds and engrained in their project models. Yet developing personal relationships within the district looked different than the social networks of the Soviet era. The use of technology to forge connections cannot be excluded from a discussion about the nature and extent of the district’s interconnectedness. Innovators rely heavily on online communication to

connect with other district innovators and consumers. Resources for communication, such as social networking sites, web forums, and email link people in Moscow in innovative ways. Widespread access to the internet aids this trend, but it is unclear how accessible the internet is for rural inhabitants. This raises another question about the ability of district innovators to foster relationships built on trust with rural actors. *LavkaLavka* has found one way to connect producers with consumers online: the cooperative's website provides a platform for both groups to engage in communication about the quality of the products, even extend appreciation and words of encouragement to one another. The ubiquity of the district's online presence has already fueled social connectivity and worked to change consumer mentality in unique ways. The transparency and interconnectedness the internet contributes to trust-building and feelings of social inclusivity among actors. Even non-consumers of *LavkaLavka* I spoke with conveyed the sense of community enriched by online connections. While personal relationships may flourish online, offering opportunities for more face-to-face relationships between actors, especially across the rural-urban divide, still remains a barrier the district will have to challenge at some point in the future.

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE DISTRICT

Understanding Moscow's network of initiatives and actors provides a broader perspective of the larger discussions happening around food, sustainability, and social justice in Russia. Despite the diversity of projects presented by these narratives, overlapping themes emerged from my conversations with district innovators regarding the importance of personal relationships, trust, and social inclusivity as crucial to the district's development and sustainability. The quality-driven food initiatives that define Moscow's alternative food district signal a shifting social trend that coincides with changing the mentality of Muscovite consumers. The turn toward quality continues to

fuel innovation within Moscow's district, but innovators may only mature so far without consumer support. Thus, the system evokes a cycle: the connectivity and building of dense social networks perpetuates the sharing of information within the district, which generates trust and transparency. Innovators' passion for their projects sets the bar high for new entrants, which simultaneously helps counter the negative effects of the market economy, such as dishonest marketing. The lack of significance given to competition pushes the district toward an economy that looks more social and moral than corporate and profit-driven. Personal relationships that develop a more moral economy contribute to building social networks and the cycle starts again.

District innovators hope consumers will find value in a food system built on human linkages, trust, and a commitment to invest in Russia's small-scale agricultural economy. Fairfax et al. (2012) believe for industrial districts, "the vision has been about building a different kind of system—one in which healthy food is available to all, one that will protect the land and provide farmers and workers a decent living, and one that builds a community in which they themselves would live and want to remain" (30). The growth of the district so far suggests a future that includes positive change as long as social inclusivity and the rural-urban dynamic are considered. The district needs more innovators who not only promote the production of quality food as an entrepreneurial endeavor, but also as a means of advocating for sustainable rural livelihoods that stimulate economic development for Russia that extends beyond natural resource extraction. United together, these innovators feel they can change the trajectory of Russia's food system.

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## :: CHAPTER 3 ::

RETERRITORIALIZING FOOD IN POST-SOCIALIST SPACES:  
CONSUMER VALUATIONS OF PLACE AND TASTE

## ABSTRACT

With the rise of place-based food networks in Moscow, Russia, consumers express their dissatisfaction with the conventional industrial food system through heightened concerns for food origins, freshness, seasonality, and healthfulness. The Moscow-based *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative aims to meet these concerns by adopting the notion of *terroir* to promote regional tastes and place constructions, as well as assign value to quality food. This exploratory case study of the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperatives' consumers qualitatively assesses the practices, beliefs, and motivations behind constructing place-based food networks in post-Soviet spaces. Findings suggest that consumers seek a refashioned a sense of *terroir*, or taste of place, that unites their desire for greater food system transparency. The culturally familiar associations of place embedded by Soviet regionalism and *dacha* household producers aids in, as well as complicates, the refashioning process. These associations raise questions about how *LavkaLavka* might utilize socially embedded values in their adaptation of *terroir* to best fit the post-socialist context.

## POST-SOCIALIST FOOD CONSUMPTION &amp; THE SHIFT TOWARD TASTE OF PLACE

Russia's experience in the market economy presents a unique case for anthropologists to examine how consumer values evolve in post-socialist societies. Since the

dismantling of the Soviet Union, everyday consumption habits in Russia have changed in unpredictable and complex ways: from prioritizing foreign goods to adopting nationalistic *Buy Russian* campaigns (Caldwell 2002). Echoing the global consumer quality turn in food of the last decade (Goodman 2003; Murdoch et al. 2000), Moscow consumers have witnessed the development of an alternative agri-food network (AAFN) that counters the homogenizing effects of the market economy. Rising consumer demand for quality food defined by taste and territoriality may be elucidated by contemporary Russians' distinct experiences with globalization, corporate capitalism, and material culture. Yet historically embedded Soviet consumer habits and practices appear to influence post-socialist consumption, complicating the unquestioning adoption of Western place-based, quality-driven food systems (Spilková et al. 2012).

Consumption acts as a mirror through which urban, cosmopolitan, post-socialist citizens express their cultural preferences, beliefs, and norms in relation to their relative and imagined pasts (Fehérváry 2002; Humphrey 2002; Patico 2005; Rivkin-Fish 2009). With the influx of foreign commodities to the post-Soviet economy, Russians began exhibiting their experiences with rapid economic and political change through their everyday consumption habits. Capital and social mobility extended purchasable goods to include foreign commodities previously othered by the Soviet Union's stringent state-regulated trading networks. Government marketing campaigns quickly championed domestically produced food as more familiar, healthier, and tastier than imports in response to Russia's economic recession of the late 1990s. As Western goods fell subject to consumption practices fueled by nationalism, the Russian term *nashi* (ours) was adopted as a ubiquitous explicative for Russian-made products, but especially for Russian-grown food (Caldwell 2002; Humphrey 1995; Patico 2008).

The post-Soviet marketplace has absorbed the once distinctive qualities of foreign products, leaving few channels through which cosmopolitan Russians may consume “authentic” Russian foods. Moscow consumers now exhibit demand for alternative food networks with farmer-direct initiatives to counter the homogeneity and health risks associated with the global food system. One retail outlet meeting this rising consumer demand is the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative. Based in the heart of metropolitan Moscow, *LavkaLavka* aims to increase urban access to Russian grown “local” food produced by their collective of small-scale organic farmers. The cooperative provides a platform for Muscovites to buy farmers’ products through an online order and delivery system, as well as via physical storefronts. *LavkaLavka*—arguably the first organization to promote this shortened supply chain model in Moscow—has an active visual and online presence that reaches a wide audience beyond their consumers. In addition, the cooperative commits itself to developing Russia’s rural regions by communicating place-based attributes that evoke a sense of terroir tailored to meet the particularities of the Russian food system.

Assigning value to food qualities that reflect its place of origin is rooted in the French concept of *goût de terroir*, or more commonly referred to as taste of place (Trubek 2008; Paxson 2010). Defined as an embodiment of the distinct ecology of a place as well as the local agricultural methods behind the production, terroir generates unique qualities and an attachment to locality by appealing the sense of taste. The value constructed alongside this relationship to the land often occurs with the aide of strict government regulations that enforce quality control. In light of *LavkaLavka*’s desire to cultivate a sense of terroir, this research questions how contemporary cosmopolitan Russians of the *LavkaLavka* cooperative perceive and convey values of taste and place through their purchasing and consumption habits. What historically embedded notions of quality and food values affect the development of a place-based food system in

Moscow? How will *LavkaLavka* consumers redefine Russian gastronomy in light of the ongoing social, economic, and political transition in ways that suggest a turn toward more territorial distinguishers of quality? What is the nature of this turn?

Place-based distinctions reflect consumers' desires to celebrate uniquely Russian—not Soviet—spaces, tastes, and methods of food production. Capitalizing on Russian taste preferences long overshadowed by Soviet cuisine and culture, for contemporary Russians to reimagine the pre-Soviet past has become “a powerful lure for Moscow shoppers who are interested in preserving and perpetuating an idealized Russian nation” (Caldwell 2002: 307). In particular, marketing that evokes images of an idyllic peasant lifestyle perpetuates mythologies about historically subjective Russian identities. Food grown on personal subsistence plots at the iconic Russian *dacha*, or summer home, has long been synonymous with qualities of naturalness and authenticity (Caldwell 2011; Zavisca 2003). Such Arcadian imagery nurtures allusions to values of taste of place reserved exclusively for food grown in Russian soil yet not anchored in specific localities. Nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Russian cuisine mixed with Soviet and post-Soviet conceptions of value creates uniquely complicated and contradictory cultural linkages among food quality, place, and taste.

This article builds upon limited existing research of place-based food consumption in post-socialist societies. Specifically, it aims to gain a more nuanced understanding of the contemporary values of place and taste expressed by the consumers of the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative. Through a qualitative analysis, I explore consumer expressions of value and perceptions of quality that have been embedded, disembedded, and re-embedded throughout periods of Russian history. I assess how these consumers construct territorial valuation based on origin labeling, ecological conditions, geopolitical boundaries, and the image of the Russian *dacha*. Additionally, I

explore ways in which *LavkaLavka* might refashion the concept of terroir to fit the particularities of the Russian post-socialist context. Finally, I question the effects consumer valuations of place and taste have on the development of Moscow's alternative food network.

#### PLACE-BASED FOOD, EVERYDAY VALUES, AND SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS

Theoretical frameworks cited by agri-food researchers make connections between consumer values, perceptions of quality, territoriality, and cultural traditions (Barham 2003). Lefebvre's (1991) production of space model describes how conditions of the political economy reshape the everyday experiences of social actors within capitalist societies. For Lefebvre, spaces are socially constructed and reproduced, or "perceived-conceived-lived" (40). Brad Weiss (2012) applies Lefebvre's model to explain how "the sensory experience of taste informs the actions of, and can be produced by this spatial body" (443) in North Carolina's local food system. Production, and consequently, consumption, rooted in place allows taste to evoke a space's unique characteristics and cultural relevance. Yet how is taste qualified based on places that no longer exist according to geopolitical definitions? For *LavkaLavka* consumers, conceptions of place and embodied attributes of place-based food reflect Russia's complex history as the core of the Soviet socialist republics.

#### *Soviet regionalism*

Soviet consumption exposes a uniquely complex set of motives and practices informed by geopolitics, culture, and economic forces that have historically impacted constructions of space and place. To better contextualize the intricacies of post-socialist consumption requires an understanding of the collectivist structure, trading networks, and marketing strategies of the Soviet food system. Collectivizing the cultural diversity

of the Soviet Union was a challenge for the socialist state. Soviet planners struggled with ways to unify Soviet identity while simultaneously preserving regional, ethnic culinary traditions. Soviet citizens embraced each other's former culinary traditions, downplaying the distinctiveness of their own national and ethnic cuisines (Klumbyte 2010). Anthropologists have documented the extent to which the Soviet Union used its state-sponsored programs to dictate consumption in accordance with the regime's ideals, altering the habits and practices of its citizens at the local level (Caldwell 2002; Berdahl 2005; Patico 2008; Klumbyte 2010). Across the USSR, consumers witnessed connections between state-sponsored regionalism and increased exposure to industrialized food (Mincyte 2003, Klumbyte 2010).

That many of the former socialist republics still share infrastructure, as well as wrestle with inter-state migration issues, ethnic conflicts, and identity politics, might help explain why present day Russian consumer constructions of place extend beyond Russia's geopolitical boundaries (Libman 2007). Libman and Vinokurov (2012) refer to this interconnectedness as *holding-together regionalism* to reflect the integrated nationalities that until twenty years ago composed a single state. Looking specifically at shifts in food production and culinary culture during the Soviet era illustrates how the centrally planned economy promoted *holding-together regionalism* in order to construct value and embed regionally produced foods in everyday cuisine (Scott 2012). Under forced regionalism, provinces across the Soviet Union specialized in the production of specific industrial commodities and agricultural products. Variances in climate across the USSR caused some regions and republics had more to contribute to the Soviet economy than others, reinforcing constructions of place and space that resulted in a form of geographical othering (Bassin 1991). Though regional trade promoted economic inclusion, it did not always extend to the cultural and social sphere. Siberia is one such example. Evoking the nature-culture dichotomy, Russia's Far East

has been historically depicted as a natural, wild frontier in juxtaposition with Western Russia's cosmopolitanism (Grant 1995). Yet Siberia's strategic position as a provider of valuable natural resources was embraced by Soviet regionalism—an association that has endured today through contemporary consumption habits (Bassin 1991). Highly celebrated for their quality by Muscovites, foods such as caviar and wild-caught fish from Russia's Far East allowed the region to be integrated into the notion of *nashi*, even if integration did not move beyond taste preferences.

#### *Local or place-placed?*

Cultural constructions of place build upon increased consumer awareness of food origins and production methods. Place-based food systems are shaped by a multitude of forces including, but not limited to, history, geography, ecology, perceptions of value, and socially embedded consumption habits (Selfa and Qazi 2005). When exploring the terminology associated with place-based conceptions of food, the word "local" is frequently cited. Activism around "local" food focuses on spatial origins: the measurable amount of miles a product travels, a natural feature of the landscape, or the length of its commodity chain (Paxson 2010; DeLind 2006). Selfa and Qazi (2005) argue that in food systems where consumers are finite, ecological conditions are inhospitable, and market access is limited, "local" strictly in the geographically proximate sense may not be physically achievable to the individual. This prompts some local food enthusiasts to utilize non-spatial terminology to describe the values espoused by food systems in regard to place. However, the extension of "local" to describe knowable yet geographically distant landscapes raises questions about what barriers prevent "local" food from extending to the national or global market. The relational ambiguity of the word "local"—local to whom and where—prompts me to use of the term "place-based" to better situate ideas of locality and quality rooted in a particular place (Holloway and Kneafsey 2000; Winter 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005).

Unpacking the term “local” becomes especially relevant when applying it the Russian context. Russia’s vast territory—even more expansive when consumers conceptually include some or all of the former Soviet republics—acts as a physical barrier to cultivating local valuations of food. The boundaries of locality that appear geographically far are constructed and reinforced by policy as feeling economically close. In contemporary Moscow, this economic proximity perseveres out of convenience, accessibility, and historically embedded taste preferences. While *LavkaLavka* uses a form of the Russian word *mestnyy* (local) in its slogan *Podderzhi mestnovo fermera!* (Support a local farmer!), its media, and its advertising, the cooperative extends the definition of “local” to include the entire Russian state and beyond. *LavkaLavka* sources products from farms across Russia, as well as from small-scale producers in Armenia, Moldova, and even Greece. The cooperative justifies offering foreign goods based on consumer demand for tastes familiarized by Soviet regionalism and made widely available by the market economy. Using place-based terminology to describe the values expressed by contemporary Russian consumers encompasses preference toward place that is not restricted by spatial distance or current geopolitical boundaries.

#### *Engineering and reverse engineering terroir*

Yet is “place-based” enough to express *LavkaLavka*’s consumers’ concerns for the ecological conditions, traditional production practices, and regional cultural identities embedded in food? Locality has the power to promote ideological attachments to place and qualities of spatial contexts where taste becomes an embodied feature of regional relevance (Weiss 2011). *Terroir*, a widely understood French term, describes the intimate interplay between a local environment and the cultural innovations of its inhabitants (Barham 2003; Trubek and Bowen 2008). The French concept of terroir offers a theory of how people, place, ecology, and cultural traditions mutually reinforce

one another with time (Paxson 2010). It is important to distinguish that terroir relies on strictly enforced government certification, standards, and values-based labeling to protect the socially constructed identities of its products and valorize the socio-natural meaning of quality (Barham 2003). A more general taste of place, or sense of place, on the other hand, is much less fixed and institutionally regulated. Taste of place cannot always be measured and draws from social constructions of value that may or may not be attributable to a shared history (DeLind 2006).

Exploring the concept of terroir in my analysis provides insight into how terroir may be repurposed to fit the unique social context of post-Soviet Russia, or, as Paxson (2010) aptly describes the process of “what happens when an essentializing category is translated from one cultural tradition to another” as “reverse engineering” terroir (445). The process of reverse engineering extends greater flexibility to regional producers, taking into account their marked influence on the existing ecological conditions in an attempt to refashion tastes associated with other places. It entails transporting socially constructed values and standards of quality from one locale to another. For example, reproducing the French cheese Camembert, a terroir product that has an embedded history in its region of origin, in Russia may utilize the same production methods but will ultimately result in a unique taste profile influenced by socio-ecological elements of the local setting. Whether or not terroir may be instituted or reverse engineered in Russia reflects the historical social conditions of the Russian countryside. Terroir’s success in France ultimately resides in its championing of rural peasant agrarian life. By evoking this cultural identity of a rural idyll, “terroir, as a concept, is symbolically rooted in the soil and historically cultivated by a romanticized peasantry” (Paxson 2010: 444). Comparing France’s agrarian experience to that of Russia raises an interesting question: how might Russia’s peasant agrarian past make adopting or adapting terroir in Russia more feasible?

*Embedding quality in place and taste*

Celebrating the social and cultural values inherent in place requires a level of quality discernment. This distinction, expressed in the producer-supplier-consumer relationship, reifies the unique elements of tastes associated with specific localities and their material environment. While quality is arguably a complex term (Sage 2003), there is growing recognition within agri-food research that the salience of quality foods may be accredited to innovations at the local level (Goodman 2003). The embodiment of food encourages consumer curiosity in a place's ecology and the innovation behind the production of place-based food (Weiss 2011). A resurgence of origin labeling and the marketing of regional foods calls attention to the direct links consumers make between quality and taste of place (Sage 2003). The ecological and spatial origins of food helps distinguish it from globalized commodities that do not use values-based labeling. Murdoch et al. (2000) suggest this happens when geographically distant products undergo the process of societal embedding and disembedding. Consumer acceptance of the product must be legitimated in order for notions of quality and value to hold any cultural weight (Barham 2003). This social construction of value suggests a qualitative process where consumers see attributes of themselves reflected in their continued engagement in the food system (Weiss 2012). *LavkaLavka* forges connections between consumer assumptions and realities of quality in an alternative food system that has found a niche to re-embed taste of place.

Notions of quality are increasingly re-embedded within the spatial perimeters of AAFNs (Murdoch et al. 2000). Throughout Russia's post-socialist history, the values consumers construct around food have been embedded, disembedded, and re-embedded alongside rapid cultural and economic changes. The process of embedding and re-embedding involves domestic, public, and civic qualities: a complex interaction between the social and economic spheres. "Ephemeral informal economies not only

prop-up the formal economic sector but provide an alternative venue for economic practices embedded within the social relationships and common values of the local community" (Bubinas 2011: 155). The disembedding of conventional agriculture and industrial food systems has realigned social values of nature, embedding them into a place-based alternative food network. Re-embedding food production processes at the local level reflects products that extol heightened quality, transparency, and health benefits to consumers. Producers meet place-based food system demands by attaching attributes of the local ecology, specific production practices, and exceptional tastes to their products.

Re-embedding values of quality in the form of place and taste may be one way through which consumers work toward achieving a more sustainable food system (Bubinas 2011). Middle class citizens may utilize their purchasing power to engage in dynamic forms of community building that re-embed alternative food networks in local ecologies, traditional production methods, and social relationships. Embedding affects the success of these connections, but some critics argue that constructing too concrete of geographical boundaries in place-based food systems results in an absence of market flexibility (Murdoch et al. 2000). Relationships built around quality food must extend beyond proximate localities and find innovative ways to combine historically embedded values while simultaneously disembedding unsustainable consumption practices. *LavkaLavka* consumers recast values of taste and place to fit the culture of their highly industrialized, post-socialist society. The question remains to what extent and in what ways are consumers recasting values of taste and place to fit the post-socialist context? How do these consumers help shape the alternative food system in Russia and how does their participation help shape their own values and perceptions of quality?

## RESEARCH SETTING, POPULATION, AND METHODS

Institutions acting within alternative food networks who prioritize attributes such as food quality and territoriality serve as useful points of entry for a case study on how consumers construct values of place and taste. The *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative was chosen as one such institution because, at the time of research, it had the largest consumer base of any farmer-direct marketing project in Moscow. Consumers access farm-fresh food through the cooperative's online order and delivery system, their café, or their multiple storefronts. In addition, their large web presence and relentless marketing has drawn tens of thousands of followers and supporters on social media platforms. Moscow served as an ideal research site because it acts as the central distribution headquarters for *LavkaLavka*. In addition, the majority of the cooperatives' customers reside within the city center. The findings of this article reflect only a portion of the data collected during this period of fieldwork, primarily the narratives of *LavkaLavka* consumers. I also interviewed *LavkaLavka* employees (n=6), as well as individuals working on various food-related advocacy projects and entrepreneurial endeavors within the Moscow's AAFN for broader conceptual context (n=8).

### *Sampling and interviews*

This exploratory research took place over the course of nine weeks in the summer of 2013. I utilized purposive sampling strategies to identify a population of *LavkaLavka* consumers to interview. Consumers who participated in the research (n=15) self-identified in response to mass emails, postings on social networking websites, and flyers placed in weekly grocery orders. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were held at the location of the participant's choosing and generally lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. Questions asked during the interview focused on participants' conceptions of locality and food quality, their shopping habits (both with *LavkaLavka* and through other outlets), their beliefs regarding the transparency and social inclusivity

of the cooperative, their history of personal interactions with the cooperative's farmers, and their perceptions of the wider alternative agri-food network taking shape in Moscow.

The sampling frame included both past and present consumers of the cooperative. Consumers who participated in the research ranged greatly in regard to their age, gender, ethnicity, and how frequently they shopped at *LavkaLavka*. Sixty percent of consumers interviewed fell within the 26-35 age group and women represented the majority of consumers interviewed (73%). The shopping frequency of consumers varied from once a month to multiple times a week; however, two thirds of those interviewed either did not shop on a regular basis or shopped only one or two times a month. In general, consumers' food acquisition strategies were highly diversified. All but one consumer interviewed regularly shopped at retail outlets beyond *LavkaLavka*. Four of the fifteen consumers were non-ethnic Russians, reflecting that *LavkaLavka*'s marketing is not restricted to a Russian audience. Including expatriates in the analysis provides a unique perspective that complimented the experience of Russian consumers. As many expatriates living in Moscow buy from *LavkaLavka*, excluding them would not only neglect their emic observations of the Russian food system, but also omit etic constructions of locality, place, and quality that exhibit how embedded values are reconstructed by the local context.

Additionally, I interviewed employees of *LavkaLavka*, including the cooperative's director and co-founder. I held two group interviews with the cooperative's staff: one set of employees based in the administrative headquarters (n=4) and one set based in a newly-opened *LavkaLavka* store at Patriarchii Prudy—a wealthy neighborhood in the heart of downtown Moscow (n=2). All interviews were conducted either in Russian, English, or both, depending on the individual's preference. A Russian interpreter was

present during interviews held in Russian to help translate responses into English. To complement the information garnered from individual and group interviews, I read and documented the cooperative's media strategy that included newsletters, emails, social network postings, and website content from July to September 2013. I also attended lunches held at the cooperative on a weekly basis, observed activity at the *LavkaLavka* café and other storefront, and regularly interacted with employees, as well as purchased their farmer's products—both online and at their shops. Individual interviews, group interviews, media discourse analysis, and field notes were transcribed and coded based on salient themes using Dedoose qualitative software.

*"Local" periphery plotting exercise*

In an attempt to operationalize consumers' geographical definitions of locality and better understand the sense of place *LavkaLavka* consumers appropriate to their food purchasing habits, I asked consumers to draw a peripheral boundary to what they understood as "local" to Moscow on a map. During the qualitative interviews, consumers were handed a blank political map of Russia. The borders of the map extend into Central Asia and Eastern Europe, including some but not all of the former Soviet republics. Consumers were instructed to use Moscow as their central point when plotting the peripheral boundary for how they defined the term "local." Instructions were not highly structured; rather, I encouraged participants to draw multiple circles and use free form shapes to denote geographical limitations. All fifteen consumer responses were then combined using Adobe Photoshop software in order to visualize the degree of variation in the interpretations (Figure 3.1). Though their responses are not depicted in these findings, participants of the *LavkaLavka* administrative employee group interview also participated in this exercise.

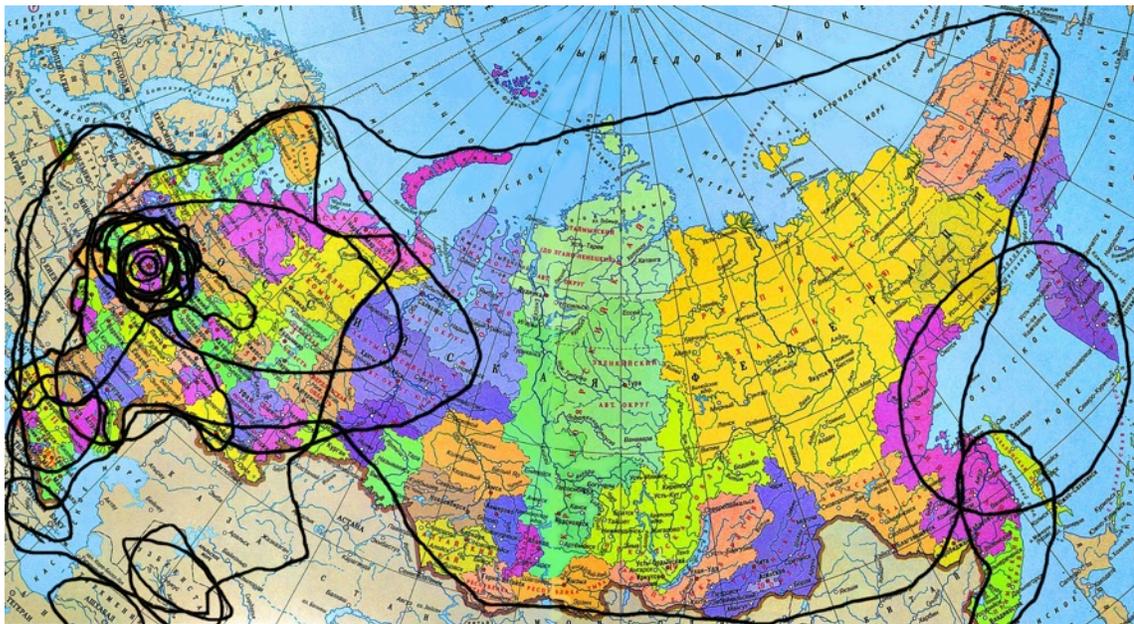


Figure 3.1: All consumer responses for the “local” periphery plotting exercise combined ( $n=15$ ). Note that the political map of Russia includes some but not all of the former Soviet republics.

## NOTIONS OF QUALITY BEHIND A UNIQUELY RUSSIAN TASTE OF PLACE

### *Terroir goals*

The *LavkaLavka* cooperative seeks to unite small-scale organic farmers in Russia, but also to construct social value around place and taste using the terroir approach. While Boris, *LavkaLavka*'s co-founder and director, never explicitly referred to his development ideals as terroir, he aimed to refashion the concept to fit the Russian context. Sitting together in a courtyard of outside of *LavkaLavka* on a warm summer night, he detailed his plans for the cooperative:

*I hope that we will help Russian agriculture to maybe be one of the best in the world. And to help our Russian farmers to remember some rare vegetables and forgotten animals, which will help some regions to be better, to have better economies. It's a question of eco-tourism. If we talk about Italy, you see every*

*region has a specific food there and it's very interesting for the people coming to Italy, to France—from all over the world—they are coming and saying, 'Oh this is ham from Parma, etc.' So we want farms in Russia to sell such products which will be connected with the regions.*

When I asked whether or not these kinds of regional gastronomical associations were familiar to Russian consumers, he responded with a hint of sadness, “Yes, [it was] something that was historically here and maybe was forgotten.” Boris’ desire to recreate regional culinary identities that embody specific production practices and local ecologies was rooted in a historical valuation of place and taste seemingly overshadowed by Russia’s tumultuous experience with socialism.

*LavkaLavka’s* consumers also felt that a terroir model might help contemporary Russians tap into agrarian identities and practices long eclipsed by the Soviet era. Among the consumers I spoke with, Eugene served a unique position as both a producer and a consumer: he owned a small farm that, at the time of our meeting, yielded enough eggs, goat milk, and vegetables to sell to his friends. Whatever he could not produce himself he purchased from *LavkaLavka*. He dreamt of expanding his farm in order to eventually sell through the cooperative. Meeting Eugene at a swanky café in Moscow, it was difficult to imagine this tailored young businessman milking goats on a farm. Yet he had countless stories to confide on the experience of rural living. At one point in our conversation, Eugene commented on the agricultural methods under communism: “So there were these huge collective farms and there were factories for workers. You are getting the same milk in the box. It’s not fresh, not organic.” He continued, “But maybe before the Soviet times, there was something like this. But we don’t have this memory—that everything works together, like in Europe.” Well-traveled Eugene referenced his knowledge of systems abroad in the hope that Russia might adopt a terroir model that supported small-scale farmers and challenged consumer mentalities

to find value in quality-laden farmer's products, as perhaps they once did before communism.

### *Origin labeling*

In addition to reconstructed regional identities, *LavkaLavka's* consumers' sentiments toward origin labeling highlight the high expectations of quality driving Moscow's growing place-based food network. Labeling and certification schemes aim to distinguish a product from its conventionally produced opponents, focusing on qualities consumers associate with a specific production practice, a product's origins, or the ecological conditions of the place in which it was produced (Higgins et al. 2008). When I asked consumers whether or not they assigned value to territorial demarcations of food labeling, their responses referenced undesirable ecological conditions, geopolitical boundaries, and romanticized spaces.

Consumers generally appreciated *LavkaLavka's* efforts to denote product origins and saw values-based labeling as a signifier of quality and transparency. I asked Vera, an English language tutor, many questions about how she interpreted the labels on her food. She purchased primarily from *LavkaLavka* because of personal health reasons, but was quick to spout off her social motivations for eating organically grown food. She distinguished the cooperative as the sole provider of more transparent labeling in Moscow:

*I only have the option of LavkaLavka because they actually explain where they get [their products] from. But if there was a market where people would put their name on the products—like a huge market where this is what is from there, there, and there, and you knew the quality...when a person puts their name on the product, I would like to go to that kind of market.*

Other *LavkaLavka* consumers expressed similar concerns for the lack of transparent outlets for place-based food in Moscow. They claimed that while there were many farmer-direct cooperatives and websites that specialized in organic merchandise, *LavkaLavka* eclipsed competitors in regard to the quality of their farmer's products. The cooperative distinguishes not only the product's region of origin, but also the name of the purveyor on every label. Additionally, biographies of individual farmers are published on the website for consumers interested in learning more about the production methods or the qualities of the environment in which the food was produced.

When I spoke with Anastasia, a young career woman working on a cooperative workspace concept for entrepreneurs, she immediately struck me as open minded, progressive, and intuitive. Over lunch on the streets near the *Belorusskaya* metro station, I asked if she felt *LavkaLavka's* transparent origin labeling singled the cooperative out from other farmer-direct marketing models in Moscow. She replied: "It kind of makes sense to put the name on the product because just unconsciously it gives more trust that this is the real product and these are the real people and they are not using any chemicals." With *LavkaLavka's* origin labeling, in addition to the farmer biographies accessible on their website, consumers assign value and meaning to place based on access to information and a certain level of trust established by this communication.

*"Ecologically clean"*

Laura DeLind (2006) notes that "place shapes the human heart as well as our external affairs and, in large measure, the local ecology itself. The latter, of course, turns right around and shapes place" (129). But aspects of the growing environment are at risk of becoming commoditized when notions of safety, health, and cleanliness act as

marketable attributes to the consumer. Many consumers see the quality turn toward food labeled as “organic” or “bio” as a reintegration of ecological concerns at the household level (Murdoch et al. 2000). While the word *organicheskiy* (organic) is relatively new to the Russian language, making associations between quality and a product’s perceived organic nature has deep roots for Russian consumers.

Other ethnographic studies in post-socialist spaces have referenced the power of “naturalness” to denote a lack of preservatives or artificial additives in food (Caldwell 2002; Klumbyte 2010). Despite *LavkaLavka*’s consistent use of the word “organic” in their marketing, consumers, whether consciously or unconsciously, attributed value to place by referencing the ecological conditions in which their food was grown rather than the organic farming methods used. When I asked *LavkaLavka* consumers which terms they used to describe qualities like “organic,” a product’s lack of chemicals was frequently expressed in reference to ecology, such as being *ekologicheski chistyy* (ecologically clean). Vera definitively added, “There is no word for organic in the Russian dictionary. There are ‘eco products’: ‘ecologically clean,’ ‘environmentally friendly.’”

Connections made between quality and ecology were not always positive in regard to a product’s territorial origins. For multiple consumers, the most proximately local food to Moscow was not desirable as it was considered polluted and unsafe to eat. I met Maria, a young lawyer and expectant mother, at an upscale restaurant for tea. The glass panels of the building’s exterior flooded light over our table and the buffet of expensive looking desserts behind us. She was pragmatic and calculated in her responses, but not too reserved to think out loud either. When I inquired how she geographically classified food that could be considered “local,” she responded:

It's a difficult question because the closer the farms are to Moscow, the worse the environment. The ecological situation is worse. And the ground is more expensive so the products become more expensive. So I think that, for example, milk from Kaluzhskaya Oblast is better than a place closer to Moscow. And if you can deliver from Kaluzhskaya or Vladimir Oblast it's better to do it from there and not from more distant places because long transportation for products is not right.

Maria placed value in the ecological qualities of the *oblasts* (regions) beyond Moscow that she perceived as less altered by industrialization.



Figure 3.2: Milk for sale at the LavkaLavka Pariarchii Prudy store. The label details the producer and the product's region of origin.

Others felt similarly to Maria, yet expressed more criticism of Moscow's ecology. Matteus, an expatriate salesman who had called Moscow home for the past five years, was one such consumer. He was the only *LavkaLavka* customer I interviewed who ordered a weekly market basket: an assembly of products that allowed the cooperative to pick and choose the included goods based on their seasonality. His trust in *LavkaLavka*, still ridden with skepticism on how truly "organic" any Russian food might be, was stronger than his trust in the global food system. Like Vera, he saw the cooperative as his only outlet from which to purchase "ecologically clean" food. He echoed Maria's sentiment on food locality:

*Living in a metropolis such as Moscow and the pollution this entails, as well as the very distance you need in order to produce food with as little influence from urban waste as possible, I cannot say that I expect everything to be cultivated near Moscow. Thereby the associations of the word 'local' meaning these romantic sort-of walking distances from your house are not feasible, of course.*

Ekaterina, a mother of two young children who lived in Moscow's distant suburbs, reiterated Matteus and Maria's sentiments about the ecological quality of land near Moscow: "You know, in Russia, a lot of people grow their own food. And cows! Close to my home, we have cows and milk you can buy." She hesitated, then continued, "But you don't have healthy grass for this cow to eat, I don't think. So when you have a choice, you can taste the normal food and globalization food. We can make a choice." Ekaterina spoke of "normal" in a way that evoked a form of traditional methods of cultivation and stewardship, the antithesis of the conventional agri-food system. She sought agency in a market economy, expressing her concern of how industrialization and globalization have altered the attributes of domestically produced foods.

The relative amount of farms *LavkaLavka* sources from within the Moscow oblast remains marginal—a product, as Maria pointed out, of the high cost of agricultural land

and the negative ecological attributes. I arranged to meet George, a corporate lawyer, for coffee in a near his firm in Moscow's *Kitay Gored* neighborhood. Enthusiastic to divulge his opinions, he felt just as skeptical of food grown in Moscow as he did of other regions he associated with high chemical exposure. When I pressed him to elaborate on whether or not food origins impacted his purchasing habits, he sighed: "You know, it does matter, but...most of the time the location is industrial. I have been working for different industrial companies for about fifteen years. I know the regions where there is some pollution. So, I simply know there are regions from which I would like not to buy things." Thus, consumers based their notions of quality not only in the presence of an ecologically clean environment, but also in the absence of it. While some consumers, like Maria, disliked the lengthy transportation networks that *LavkaLavka's* products traveled and the negative effects this movement had on the environment, more explained they would rather have their food travel further in order to ensure its quality and cleanliness.

### *Defining locality*

Boris of *LavkaLavka* admitted that the cooperative's own broad definition of locality was constructed out of necessity—in regard to both the paucity of small-scale farmers and consumer demand for a mixed array of "ecologically clean" products. It was more important for *LavkaLavka* that farmers practice organic methods of cultivation and have a diverse supply than be physically close to Moscow. He explained the cooperative's conundrum further:

*Now it's a question of where agriculture is [in Russia]. It's not a good situation—we just don't have enough farmers, enough food to say that local is only [that] which is here. So if somebody would make a business to just sell products from the farmers in Moscow region—100 km from Moscow—I think, 'Okay, it's great, but it's not real right now.' So we think that local food is what is coming from*

*your region. But also if you think about food which cannot appear in your region because of the climate, maybe you should go somewhere south or north to get some fish. So it's like the food that you can get the nearest you can. So if you can get apples from 100 kilometers, great, but if the apples don't grow here, you should go 300 kilometers. If you can get wild fish from the sea from 200 kilometers or 100 kilometers, great, but if you don't have a sea around and you have to go 1000 kilometers, okay, go that far. So the nearest you can is best.*

Some consumers shared Boris' sentiment that proximity was preferable but not always attainable. When I asked Eugene if he felt *LavkaLavka* sourced as much as they could locally, he responded, "Of course. All products are fresh and if they are not, they can only be local if they are fresh. Otherwise they would have to be preserved or undergo some type of preparation. But yes, more is needed." Nearness implied freshness unless something could be frozen, like fish from the Far East.

The question of nearness still raised concerns about health attributes and qualities of "ecological cleanliness." Ludmilla and I enjoyed tea together on the patio of a café overlooking a busy street in Moscow. Over the drum of passing cars, we spoke about proximity and her preference for food considered more geographically local. I wanted to know if Ludmilla would prefer to see more of *LavkaLavka's* products come from closer to Moscow. She replied: "Of course, if it's the same products. I don't care where it was grown if it is all ecologically clean. It doesn't matter if it is in Moscow or in Krasnodarsky Krai. But the transportation should not have problems. I mean, if it will not spoil during the travel, then it doesn't make any difference to me." Other consumers felt *LavkaLavka* should use a more geographic definition of "local" and do more to source from nearby farms. A PR executive and mother named Nastia complained about the vagueness of their definition: "*LavkaLavka* is defining local food that is not so local. Like local food [for them] is from Armenia, from somewhere north, from Far Eastern

Russia. So it's not local, maybe." Maria also expressed concern for *LavkaLavka's* definition of locality that defied her own:

*To say strictly that it's all local, no. For example when they deliver something from Krasnodarsky Krai or these pine nuts from Siberia—it's not local at all. But about meat and milk and fruits, like apples, that are from the closest regions, that's local. Local is when it is from within the same climate and the same tradition of food preparing. So like Krasnodar has another climate and other food traditions.*

Maria's inclusion of the word "tradition" alludes to the presence of cultural and social constructions embedded in place. For her, the climate of a place affects its ecology, its regionally and culturally specific methods of production, and its culinary identity.

By *LavkaLavka* using the word "local" to define their products, they are branding a food's place of origin. Whether that place is Vladimir or Kamchatka, "local" still denotes "ours" in complicated ways. Andrew, an expatriate working on the same collaborative workspace project as Anastasia, did not understand why *LavkaLavka* would use "local" in its marketing. From the living room of his Soviet style apartment, he debated how the definition of "local" crafted by his upbringing in London had to be amended when he moved to Moscow:

*If I call it Moscow food it would have to be Moscow oblast but we don't see that. There isn't any of that. There is no brand of that. There is no understanding of that. It is not something that you can buy except through something like LavkaLavka. So for me, I draw the relevant boundary a bit broader even though I would not necessarily call it local.*

Taste of place was evident in constructions of locality though the values of proximity and place-based attributes were not uniformly shared among *LavkaLavka* consumers. Andrew's comment highlights how socially embedded constructions of taste and place

affect perceptions of locality within a specific cultural context. If *LavkaLavka* were able to cultivate terroir for regions in Russia, regional identities might be more easily communicated to expatriates like Andrew, who have a preexisting set of socially embedded values.

I first encountered Leila, a computer programmer, on the patio of a restaurant that publicizes they source products from *LavkaLavka*. Nervous to start, she quickly warmed to our conversation, sporadically asking me questions about alternative food projects in the U.S. She only purchased her food from *LavkaLavka*—a notion I found difficult to imagine given the high prices of their products (generally at least three times higher than the average cost of goods at supermarkets). When I questioned her about which foods constituted “local,” she emphasized that she valued quality more than proximity. She raised an interesting perspective of food transportation: “I am not against the delivery if it doesn’t affect the quality of the food. Like for example, *LavkaLavka* delivers meat and fish from Kamchatka but it’s all frozen so it doesn’t negatively affect the food. On the other hand, buying local food we are investing in the economy of our country because during the Tsar’s times, Russia was the leader of food production, of very high quality food.” Leila’s conflation of locality with the past suggests the potential of adopting a food system model that taps into embedded values of food that date back to a pre-Soviet era.

### *Geopolitical distinctions*

Consumers also described values that corresponded with historically embedded notions of place—a remnant of state-sponsored regionalism during Soviet times. Regions often have their own unique culinary cultures, place-based agricultural practices, and geopolitical associations that capitalize on the social construction of place for economic and political purposes (Weiss 2011). Place is independently relative

and relational. Attaching meaning to place—especially in a geopolitical sense—does not mean that all consumers' values will align. This is especially seen in light of citizens of post-Soviet republics whose national and regional culinary traditions were altered by the state-sponsored consumer economy (Klumbyte 2010; Spilkova et al. 2012). *LavkaLavka* consumers' constructions of place are best illustrated by the local periphery plotting exercise. While the responses were diverse and complex, I have isolated them geographically into four categories: the Russian nation, former Soviet republics, the Russian Far East, and Western Russia. Each categorization evoked very different descriptions of values and qualities *LavkaLavka* consumers ascribed to place.

#### *The Russian nation*

I asked Ludmilla, the oldest consumer I interviewed, how she interpreted the term "local." "So it's mostly about places with a similar climate that we have," she said with confidence. "For example, Uzbekistan, which is near in climate, may be geographically further than the Netherlands. But this word is rather uncertain. For me, it is mostly about the same climate that the food is growing in." When I had Ludmilla transfer her response to the map, she circled most of Russia and portions of its neighboring countries (*Figure 3.3*). She was the only consumer to depict "local" at a national level. Her comment on climate determining locality and her pictorial depiction of local raise an interesting contradiction. As Siberia, Uzbekistan, and Moscow are not categorized in the same climate region, they do not have similar agricultural growing conditions. Ludmilla's "near in climate" remark may speak to the social constructions of space that linger from state-sponsored Soviet regionalism, highlighting the complexities of contemporary consumer mentalities and identities. But unlike Ludmilla, most consumers referenced place-based values at the regional level, especially the former Soviet republics.

### *Former Soviet republics*

That *LavkaLavka* consumers would extend place-based values to products historically traded between Russia and former Soviet republics is not unlikely (Figure 3.4). As state-sponsored production dictated which goods were produced where, many post-socialist citizens still hold associations of quality fostered during the Soviet era. Former republics also use this socially constructed demand to their advantage. I met Yulia, an investment banker in her thirties, over lunch one day in Moscow's *Patriarchii Prudy* neighborhood—right around the corner from *LavkaLavka*'s new store. I inquired whether or not Yulia valued the geographic origin of the food she purchased from the cooperative and she replied, "In a sort of sense. So, in general, I do prefer fruits from either Russia or neighboring republics like Azerbaijan. *Tagansky* cucumbers are one of the best. Watermelons from Uzbekistan are the best. So every year I am waiting for watermelons from Uzbekistan. It's something different." Her response highlights examples of deeply engrained trading networks and regional associations that point to a socially embedded taste of place.

Associations consumers made between Russia and former Soviet republics evoked both interesting contradictions as well. When Anastasia and I discussed her definition of local, she paused to reflect on her construction of the concept. She debated the idea for a minute and eventually admitted, "Like Krasnodar for me can be local, but then Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia. These are less distant, but..." She recognized the contradiction when I asked her to draw her conception of "local" on the map. She looked at the map silently for a few seconds then declared, "It's a very hard question! Because I wouldn't include, like, Estonia or whatever. Probably. But it's kind of not as far as Krasnodar." I asked why she wouldn't include it and she replied, "It's out of the country. It's kind of my perception that it breaks the concept of local. But maybe I should change it." If calculated based on a spatial proximity, the two regions she

speaks of vary greatly in their distance from Moscow. Krasnodar is the capital of Krasnodarsky Krai, an agriculturally abundant region in southwestern Russia bordering the Black Sea. It is approximately 835 miles from Moscow, whereas the Latvian capital of Riga is only 570 miles away. Anastasia did not explicitly state that products from the Baltic countries were less desirable, but she illustrated her preference for products from Russia regardless of proximate locality to Moscow. What Anastasia's comment suggests is that perceptions of "local" rooted outside of geographical proximity influence *LavkaLavka* consumer ideas about social constructions of place. This is important when considering the history of Soviet state-sponsored regionalism and its lasting impact on notions of taste and place made by consumers in the post-socialist environment.

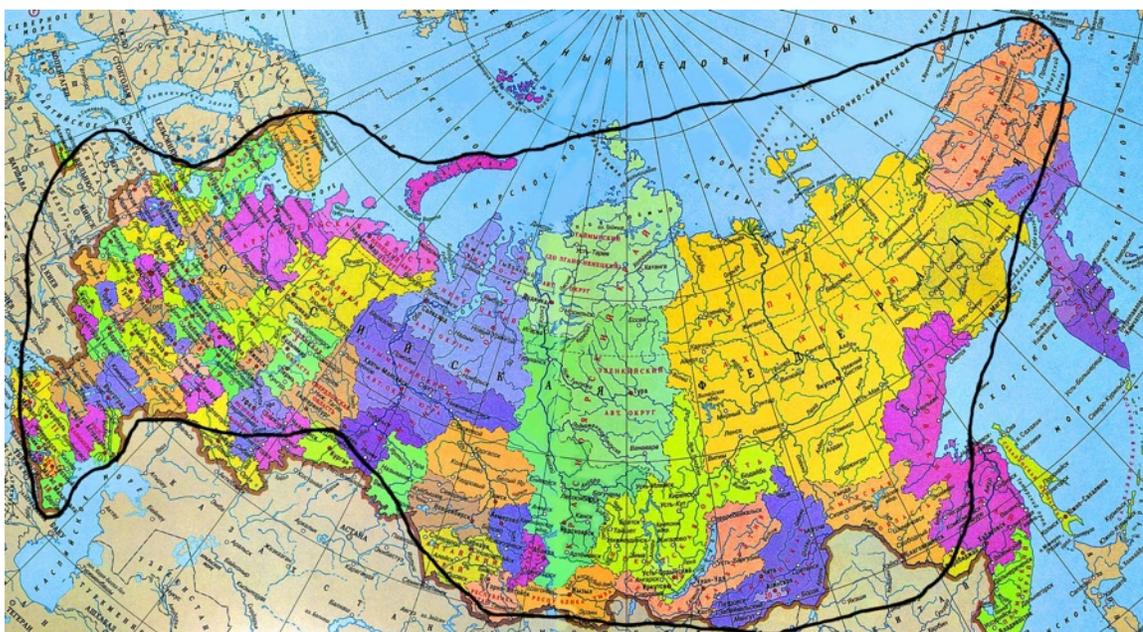


Figure 3.3: Consumer construction of "local" at the level of the nation state ( $n=1$ ).

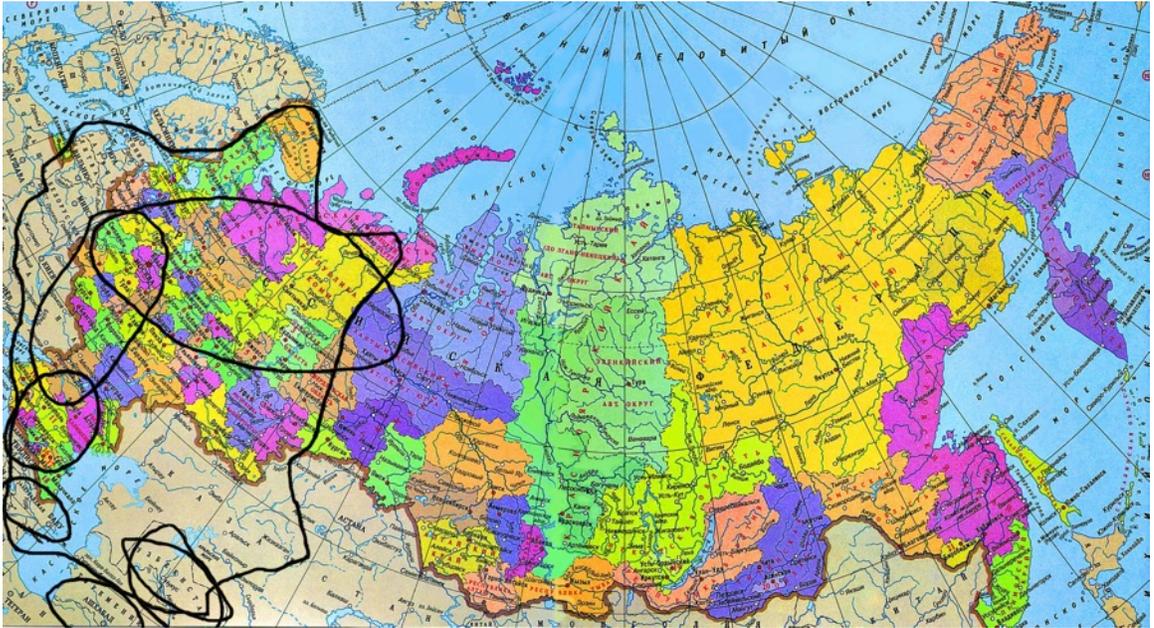


Figure 3.4: Consumer constructions of "local" that include former Soviet republics (n=3).



Figure 3.5: Consumer constructions of "local" that include the Russian Far East (n=2).

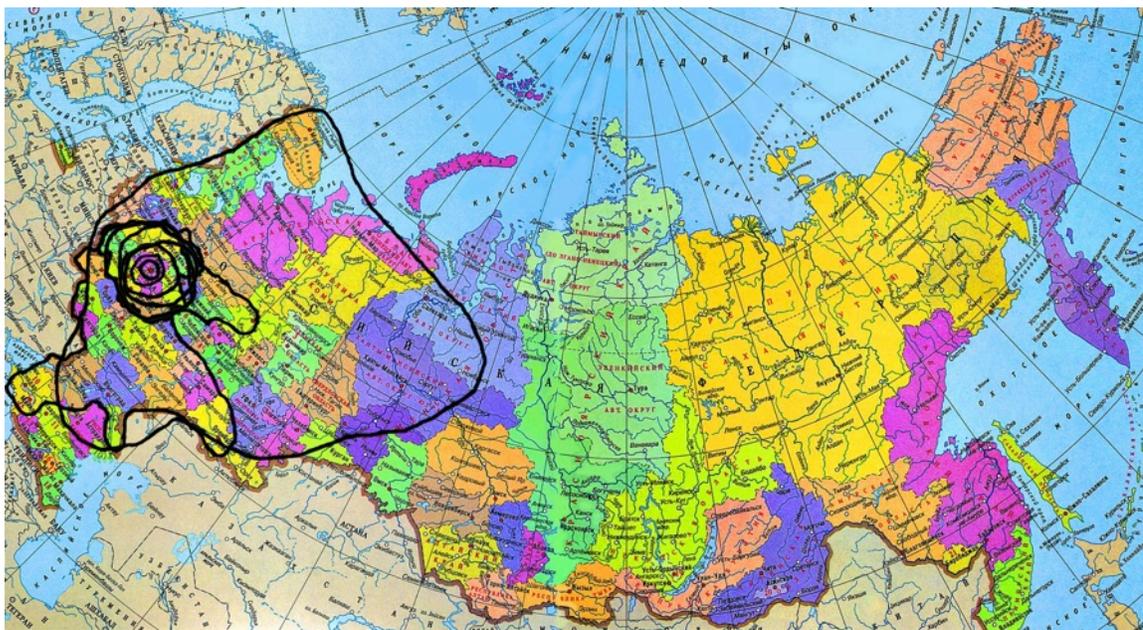


Figure 3.6: Consumer constructions of “local” that include Western Russia (n=9).

#### The Far East

The Russian Far East was another region *LavkaLavka* consumers associated with specific tastes. Consumers who included the Far East in their perception of “local” noted that they only considered it “local” in regard to certain products, such as fish and caviar. The two consumers’ responses isolated on the map (Figure 3.5) include a circle around Moscow and a separate circle around portions of Eastern Russia. Masha, a spirited, highly educated entrepreneur in her thirties, told me she included the Far Eastern region because it was the only place from which to source a particular species of fish that she liked. I asked her to elaborate on her drawing and she replied: “It’s like local depends on the region where I am. But to Moscow, this is approximate. There are difficulties with logistics in getting food from one place to another. So when I am in Uzbekistan, the local is Uzbekistan.” Yet before the mapping exercise, when I asked Masha how she would define “local food,” she concisely replied “it’s grown in the region.” Masha’s contradicting responses situate local in multiple geographies appear

heavily influenced by her taste preferences. Her responses support *LavkaLavka's* desire to promote terroir: specific food qualities assigned to a region that may not appear geographically proximate yet the place is valued by Moscow consumers because of how its local ecology and production practices are expressed through taste.

Eugene, the other respondent who included the Far East in his map, described his motives out loud while completing the mapping exercise: "Seafood from the Far East," he declared as he drew. "What else...that's all. Those are the main areas. Fish and other seafood is only from there." When I asked him how he felt about seafood from the northern coasts of Russia, such as the Baltic or the White Seas, he claimed, "I like seafood. Not fish so much, but everything else. And for example, you can't find it in the north, but you can find it in the Far East." Eugene's comments reinforce Masha's place-based associations in which ecological circumstances play a key role in the construction of taste.

#### *Western Russia*

The remaining consumers' responses (n=9) situated their definition of "local" within Western Russia, generally west of the Ural Mountains (*Figure 3.6*). This natural barrier has historically divided the country both geopolitically and culturally. Vera spoke of this division when she explained her perception of "local": "Behind Urals is Siberia. Everything is Siberia. Like there is West Siberia, East Siberia...But as long as it's not beyond the Caucasus, they consider it ours because of the culture. If it's your culture, you consider it a part of the region." Vera highlighted cultural distinctions between Western and Eastern Russia. She spoke aloud as she completed the mapping exercise: "So I would say—I know it sounds bad, and I am not a racist—but I am saying this as a Russian right now, from a Russian psyche. For me, for *Russian* Russian, that would be up to here, where the Russian ethnicity is." She denoted the Urals on the map. In

referencing every part of Russia west of this topographic demarcation, she claimed, “Basically, this is considered *Russian* Russian. So geographical locality, that would be local. But cultural locality, I would say everywhere where there are, I would say, native Russians. Any of the ethnic republics...I’m not sure, if I included them, I would have to take them out because they don’t belong there.” Vera’s thoughts reiterate Maria’s earlier reference to tradition, both of which highlight the diverse peoples that inhabit the vast territory. They also reinforce literature on how Soviet regionalism did not always extend to non-Russian ethnic inclusivity.

#### *Certifying terroir in Russia*

*LavkaLavka*’s aim to construct value around the notion of terroir for Russian consumers may be hindered by a crucial component of terroir that distinguishes it from taste of place: quality dictated and enforced by governmental or institutional standards. While *LavkaLavka* has created its own certification scheme to help the cooperative’s producers work toward using organic growing techniques, no national organic or terroir certification exists in Russia. I asked consumers how they felt about adopting organic certification schemes that involved the government. Many consumers, such as Eugene, expressed concerns:

*It’s a difficult question. For example, for my mother to understand, what does it mean, this certification? I am reading a lot on this topic now. For example, in France, they recently adopted [organic] certification. I think that for usual customers it has to be clear and transparent in what it means. I am not against participating in working on the idea of certifications, but I think it’s a problem to just take the European experience and bring it here.*

Eugene’s concerns for how everyday consumers would interpret the certification scheme raised questions about which values would be expressed by the certification and how they would be communicated by the certifier. George, on the other hand, felt

less optimistic about government certification: "Yes, yes. It would be great. But the problem in Russia that we are used not to trusting our government." When I asked Masha if she would trust any government certification scheme, she laughed at my question. "It's Russia!" she mocked in reply. Anastasia echoed her sentiments, but in greater detail: "I would rather trust a third [party], some kind of international organic certification. It would be better, I would say. In general, we don't have a habit of trusting our government." She smirked and continued, "I think it's like a trust issue. Although, I think that it would have been good if there were some local specifics. It's hard to explain, but I would rather look for something more internationally planned like this is an international organic label and this particular Russian product is responsible for the requirements of this certification. But maybe if it was one from *LavkaLavka*. I know that they are starting their own certification. From *Lavka* I would trust that."

Anastasia's comments regarding the local characteristics of a product expressed concerns about the trouble of transplanting foreign schemes that involve government regulation to the Russian case. Leila saw the value in certification but also felt that "You should have these regulations, but there needs to be something behind them." I asked her to elaborate and she spoke of the need for greater control: "It's nice to have this possibility of formalized checking. Because *LavkaLavka* is becoming popular, so I am anxious about how farmers will react, whether or not they will be ready for the larger demand. It was a nice addition that the farmers whom I like most were the first to get the certification, so that's why I trust my own taste. My tastes are like an inspector." Leila's comments about *LavkaLavka*'s certification program further elucidate the trust the cooperative has built based on its commitment to quality and transparency. When George and I talked about *LavkaLavka* staying small, focusing on quality instead of quantity, he exclaimed: "Yes! Because half of their charm and half of what makes them interesting for buyers is their attitude. It's that they can tell you about any farmer, who

likes what and how the pig was grown, what place, what is nearby the farm...If they will be too big, I think they will lose it.”

This trust was fostered not only from access to information and formal quality control, but also from the repeated social interactions between *LavkaLavka*, farmers, and the consumers. I asked Ludmilla why she had so much trust in the cooperative, especially in light of the rising amount of dishonest farmer-direct marketing initiatives that emerged alongside *LavkaLavka*'s popularity. She explained: “I trust the people there. I know Boris and some of the other staff and we feel close to them, speaking from time to time. It's about trust. I know they are not trying to somehow reassure us—as if they needed to. They are doing everything they are saying they do. We are not feeling like we need to check them. We just trust.” This unquestioning trust stands out as atypical given previous consumer comments about how trust was a value absent from Russian society, especially trust in the government. Certification built on trust in *LavkaLavka* as an institution promotes Boris' idea to adopt terroir from the European model, but perhaps refashion it to factor in the low levels of consumer trust in the Russian government.

#### *Taste of place at the Russian dacha*

The Russian *dacha* prompts further questioning into how taste of place is socially embedded and perpetuated by Muscovite consumers. The *dacha* both symbolizes and physically serves as a place of repose, especially as Russians push away from the market economy and seek consumption less altered by industrial agriculture. It is a space for Russians to connect with nature, as well as integrate a range of home grown foods into their diet that help constitute their individual and social identities (Caldwell 2011).

While *LavkaLavka* aims to establish terroir, downplaying geographical proximity to food sources, *dachas* embody the opposite. A uniquely Russian example of taste of place, *dacha* locality is not restricted to a specific region. *Dachas* line the periphery of major metropolitan areas in Russia and elicit a uniformly emblematic image in the Russian psyche. They denote shared values about the countryside: a place of repose where ecologically clean food reflects the taste of the Russian soil. Yet their geographical positioning on the periphery of many large cities in Russia reflects another contradiction: their predisposition to chemical exposure, a quality that concerned many of the consumers I interviewed. George was one such consumer whose preferences prioritized the taste of place of the *dacha*:

*You know, in fact, I never cared about whether it is local or is it grown near Moscow or is it Russian because Russia is such a huge country. It's not working when you say, 'Buy Russian,' because you cannot buy something that was grown in Siberia that takes several days to travel to Moscow. That doesn't make sense. So we call local something that is near Moscow but it doesn't make sense to focus on such products because Moscow is not a very good place ecologically. You know, when I go to my dacha, I see that when you drive 30 kilometers, you still cannot see the stars. But after the 40s, the sky is cleaner. There aren't many industrial objects there. So local food starts somewhere after 50 kilometers from Moscow.*

George's *dacha* was located 40 kilometers from the city, yet seemed immune to George's ideas of pollution. Later in our conversation, when I questioned George about the other outlets he and his family purchased food from he said, "When we are spending weekends at the *dacha*, we have a market nearby. It's near east of the town. And I buy vegetables and fruits there. They also have a good choice of fish." George admitted to purchasing food grown near his *dacha* that perhaps did not meet his qualifications for ecological cleanliness. For George, his *dacha*'s locality exuded a taste

of place rooted in personal preference, the value of convenience, knowing the place, time spent there, knowing markets and people, and growing food.

An interesting contradiction, *dachas* seemed immune to consumers' expressed concerns for "ecologically clean" growing conditions—or at least subject to a lower level of scrutiny than consumers extended to *LavkaLavka's* small-scale farms. We were discussing how to define the term "organic" when Vera explained: "So organic is something that is Russian but they don't call it organic, they just call it...basically they say...do you know the phrase *vsoe svoi*? It means 'it's all ours.' Basically that's what people always say when they bring something from their *dacha*. They say, 'Oh! *Vsoe svoi*! It's from our *dacha*!' And that's what organic means: home grown." Vera alluded to the contradictory social constructions around food grown on household plots, but specifically to the heightened sense of quality attached to *dacha* food. When I countered that surely some *dacha* owners used chemicals such as pesticides or herbicides, she protested: "Pesticides? No. But nobody uses pesticides as far as I know. Sometimes they used, for pesticides, either tobacco grains or dandelion leaves. And you soak them because they are so bitter. They constantly use herbal remedies. This is what Russia looks like. That's normal; it's kind of tradition." Her citation of tradition echoes Maria's earlier comment about regional growing methods that she viewed as different in regard to tradition. For *LavkaLavka* consumers, generating ideas about socio-natural relationships extends not only to regions, but to the *dacha* as well.

Expatriates also expressed the notion that home grown food was inherently superior. In response to questions regarding the future vitality of place-based food in Moscow, Matteus replied:

*From what I understand on the one hand Russia has this affinity with home grown food. It is a much stronger among Russians than Westerners because we*

*have completely lost touch with the land. But here, thanks to the babushkas and dachas, they are still in touch with the growing process. In that way, it's not really a new thing. The new thing is to package it and sell it at a higher price locally.*

The professional small-scale organic farmers of the *LavkaLavka* cooperative are absent from Matteus' comment. Like other consumers, Matteus attached value to a broad construction of taste of place when it came to the Russian *dacha*—perhaps too ambiguous to encourage mass consumer adoption or adaptation of the notion of terroir.

#### REFASHIONING TERROIR TO THE RUSSIAN CONTEXT

While ecological conditions mattered at the *dacha* and factored highly into consumer associations of taste and place, this construction does not originate from a specific territory that evokes ecologically regulated growing conditions in the sense of the terroir model. Consumers view *dachas* more as an imagined, socially embedded source of quality food grown in a space laden with symbolism and cultural idylls. The level of quality consumers like Vera assign to products grown at the *dacha* complicates *LavkaLavka's* ability to construct an understanding of terroir and attach meaning to quality certifications assigned to regulate "ecologically clean" spaces. Small-scale farmers' expertise is at risk of being obscured by the historical cultural affinity for gardening and household food production in Russia. While the values associated with *dachas* complement the notion of taste of place, they may hinder *LavkaLavka's* aim to encourage rural regional development rooted in a more concrete and regulated sense of the terroir model. Value in the *dacha's* taste of place and value in terroir exists simultaneously for consumers. *LavkaLavka* must consider consumers' perceptions of food grown at the *dacha* and use these taste of place associations to enhance their

ability to market their product's ecological origins, growing techniques, and farmer narratives.



*Figure 3.7: A typical wooden Russian dacha, Moshnitsy Village, Moscow Oblast.*

It is crucial to remember that taste of place is not synonymous with taste of proximity (Paxson 2010). Taste of place is distinguished from food geographically close to Moscow in the sense that it is grounded in place but not confined to a specific territory, region, or nation (Trubek 2008). It spurs remembrance and imagination for ecological growing conditions, products, and cuisine that may or may not still be found in a particular place. Consumer valuations of place coincide with distinctive taste profiles forged by local knowledge and ecology. While elements of the environment play a role

in this construction, taste of place is primarily a product of cultural and social forces (Trubek 2008). This was expressed by *LavkaLavka* consumer's apprehension of agricultural products considered proximately local to Moscow due to the relics of Soviet collective farming practices. As the urban and semi-urban ring around Moscow continues to extend, it will become increasingly difficult for small-scale farmers to remain as geographically proximate as possible to their urban consumers and still maintain strict organic growing practices.

In addition to concerns for ecological cleanliness, the cooperative's consumers value taste of place over geographical proximity in their celebration of regionally characteristic cuisines. They conveyed demand for food sourced from a wealth of localities ranging in climate and ecological conditions to ensure quality, seasonality, and diversity that met their taste preferences. *LavkaLavka* feels adopting regional place-based values akin to the terroir model has the potential to instill positive associations between notions of quality and Russian grown food—both in regard to re-establishing culinary traditions and in communicating value for products within and beyond Russia's borders. Regional associations lingering from the Soviet era's state-sponsored trade networks and central economic planning may still influence contemporary consumer place-based associations of quality. Eugene and Masha's willingness to make exceptions for products from the Russian Far East speaks to the pervasive impact that taste preferences, Soviet regionalism, and the market economy have on consumption habits, even within an alternative food network. As Russia and the former Soviet republics share a history of strong regional identities, designating Russian *oblasts* as production sites for terroir products has the potential to celebrate past linkages and create new market opportunities for innovative producers (Barham 2003).

Socially inclusive constructions of place may reflect a region's agricultural future, promote new markets, revitalize existing ones, and celebrate regional heritage (Nabhan et al. 2005). Yet post-Soviet socio-economic development that favors Western Russia has further suppressed social and cultural expressions of regional identities. Within Russia's territory, cultural distinguishers factor greatly into consumers' construction of place, evoking a sense of *nashi* that does not necessarily extend the concept of "ours" to a truly national scale. The question for *LavkaLavka* is how they will recast place-based notions of quality by promoting regional identities in socially inclusive ways to fit Russia's contemporary cultural context. *LavkaLavka's* idea to translate the concept of terroir to post-socialist Russia raises another set of questions: While Russia and France both have agricultural histories rooted in the rural peasantry, how familiar are Russians with the concept of terroir? How difficult would it be to adopt Russia? The Russian *dacha* adds a unique cultural dimension to the process of reconstructing consumer values of place and taste that align with institutional standards and certification schemes. As *LavkaLavka* consumers expressed, movement toward regulation was met with overwhelming distrust of the government. As state involvement is crucial to the success of terroir in the French case, it is difficult to see how terroir will be transported as-is to post-socialist Russia.

A refashioning of the terroir model must factor in the effects of *dacha* taste of place associations, consumer desire for "ecologically clean" growing environments, and enduring Soviet regional identities. One such method of translating terroir to new environments is the idea of reverse engineering terroir. Heather Paxson (2010) discusses the concept in her study of cheesemakers evoking the French terroir model but operating in the United States. These producers adopted traditional practices from the French tradition but construed value for their consumers around the unique attributes of their local environment and the effect they had on taste. Reverse engineering terroir

allows inhabitants of the region to have more influence and control over the social constructions that underpin a sense of place in the hope of creating more sustainable alternative food networks (Paxson 2010). In the reversal process, space is reterritorialized and constructed with meaning and value that reflects the local social context and landscape.

Yet Paxson warns that reverse engineering terroir may problematically reinforce divisions along social and geopolitical lines. Social constructions embedded in place reproduce taste preferences that distinguish products as a part of a hierarchical market and reveal class-based values (Paxson 2010). Embedded cultural traditions of a place—especially ones as volatile as Russia in the socialist and post-socialist era—challenges how *LavkaLavka* might proceed with reverse engineering the terroir model while remaining committed to rural development. “Unreflexive localism,” or value in place that glosses over local politics and romanticizes social constructions around food origins, has been criticized for being exclusionary and class-based (DuPuis and Goodman 2005: 359). If terroir is reverse engineered by rural producers rather than by wealthy consumers, *LavkaLavka* may avoid promoting the “unreflexive localism” trap in a way that refashions terroir to fit the contemporary values of place and taste expressed by all actors of the alternative food system.

My conversations with the cooperatives’ consumers elucidate that they seek a framework through which they can redefine Russian cuisine and express their desire for quality food through products they view as uniquely theirs. Consumers see the Soviet and post-Soviet periods as poor representations of their cultural values, especially in light of the rapid marketization of the economy (Patino 2003). *LavkaLavka* consumers’ reimagining of a past long upstaged by the Soviet food system implies refashioning a taste of place or sense of terroir to fit the particularities of their contemporary cultural

context. Except for the way they view their *dachas*, these consumers are not nostalgic, as there is no living social memory of the pre-Soviet era. Rather, the cooperatives' consumers are reimagining and refashioning Russian gastronomy through a selective reinterpretation of the past.

Qualitative connections to place frame cultural and social senses of belonging that convey acceptance and inclusion (DeLind 2006). Place takes on a symbolic role as "the ground that integrates the natural and the cultural, the individual and the collective, the sensual and the political" (DeLind and Bingen 2008: 131). Advocates of refashioning cultural associations with place must understand how knowledge and interpretations are altered by time and can serve as a way to legitimate social hierarchies in the present (Rivkin-Fish 2009). *LavkaLavka* consumers seek to refashion their culinary heritage by connecting places to both pre-Soviet and Soviet pasts. They have the financial means and social capital to create such illusions, while the majority of Russian small-scale farmers and rural consumers do not. Whether or not these associations will try to alter rising social disparities in Russia remains to be seen.

#### A CONTINUAL REFASHIONING OF TASTE OF PLACE

Russia's economic transition has altered post-Soviet consumer mentalities of what constitutes food quality, including consumer valuations of territoriality and taste (Patino 2003). The consumers interviewed in this study exhibited strongly embedded place-based associations with food that did not prioritize proximity but did evoke a taste of place, supporting *LavkaLavka's* aim of instituting a form of the terroir model to protect social constructions of places and tastes. Consumers expressed their values through references to origin labeling, the ecological conditions of the growing environment, *dacha* foods, and geopolitical boundaries. *LavkaLavka* uses these narrative

constructions to educate consumers on food production practices, as well as to tap into socially embedded constructions of quality rooted in taste and place.

What is place in “place-based” for *LavkaLavka* consumers? How do consumers connect to place? Place-based valuation embodies a range of outlets: from *dachas* to the nation; from regions to specific places. This is especially true in post-socialist Russia where place-based social constructions have undergone a process of embedding, dis-embedding and re-embedding in the wake of the transition to the market economy. Food as embodied and food as sustenance invoke inherently different social values. How the embodiment and embedding process occurs for *LavkaLavka* consumers raises questions about the future of alternative food networks in Moscow and the saliency of a terroir model that is not fashioned to fit the local cultural context. Never given or static, constructions of place remind consumers of the shifting cultural preferences that influence the adoption of concepts like terroir to the Russian context and remind them that a continual refashioning process is necessary to respond to changes that occur on the local level.

The question remains how consumer valuations of taste of place expressed through a refashioned model of terroir will evolve in Russia as consumers continue to adjust to the market economy, as well as account for a generational shift in cultural remembering and lived experience. Future generations of Russians may associate their consumption habits less with the cultural constructions of space created by Soviet regional planners as they further embed themselves in their globalized world. While cultural taste preferences and valuations of place are never static, the current consumer turn toward quality, embeddedness, and locality reveals complex exhibitions of cultural behavior that influence social relations and power dynamics. Future research on alternative food networks in post-socialist spaces should focus on the means by which social interaction,

Russian identity formation, and public policy situate constructions of place at the core of everyday food consumption. These constructions must be continually adapted to account for generational change. If Muscovite consumers prioritize taste of place or terroir in ethical, reflexive ways, their actions have the potential to influence social values and consumption habits of actors within and beyond Russia's growing alternative food network.

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## :: CHAPTER 4 ::

## CONCLUSION

## ALIGNING ALTERNATIVE FOOD DISTRICT ACTORS

This thesis presented the perspectives of innovators leading various food related initiatives and consumers of the *LavkaLavka* farmer cooperative. Collectively they represent a mere fraction of the actors who participate in Moscow's growing alternative food district. Reflecting on the perceptions detailed by these two groups raises questions about how the relationship between innovators' and consumers' constructions of taste and place affects the goals of the district. How do consumers understand the district's initiatives and work in collaboration with innovators to develop the district? How are innovators reacting to consumer perceptions of quality and working alongside them to affect positive change on the food system? Are both sides' values aligning?

Consumer valuations of taste and place and the aims of the alternative food district aligned in more ways than one. While the legacy of Soviet regionalism appears embedded in consumer attachments of quality to place, this is an attribute the innovators of the district, especially those working on place-based projects like *LavkaLavka* and *Fley*, may help reconstruct to reflect the skilled artisan producers of a region instead of the remnants of Soviet industrialization and the inefficiencies of the centrally-planned economy. In addition, while cultural weight assigned to the Russian *dacha* complicates more concrete notions of place constructions, especially terroir, *LavkaLavka* and other district innovators may use *dacha* taste of place to encourage

more small-scale producers to participate in the alternative food network. *LavkaLavka* does not have to change its pursuit of a terroir-based framework, as long as it has been refashioned to fit the social and economic conditions of the post-socialist environment. However, the cooperative must be accepting of *dacha* producers and the skills they may bring to the alternative food district. *LavkaLavka* would benefit not from romanticizing nostalgia for the *dacha* but rather from communicating with these household-level producers and encouraging them to seek more organic methods of production.

Consumers expressed their sentiments toward the alternative food district mainly in the context of how they felt about *LavkaLavka* and whether or not they saw a wider food movement taking shape in Moscow. Both sides acknowledged that change, albeit recent, was happening—primarily in the form of new restaurants, food festivals, and cooking classes. This trend does not reflect the push for quality from the district. Consumers of *LavkaLavka* distinguished the wider food movement from a more place-based alternative, but it is unclear whether or not this recognition extended beyond those who participated in farmer-direct supply chains. To a certain extent, consumers' constructions of place affected the district's ability to develop because their constructions were riddled with contradictions that evoked a conflict between Soviet and post-socialist identities. They expressed socially embedded beliefs and practices that suggest a disembedding process by district innovators in order to re-embed the district's definition of quality.

Innovators felt that the embedded cultural mentalities that countered the district's common enterprise were changing but perhaps not quickly enough. Place and taste constructions by consumers affected some innovators more than others. In regard to quality, there appeared to be a clear delineation between the group of innovators:

those who defined quality by place and taste and those who defined it solely by taste. If these innovators cannot align their definition of quality, educating consumers about a united common enterprise for the district will pose a challenge to the district's development. However, consumers exhibited great trust in the district's innovators—acknowledged on both sides as 'new' for Russia. This trust is the quintessential first step toward greater food system change.

While their experiences weave a complex narrative that speaks to the values of place, taste, locality, healthfulness, collaboration, and cooperation, establishing more transparent and trustworthy relationships among actors within this alternative framework emerged as the dominant unifying theme. Both innovators and consumers referenced their trust in alternative food district actors over their trust in the Russian government. Their trust also extended to rural producers who participated in the network. Thus, intra-district relationships spanned across actors' geographic localities, suggesting a potentially effective medium for countering growing class distinctions along rural-urban lines.

However, the connections elucidated by the consumers and innovators of the district indicated that their trust only extended to rural actors of a certain persona, to actors they viewed as similar to themselves. *LavkaLavka* consumers and district innovators distinguished between which rural producers participated in the district and which who did not, suggesting that the alternative food network, guilty of urban bias, was more socially exclusive than inclusive. The image of the "businessman" farmer who chose to leave his high-paying job in Moscow in order to start a new life in the country, where he could still earn a living wage by selling his products through market connections like the *LavkaLavka* cooperative, transplanted an unfamiliar social dynamic to the rural environment. Consumers and innovators of the alternative district viewed this rural

migration as noble, challenging, and inspiring. They held high esteem for the valuable skills they felt these businessmen brought to the field of agriculture. Rural inhabitants outside of this business class were hardly spoken of, except in a negative light.

District actors dichotomized rural farmers into polar extremes that paralleled Soviet class constructions of *workers* from *intelligentsia*. *LavkaLavka* and its consumers must be wary of assigning too much weight to consumer constructions of value that reinstitute the urban-rural power dynamics that stem from the *intelligentsia-worker* dichotomy of the Soviet era. Consumers and innovators noted that the stigma attached to the other half of the dichotomy, the *worker*, had declined from its once respectable position as a contributing member of socialist society to a simple-minded “drunk farmer.” The rural inhabitants they reference lack social and financial mobility, as well as steady access to capital, technology, and professional development. Neither the dichotomy of *businessman-drunk* or *intelligentsia-worker* accurately or justly describes the reality of obstacles and hardships faced by rural Russian farmers. The spaces that a majority of small-scale Russian producers inhabit remove them from the reach of niche cosmopolitan markets like the one *LavkaLavka* has created in Moscow. While *LavkaLavka* sources farmer’s products from across Russia, the more spatially distant producers have the technological capacity to find markets like *LavkaLavka*; the reverse is less frequently witnessed. Thus, imbuing value in taste of place may enable geographically remote rural producers to market their products to distant localities.

Focusing on the challenges facing the alternative food district overshadows the positive change the district has made in regard to questioning the status quo of the conventional industrial food system. Those who have left their corporate jobs, motivated by a desire to help revive Russia’s agricultural economy should be recognized for their efforts. This new wave of farmers who have pioneered a track for

urban out migration have served as instigators for rural and regional development. *LavkaLavka* refers to this movement as part of the greater “agricultural revolution” Boris mentioned. As an unarguable leader in Moscow’s alternative food district in, *LavkaLavka* has the marketing ability, cultural capital, and support base to alter consumer definitions of quality and dispatch narratives that celebrate all rural actors. By assigning value to place and the specific tastes cultivated by this locality, *LavkaLavka* may create value around not only place and taste, but the people who inhabit these socially constructed spaces.

While extending the construction of place to all regions in Russia appears to benefit rural development initiatives and the growth of the alternative food district, embedded Soviet notions of values complicate the act of constructing space and imbuing it with the alternative food network’s values in contemporary Russia. It is important to keep in mind that Russian consumer mentalities will change with time. With the rise of technology coinciding with the slow loss of the Soviet memory, Moscow’s alternative food network will continue to evolve—no longer to fit the post-socialist context, but to fit a truly Russian context. The young innovators leading the movement have already asserted their Russian identity around the level of food quality they believed to be akin a time period free of chemical exposure, pollution, and highly processed food. While contemporary Russians will never be able to return to the pre-Soviet era, their rejection of Soviet nostalgia is an important step toward disembedding Soviet mentalities and embedding new definitions of what defines quality Russian food.

#### APPLYING THE RESEARCH

This study aims not only to inform other scholars of the nature of social relationships and place-based values seen in Moscow’s alternative food network; it also seeks to

provide the *LavkaLavka* cooperative with qualitative information concerning consumers' motivations, preferences, and food acquisition strategies. I plan to compile a comprehensive report that details this information, as well as more general findings and feedback consumers offered and present it to *LavkaLavka*. This report includes data not included in this thesis, such as general consumer perceptions of the cooperative, suggestions for future initiatives, responses to *LavkaLavka's* marketing efforts, consumer shopping habits, and desire to engage in more direct face-to-face interactions with producers. Participating consumers who expressed interest in the research findings will also be provided a copy of this report. Sharing this information with the cooperative and its consumers will help both sides better understand how consumers interpret *LavkaLavka's* marketing strategies and business goals.

In addition, I aim to publish my data in both scholarly journals and mass-media outlets in order to contribute to the larger body of knowledge on food consumption in post-socialist states. I believe it is valuable for food activists and innovators beyond Russia to see how the values of alternative food networks are reshaped in creative ways to fit the local context. This sharing of knowledge might continually spark innovation among all actors engaging in more alternative food systems.

#### STUDY LIMITATIONS

Gaining access to a large and diverse enough sample of *LavkaLavka's* consumers limited my ability to incorporate quantitative analysis into my research aims. I recognize this inclusion would have enriched my strictly qualitative findings. Despite my personal efforts to enlist participants through multiple outlets and methods, acquiring participants was also limited by my partnership with the *LavkaLavka* cooperative. While they served of great help in the process of finding research participants, restricted

access to their consumer database proved an added challenge that prevented me from directly communicating to consumers about my research.

As my fieldwork lasted for only nine weeks, I was unable to interview any of *LavkaLavka's* rural farmers. My mobility was confined to Moscow, which limited my opportunities to engage with farmers solely to special cooperative events. The events were unfavorable environments to hold the kinds of conversations with actors that would result in a more nuanced understanding of the rural context of the food system. My language skills also limited my ability to conduct this research. While many research participants spoke English, my conversational Russian required the use of a translator for the in-depth interviews. While I trust that she sought objectivity in her translations, being unable to personally hold interviews in Russian prevented me from asking questions could have resulted in a richer understanding of my participants' narratives.

The timing of the research proved yet another limitation. While spending the summer months of July and August in Moscow was helpful in regard to the wealth of outdoor food-related events I was able to observe and attend, it is the time of year when many Muscovites, and the consumers I hoped to interview, take their summer holidays. Conducting research outside of the peak travel seasons for Russians might have resulted in a greater number of research participants.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While my fieldwork in Moscow was limited by research constraints, language skills, and time, I managed to gather enough data to compile this thesis while still omitting data from consumers and non-consumers. Multiple themes emerged that I felt did not coalesce with the subjects of either manuscript presented in this text. As I interviewed

consumers, I also asked them about the nature of their relationships and interactions with *LavkaLavka* farmers. They detailed their perceptions of rural life, as well as their desire to have personal relationships with producers. Exploring the idea of consumer participation in alternative food networks is an important component of the food system, especially when these consumers detail connections to other actors. This vital data was not omitted in this thesis because I did not find it essential; rather, I intend to use this data to write an additional manuscript for publication based solely on the farmer-consumer dynamic expressed by *LavkaLavka* consumers.

Beyond consumers, future study of different actors within post-socialist alternative food networks would build upon and enhance the findings of this research. Assessing the motivations and aims of small-scale farmers who engage in cooperative projects is crucial to gaining a more holistic understanding of Moscow's alternative food district and its potential to bridge the rural-urban divide in Russia. It would be interesting to investigate whether or not being a "cooperative" has socially embedded meaning for rural farmers, some of whom may have worked on collectivized farms or participated in cooperative organizations during Soviet times. Any future ethnography of farmer perspectives should also address their perspectives on the migration of "businessmen" and "businesswomen" farmers from Moscow to rural Russia.

Finally, as constructions of place continually shift based on economic demand, trade unions, social perceptions, generational change, and geopolitical extensions of state power, a longitudinal study would perhaps best address how values rooted in place and unique place-based tastes continue to evolve in the post-socialist environment. This appears particularly relevant with the recent display of geopolitical hostility between Russia and Ukraine. How shifting values associated with specific places continue to

shape and refashion social and cultural identities of post-socialist citizens appears pertinent given enduring effects of the Soviet era.

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