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Beyond Europeanization: The politics of scale and positionality in Lithuania's alternative food networks

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Abstract

This article brings geographical insights to understanding the Europeanization of agri-food politics in new European Union member states. Most literature on agri-food policy and law in the European Union has conceptualized policy making and implementation as an institutional process involving multiple levels of governance. In this perspective, Europeanization is understood as a process through which stakeholders formulate, negotiate, and implement legal principles and procedures across various institutions at different levels of governance. By employing the conceptual tools developed in geographical research, we contribute a spatial and historical dimension to these studies. Our analysis shows how the politics of scale and sociospatial positionality can help explain idiosyncratic shifts in food policies in new European Union member states that could not be attributed solely to institutional processes. To develop these arguments, our empirical analysis focuses on shifting agri-food regulatory frameworks for Alternative Food Networks in Lithuania. In particular, we analyze how and why Lithuanian authorities began changing and simplifying food safety and veterinary requirements for the production, processing, and distribution of small quantities of food products sold directly to consumers through Alternative Food Networks in the local market. We show how Lithuania's positionality in regional and global markets contributed to the growth of the direct sales sector. Our analysis also reveals the agency of local producers and consumers in creating conditions for policy change. This analysis suggests that Europeanization of food politics in the new European Union member states is best understood as a spatial reordering of the region and its historical relationships.

Keywords

Alternative food networks, eastern enlargement, Europeanization, food standards, Lithuania

During the European Union (EU) accession process in Lithuania, as in other post-socialist countries, new food and agriculture policies considered small-scale production as an obstacle to economic development (Mincyte, 2011). Marginalized, and even criminalized, many smallholder farmers and processors were forced to operate in a legal grey area, forging informal ties with consumers (Harboe Knudsen, 2012; Mincyte, 2012). By 2008, however, the regulatory landscape started to shift to support direct-to-consumer marketing outlets, such as farmers' markets and other types of Alternative Food Networks

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(AFNs) (Blumberg, 2015). This shift has continued until the present day: in September 2018 the State Food and Veterinary Service announced that it was simplifying food safety and veterinary requirements for those seeking to process small quantities of meat from hunted game and sell it directly to consumers in the local market (Valstybinė Maisto ir Veterinarijos Tarnyba (VMVT), 2018). Given that the corresponding EU food safety and hygiene regulatory framework remained relatively stable during this period, this shifting policy landscape at the national scale merits closer analytical attention. In particular, because the capability of small-scale farmers and producers to conform to EU food safety requirements was such a contentious issue during EU accession (Dunn, 2003; Gille 2016), this paper examines the dramatic shift in regulations as part of both the ongoing political process of Europeanization and the growing visibility of AFNs in Lithuania.

Since the last decades of the 20th century, AFNs have emerged alongside the growing interest and support for local food systems and direct-marketing channels in Western Europe (Watts et al., 2005). Through farmers' markets, box schemes, and other direct-to-consumer marketing mechanisms, AFNs forge spatial and social connections between consumers, which are distinct from conventional, industrial, and globalizing food networks (Goodman and Goodman, 2007). AFNs have provided a livelihood for some farmers and producers by allowing them to bypass intermediaries (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000), but they are also becoming integral components of new rural development trajectories at local and regional scales throughout the EU (Horlings and Marsden, 2014). Although originally research on AFNs in the EU focused on case studies in Western Europe (Watts et al., 2005), more recent studies have documented the increasing visibility of AFNs in Central and Eastern European member states (Balázs et al., 2016; Grivins and Tisenkopfs, 2015; Mincyte, 2012; Spilková et al., 2013; Syrovátková et al., 2015; Zagata, 2012). Nevertheless, few studies have examined the connection between AFNs and food safety and hygiene regulations as part of a broader process of Europeanization.

The political dimensions of agri-food regulations in the EU and globally have been addressed in the growing literature that points to food standardization and certification as contentious processes through which material qualities of foods such as taste, shape, and genetic composition, as well as farming practices and farmers' livelihoods, are transformed (e.g. Hatanaka, 2014; Mutersbaugh, 2005; Raynolds, 2014). Even though such standards and regulations may appear as neutral tools for quality control, a number of scholars (Busch, 2011; Freidberg, 2004; Guthman, 2004) powerfully argue that they represent the interests and visions of the elite producers and consumers who are the main stakeholders in policy making. Building on this research, scholars studying food politics in post-socialist Europe find that the Europeanization of food standards has had far-reaching implications for local producers and rural livelihoods. For example, Aistara (2014) makes a case that the EU heirloom produce regulations led to the banning of a number of local varieties of tomatoes in Latvia due to their incompatibility with the EU legal definitions of heirloom seeds. In an analysis of the meatpacking industry in Poland, Dunn (2008) documents how the EU food safety and hygiene regulations have not only driven small processors out of business, but also disempowered workers in factories. Similarly, Gille (2016) shows how the Europeanization of food quality regulations has decimated paprika production in Hungary where it is certified as heritage food. Gille (2016) goes further to link this process with the broader embrace of right-wing Euroscepticism in Eastern Europe.

This literature has produced valuable insights on the impacts of Europeanization. Yet by considering Europeanization as an external political force, it does not explain national regulatory shifts and changes in political support for AFNs. To explain these shifts, we contend that attention must be paid to the sociospatial relations that structure the food system in Lithuania. To accomplish this, we argue that geographical research on the politics of scale (Moisio, 2016) and sociospatial positionality (Sheppard, 2002) provide the conceptual tools to explain the shifting agri-food regulatory framework in Lithuania, and potentially elsewhere. Building on feminist scholarship, Sheppard has developed the concept of positionality to understand the "shifting, asymmetric, and path-dependent ways in which the

futures of places depend on their interdependencies with other places" (2002: 308). This concept highlights the importance of relative location, and its influence on economic development possibilities. In this respect, Sheppard's positionality does not refer to a fixed position that one occupies in a particular social structure, geographic location or time, as is commonly defined in the earlier work in social and behavioral sciences. Rather, it emphasizes historically grounded political and economic interdependencies that shape developmental paths in particular places. Combined with an understanding of the politics of scale, we argue that such an approach provides a nuanced perspective on Europeanization and its dynamic relationship to food systems in Lithuania.

Our research findings are based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at different time periods. The first author conducted ethnographic fieldwork for several months from 2008 to 2013. The second author's ethnography reaches back to the summers of 2002 and 2003 during the EU accession negotiations and preparations, and nine months of fieldwork in 2004, followed by annual visits of at least two months long. To gain a historical perspective, one author conducted 20-year longitudinal livelihood studies with 20 farmers involved in alternative food economies. Our combined fieldwork includes participant observations lasting over 49 months, and approximately 110 formal and informal interviews with consumers, farmers, food industry representatives, academics, and politicians, among others, during which our interlocutors shared their experiences, understandings, critiques, and approaches to changing agri-food politics in Europeanizing Lithuania. The study also includes an analysis of policy documents, such as Rural Development plans, and their drafts. Additional insights were developed from reading and engaging with secondary literature, such as media and scholarly work in the field. As is common in ethnographic research, we analyzed the data using a recursive approach by rereading and categorizing interview texts to identify patterns and make conceptual connections across the narratives. We also analyzed fieldnotes using the same methodological approach. Grounded in ethnographic research, this analysis takes a relational perspective to consider not only legislation and policy-making processes as sites of Europeanization, but also the narratives and perspectives of farmers circulating in the broader public. Narratives are key for understanding how social actors define their place in the world and how they should act (Della Sala, 2018; Eder, 2006; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006). To understand Lithuania's positionality and scalar relations from the farmers' perspective, therefore, our analysis considers their narratives.

Our paper is structured as follows. The next section critically analyzes the literature on Europeanization and multi-level governance that has played a central role in the scholarship on European integration. Drawing on geographical scholarship, we critique this literature. In the following section, we explain how Europeanization could be understood as an ongoing process shaped by the politics of scale and positionality. The subsequent section utilizes this approach to analyze the formulation of food safety legislation in the EU and its application in Lithuania. The final section further applies this approach to explain recent changes in food safety regulations in Lithuania.

Europeanization as multi-level governance

While the term "Europeanization" may refer to diverse phenomena, in contemporary social science research it is most often used to denote EU influence and impacts on institutional arrangements in nation-states (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003). This research has grown as a result of both scholarly and political concerns about the changing nature of the nation-state, the growing power of the EU and the possible loss of national identity. The fear of the loss of national sovereignty was most recently demonstrated by the results of the 2016 "Brexit" referendum in the UK, which has ushered in the prospect of de-Europeanization (Burns et al., 2019). Therefore, while the process of Europeanization of the national state implies convergence toward a European standard and increased credence in a unified European voice at the global scale, the possibility of de-Europeanization is perpetually present.

Early research on Europeanization produced conflicting results on the prospect of diminishing

national sovereignty and convergence across the EU. While some research found that the EU had strengthened the nation-state (Moravcsik, 1994), other research revealed that the EU had transformed national polities by fostering multilevel politics and creating alternative arenas of advocacy that could bypass national governments (Sandholtz, 1996). Interestingly, instead of finding policy convergence, divergences between member states often followed the adoption of EU policies (Börzel, 1999). Europeanization researchers therefore focused on the process and outcome of adopting EU policies in two or more nation-states (cf. Holmes, 2000). Researchers have found that divergence results from a complex combination of factors, including the existence of import–export ties with other countries, differences in productivity, patterns from past policy adoptions, uneven regulatory burdens, and pressures from civil society (Perkins and Neumayer, 2004). Researchers on Europeanization have therefore argued that the process cannot be understood as a zero-sum game in which the nation-state either loses or gains power and influence (Börzel, 1999), nor can it be understood as having produced a homogeneous landscape marked by convergence (Perkins and Neumayer, 2004).

While research on Europeanization has contributed significant insights into the transformation of the state in the EU at multiple scales, providing detailed explanations for the variable outcomes produced by single EU policies within different member states, it tends to overlook Europeanization as an inherently spatial process (Clark and Jones, 2009). Geographers have articulated several critiques of this literature. First, they have pointed out that Europeanization studies have assumed a unidirectional understanding of institutional and regulatory changes in the EU by assuming the initiative for change has come from the EU and descended down towards nation-states, which then implement those changes in Europeanizing (converging) or path-dependent ways (Clark and Jones, 2009). Although a few prominent scholars have analyzed the "uploading" as well as the "downloading" of EU policy (Börzel, 2002), the predominant focus has been on the latter. In either case, however, Clark and Jones (2009) point out that scholars have tended to treat space problematically, as a backdrop or container. Second, Europeanization research has also focused on the form of change, as opposed to the content of change (cf. Holmes, 2000). As a result, ideologies and processes that stimulate certain spatial configurations, such as neoliberalism, have also been neglected. Often, such as in multilateral trade negotiations, these processes emanate from the global scale. Third, prioritizing EU–national relations and neglecting scalar relationality has therefore led to the neglect of the global scale. Finally, the heterogeneous power relations that constitute the national scale have also been overlooked in much Europeanization research. This is problematic because EU legislation is formulated with active input from national representatives who have their own interests and agendas, while implementation is also a national responsibility, which may require the introduction of national legislation. In the agri-food sector, multiple and conflicting interests forge the national scale, with political elites constructing careers, and the food processing and retail sectors exerting influence for their own benefit. Thus, to gain a more meaningful view of Europeanization processes in the agri-food sector, analytical attention must be focused on the heterogeneity of voices composing each scale and on scalar relationality.

The literature on Europeanization attempts to capture scalar relationality by utilizing the concept of "multi-level governance" (MLG), a concept formulated to account for vertical and horizontal structures of decision making. The use of the term "multi-level" marked a shift away from an exclusive focus on the nation-state to levels above and below it (Piattoni, 2009). However, the concept of the "level" as defined and utilized in the MLG literature on the EU has several analytical weaknesses. The existence of levels is largely understood as pre-existing and given, rather than as constructed and constantly in production. In addition, Stubbs (2005) argues that multi-level governance approaches have neglected to emphasize power relations. Like Europeanization studies, MLG research has largely ignored neoliberal globalization as an influence on the very process MLG attempts to analyze (Stubbs, 2005). While studies on Europeanization, including those that integrate an analysis of MLG, have contributed

substantial insights on transforming governance in the EU, their conceptual weaknesses are also substantial. Impact narratives of EU and national relations are not only analytically limited, they are also politically disabling because they disregard the agency of various actors in the formation of EU policy. In the following section, we provide an alternative framework focusing on the politics of scale and positionality as an approach that addresses the aforementioned issues.

Disabling Europeanization: towards a politics of scale and positionality

Unlike MLG and Europeanization research, geographical research on scalar relations has been contextualized historically and spatially; because scales and the relations between them are produced, socially and materially, it is therefore important to situate research on the politics of scale in a specific context (Agnew, 2001; Brenner et al., 2008; Delaney and Leitner, 1997; Hudson, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2000). This awareness necessitates attention to historical context and path dependencies, as well as to changes and ruptures (Jessop, 1990; Jessop and Sum, 2006). According to Jessop and Sum (2006), the rise of neoliberal globalization since the 1970s has entailed a major shift in political–economic coordination through rescaling (down, up, and outwards) and restructuring. However, this does not mean that there have been uniform outcomes for states: strategies implemented at different scales within nation-states may lead to considerable divergence (Jessop and Sum, 2006). Research on scalar relations has shown that, with globalization, the nation-state has not withered away: instead it has been transformed (Brenner, 2004).

Political economy approaches to the politics of scale highlight how the geography of capital has played an increasing role in molding state space through scalar processes such as rescaling or scalar relations (Brenner, 2004). However, the dynamics of capital are not the only forces prompting radical scalar recalibrations: political, social, and other processes also play a role in the construction and reproduction of scalar relations (Delaney and Leitner, 1997). Indeed, the construction of a European supranational scale (as opposed to one centered around the Mediterranean, for example) has more to do with imagined historical, cultural, and racial affinities than with capitalist processes. Likewise, important transnational partnerships based on common environmental concerns have emerged at the regional scale (such as around the Baltic Sea). A geographical critique also illustrates that scales are not pre-existing or static, and that the process of scalar construction is itself imbued with power, contestation, and negotiation.

Geographers have analyzed how scaled visions put forth in scalar narratives matter both in the production of scale and the imagination of alternative scalar arrangements. Scalar narratives are explanatory discourses that serve to justify existing or possible scalar relations and arrangements, providing them with meaning (Kelly, 1997). They are also productive of scalar relations in the sense that their very circulation and repetition either helps solidify existing scalar relations or helps imagine new ones. For example, policy makers who seek to advance a neoliberal agenda often invoke the global scale in a way that stresses the need for a competitive entrepreneurial national state (Kelly, 1997). Of course, dominant scalar narratives do not always mirror material scalar practices (Miller, 1997).

In addition to explaining the production and reproduction of scalar relations, an approach based on the politics of scale challenges a penetrating account of Europeanization, while also examining the conditions that perpetuate scalar narratives that offer unidirectional accounts of EU integration. Geographic research on Europeanization has critiqued approaches that naturalize space and assume scalar relations operate in a top-down manner (Bialasiewicz et al., 2013; Clark and Jones, 2013). Although scales bear similarities to the levels that make up MLG approaches, a politics of scale foregrounds scalar production, places scalar arrangements within a geohistorical context, and is attentive to power struggles and heterogeneity. As Moisio (2016) argues, because the production of scales is contingent and contested, research "should approach scales as a category of practice rather than treating them as a category of analysis" (Moisio, 2016: 22).

However, a focus on the politics of scale to explain how regulatory frameworks change in the agri-food sector would be insufficient without a consideration of sociospatial positionality. Building on feminist scholarship, Sheppard's (2002) concept of sociospatial positionality explains how globalizing processes have produced or reinforced inequalities across space, rather than eradicating the significance of relative location and leveling development possibilities. This concept has been used to analyze diverse topics in geography, such as the natural resource development constraints in peripheral regions (Kortelainen and Rannikko, 2015), the translocal constitution of public markets and bazaars (Alff, 2017), the spatiality of conflict (Flint et al., 2009), and the evolution of the free trade doctrine (Sheppard, 2005). An understanding of sociospatial positionality helps explain the weaknesses in policy recommendations informed by neoliberalism, which advocate that individual places should exploit their comparative advantages to further economic development. Following the logic of comparative advantage has not helped postcolonial nation-states that specialize in exporting unprocessed primary commodities, which have experienced declining terms of trade (Gonzalez, 2006). Sociospatial positionality is reproduced through material and discursive power-laden relationships that have advantaged developed nation-states in the Global North, to the detriment of postcolonial and peripheral nation-states. As a result, "the possibility of national economic growth in the former Third World, and indeed throughout much of the former Soviet Union, is surely still shaped by their dependence on and position within global networks of trade, finance, migration, and know-how" (Sheppard, 2006: 51).

The concept of positionality helps account for the development trajectories of Central and Eastern European nation-states since the 1990s. Facing a disadvantageous position in global networks of trade, finance, and know-how, they embarked upon a neoliberal development trajectory to increase political and economic integration with Western Europe and participation in the global market. In other words, they tried to increase interdependencies with Western Europe, while diminishing the interdependencies that tied them to the sphere of the former Soviet Union. However, the growing ties with Western Europe were asymmetric and informed by persistent, hierarchical demarcations (Kuus, 2005; Moisio et al., 2013). By reinforcing power relations, these demarcations have produced material consequences. For example, underpinning the EU accession negotiations were hierarchies of power, an assumption of Eastern European inferiority, and the need to achieve norms set by the West (see Böröcz et al., 2001; Wolff, 1994). Just as much as EU accession involved adopting policies, it also involved applying measures to assess achievements towards certain assumed goals or norms, which, because they existed in the EU, were assumed to be universal (Mincyte, 2011). Moreover, the terms of EU accession for the Central and Eastern European states were less favorable than they were for previously accepted nation-states, and the accession process was also marked by tension and an unequal power dynamic. Even after strengthening interdependencies through EU accession, Central and Eastern Europe's sociospatial positionality within European and global networks has not shifted dramatically, as is evident by persistently lower incomes, lower levels of disposable incomes, and higher rates of out-migration in comparison with Western Europe (Ballas et al., 2017; Iammarino et al., 2019). Rather than producing convergence across EU nation-states, Europeanization through EU accession brought new forms of uneven development (Rae, 2011; Smith and Timár, 2010).

An approach that examines the politics of scale and positionality in the EU therefore necessitates a critical analysis of the form of Europeanization, as well as the influence that power relations have on the content, outcomes, and beneficiaries of Europeanization. In the following section, we employ an approach based on the politics of scale and positionality to examine the creation of a new and comprehensive food safety and hygiene framework in the EU.

Europeanization and food safety: the politics of scale and positionality

The regulation of agri-food governance in the EU has often been contentious, but the 1990s were

particularly tumultuous. First, the intensification of neoliberal globalization called into question particular forms of agri-food governance, which were categorized as barriers to trade liberalization (Vogel, 2009). At the same time, the need for stronger food safety legislation in the EU was increasingly evident following several significant food safety crises (Knowles et al., 2007). For example, the outbreak of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) instilled a wave of consumer mistrust in the food system, as well as in national and EU capabilities to regulate the system. Because of the significance of intra-EU trade in food, the food safety scare brought EU integration into question as well. In explaining these developments and their outcomes in Europeanizing Central and Eastern Europe more broadly, and Lithuania in particular, we argue that it is important to highlight scalar relations and sociospatial positionality.

Scaling food safety in the EU: the making of the General Food Law

The response of EU institutions to the food safety crises of the 1990s demonstrates the heterogeneous construction of the supranational scale. Initiated by the European Parliament, an investigation revealed shortcomings at both national and supranational scales (Van der Meulen, 2013). Although criticized for its slow response, the European Commission finally issued a Green Paper in 1997, which aimed to start a debate on how food legislation could meet the needs of the consumer, producer, and manufacturer of food products (Alemanno, 2006). The subsequent negotiations led to the passing of comprehensive legislation, the General Food Law (Regulation (EC) 178/2002), and to the creation of the European Food Safety Agency. More detailed legislation followed, including: Regulation (EC) 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs, and Regulation (EC) 853/2004 on specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin.

The result was a monumental achievement of state spatial rescaling, with considerable authority scaled up to supranational entities (Alemanno, 2006) However, the negotiations over this legislation were far from harmonious or predictable. Tensions arose around conflicting cultural, political, economic, and scientific interests and processes both within and between scales (Ansell and Vogel, 2006). The EU had already made a commitment to multilateral trade at the global scale, most notably through its membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Any potential legislation would therefore have to be in accordance with WTO agreements (or it would jeopardize the EU's negotiating position), including the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, which privileges a certain understanding about the relationship between risk assessment, management, and communication (Taylor and Millar, 2004). In other words, an agreement on new food safety regulation would have to contend with the economic interests that had facilitated global trade integration, in addition to adhering to the more long-standing bilateral agreements furthering the free market in food, in particular, between the US and the EU (Taylor and Millar, 2002). The dominance of neoliberalism in the 1990s, especially at the global scale, and the growing acceptance of market-based solutions by some EU institutions, meant that restoring confidence in the market while facilitating greater market expansion was a priority. However, influence from groups at the national scale was also important, as were cultural, social, and scientific perspectives articulated at national and supranational scales. In addition, positionality played a role in the negotiations as interest groups argued against delegating ever more authority to the supranational (EU) scale (Alemmano, 2006).

Although not all member states exerted equal influence, and positionality influenced final outcomes, member states had some flexibility with their method of policy execution. With the new legislation, national institutions were not transformed in a homogeneous manner across the EU. Studies on the Europeanization of food safety policies noted that, following the application of the General Food Law, some member states completely overhauled their regulatory system, while others adapted their existing systems to new requirements (Abels and Kobusch, 2010). Risk assessment and management were separated in some countries, but integrated in others, and differences were noted between federal and unitary states, as well as between old and new member states. Yet, none of these arrangements are

completely stable because the politics of scale is an ongoing process. Indeed, the resulting legislation reflected the shifting politics of scale between different institutions and voices at the supranational scale, as well as between global, supranational, and national scales.

The contents of the law are too vast to outline here, but important themes include risk analysis, transparency, and traceability ("from farm to fork"). The follow-up Hygiene Package (specifically, Regulation (EC) No 852/2004) has been of particular relevance for AFNs. While it expounds upon the principles of risk analysis, transparency, and traceability, it also includes language about flexibility, exceptions, and national measures. For example, Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 details that exceptions could be made for small businesses with respect to the requirement for sophisticated food safety procedures. In addition, it provides flexibility to allow for the continuation of traditional methods of food production, processing, and distribution (Lawless, 2012). Significantly, it includes the provision that the regulation will not apply to "the direct supply, by the producer, of small quantities of primary products to the final consumer or to local retail establishments directly supplying the final consumer" (Regulation (EC) No 852/2004). Ambiguous terms like "small quantities" and "traditional methods" create significant openings for nation-states in their own legislation. Similarly, for Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 on hygiene requirements for food of animal origin, specific exceptions were provided for producers selling small quantities directly to consumers.

Food safety in Europeanizing Central and Eastern Europe

Although the new Central and Eastern European member states were not yet part of the EU while the General Food Law and its attendant Hygiene Package were being formulated, they were members by the time the main legislation was in force. Even though this legislation provides nation-states with the opportunity to design and legislate appropriate regulations for AFNs at the national scale, Lithuania did not take advantage of the full opportunity to do this. Other Eastern European EU member states also failed to immediately take full advantage of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 (Balázs, 2012). As participants in a multinational project on AFNs wrote: "The FAAN project found that Regulation (EC) No. 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs had been implemented badly in many countries (particularly in Eastern Europe) restricting local sales of products such as jams from farms. This does not appear to be such an issue in the UK, where the regulations have been implemented more flexibly" (Environmental Audit Committee, 2012: 146).

One explanation for this rests in the sociospatial positionality of Eastern European EU member states, and their agri-food sectors particularly. Throughout the accession process, their agri-food sectors were under scrutiny because they were considered to "lag behind" EU norms for quality, food safety, and competitiveness. For example, on average, Eastern European states employed greater proportions of their populations in agriculture, and farm size tended to be smaller on average with more subsistence-oriented farms (Mincyte, 2011). This was an issue not only for food safety regulations, but also for the EU's generous agricultural subsidy system, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). According to Franz Fischler, European Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, and Fisheries, the rationale for not extending the CAP to new member states was that this "could induce a reluctance to change, hindering the development of sound agricultural structures" (Fischler, 2000). As a result, Central and Eastern European applicant states were offered a version of the CAP that provided them with substantially less financial support than was given to farmers in old EU member states (Swain, 2004). In Lithuania, small-scale farming was categorized as backwards and inefficient in rural development policy (Mincyte, 2011), thereby marginalizing the production and marketing practices of the ubiquitous number of small-scale producers (Blumberg and Mincyte, 2019). For the competitive and export-oriented agri-food sector, which was widely supported during the pre-accession period, tariff and non-tariff barriers still limited market access to the EU despite significant trade liberalization (Chevassus-Lozza et al., 2008). After accession, many new member states increased

agri-food exports to each other (Galati et al., 2018). For Lithuania, this involved neighboring Baltic countries, but trade remained strong with the Russian Federation, a historically significant agri-food export market. For Lithuania's food producers, EU accession and the implementation of EU food safety regulations did not lead to significantly increased exports to the old EU member states, but rather, EU rural development funding and subsidies helped spur increased outputs, which were then sold on to the export markets that have been forged by Lithuania's sociospatial positionality.

Practice and politics of Europeanization in Lithuania

A majority of Lithuanian voters supported EU accession in a referendum, but, because this victory was not guaranteed, significant resources were devoted to the "Yes" campaign. Because all the legislative changes had already been enacted, politicians presented the hard work of EU accession as a fait accompli. To them, all that remained was to receive the benefits. What was already clear to society, however, was that there would be categories of "winners" for whom EU accession provided advantages, and, similarly, groups of "losers" for whom EU membership entailed an economic or social loss (Tang, 2000). Despite the aid offered to agriculture and rural development, rural areas and small-scale farmers were predicted to fall largely in the category of "losers" (Vilpišauskas and Steponavičienė, 2000).

The rapid pace of EU accession led to the circulation of scalar narratives related to EU membership. At the time, access to the internet, and even computers, was limited, especially in the countryside. But some farmers had opportunities to participate in funded international educational tours of farms in the EU and other Western European nation-states. This was particularly popular for certified organic farmers and mid- to large-scale farmers who planned to develop their farms. These trips provided first-hand evidence for farmers that the interpretation and implementation of food safety legislation was not universal across the EU or in other developed nation-states. In addition, the experiences farmers had on these trips fed into scalar narratives that circulated throughout agricultural/rural communities that blamed Lithuania's government for not representing farmer interests at the supranational scale. One farmer recounted:

> Farmer 1: When you go abroad, you see that there the requirements are lower by half. Let's say, we went to an organic farmer's dairy unit. The washable walls are covered with oil-based paint. But here it is required to cover them with tiles. . .
>
> Author 1: But these requirements are not from the EU. They are national?
>
> Farmer 1: Yes, Lithuania's. In Lithuania we make things bigger, because of risks. Before entering the EU we increased requirements even more for our own. . .
>
> Author 1: What accounts for such a policy?
>
> Farmer 1: They said, behold, we did it this way to demonstrate that here everything is very good. But in reality, abroad is where everything is normal.

The scalar narrative that farmers constructed was particularly politically disabling, and some farmers provided another rationale to explain the government's position. They described how small-scale farmers are targeted because it is easier for bureaucratic institutions with few personnel to oversee just a handful of large-scale farmers. Some other farmers did not place all responsibility in the hands of governmental representatives: they pointed out that processing companies and the conventional retail sector had a powerful influence on governmental decision-making at the national scale. Small-scale farmers with AFNs and with access to their own processing facilities were in competition with the large-scale, conventional food sector.

Following EU accession, the number of farms did decline, but many small-scale farmers did not abandon farming, processing their own products, or selling directly to consumers. This phenomenon was described by another farmer who linked marketing through AFNs with strict hygiene requirements.

Author 1: But why does the government make it more difficult?

Farmer 2: So that there would be a guarantee that nothing would happen, heaven forbid. . . . But for the farmer it is difficult. But I still think that small business should be supported, that farmers should make their own dairy processing units. In this region people are working like that, but of course, without abiding by the hygiene requirements.

As has been widely documented, informal AFNs proliferated after EU accession (Harboe Knudsen, 2012). Although EU accession brought benefits that farmers lauded, such as investments in infrastructure to improve roads and install sewers, most identified how it actually brought mixed impacts (Aistara, 2015). The negative aspects were quickly made apparent in just a few years with a dramatic fall in milk prices.

The milk crisis and the politics of scale and positionality

Accession to the EU in 2004 was correlated with economic growth in Lithuania. EU accession signaled confidence and security to investors; Lithuania's positionality had shifted as political ties with the rest of the EU member states and EU governing institutions were solidified. Capital flows ranged upwards from 80% of 2003 gross domestic product (GDP) and the GDP grew an average of 8% per year (Mitra, 2011). While much of the incoming capital was directed towards the real estate sector, capital was also increasingly available to farmers who wanted to invest in their farms. A number of EU programs were also developed to reimburse farmers a certain percentage for approved projects. With increases in production, export volumes also grew. However, export destinations for agricultural goods largely remained the same. Compliance with EU standards and the inclusion of Lithuania in the EU's market had helped lead to a small but steady annual increase in the value of agricultural goods being exported to the old EU member states. However, the Russian Federation remained an important export destination for food, especially processed dairy and meat products. About 30% of Lithuania's dairy exports went to Russia annually (the largest single export market), where they commanded higher prices than in the internal EU market and were in demand because of their good reputation (Rimkus and Karlaitė, 2011). Therefore, while Lithuania's political sociospatial positionality shifted, its economic positionality remained highly dependent on and connected with markets further East, particularly in Russia.

However, Russia had developed strict food safety standards and had periodically banned imports for extended periods from the Baltics and other EU countries when it found violations or for geopolitical reasons. For example, dairy products processed by certain companies in Lithuania were banned from entering the Russian Federation for several months in 2013 even though these products were declared safe by the European Commission (Hirst, 2013). Although academics have argued about whether Russia's actions have been motivated by geopolitical conflicts, interests in protecting its own producers, or desires to enhance economic control (Elvestad and Nilssen, 2010), even following EU accession, Lithuania's positionality tied its agricultural and food processing sector to Russia in multiple, complex ways.

Immediately after EU accession, interdependencies between Lithuania and Russia were not necessarily inimical to the interdependencies between the EU and Lithuania, although they were often imagined to be so. For example, EU subsidies helped boost agricultural production, and therefore exports to Russia. Conversely, integration into the EU's internal market also led to increased prices for important inputs. Lithuania was also required to shut down its nuclear power plant, which had supplied the country with most of its electricity. As a result, Lithuania became even more dependent on Russia for energy imports.

Despite the benefits of EU subsidies, there were significant costs associated with accession. In addition to rising prices for inputs, the price of agricultural land increased dramatically, partly because of the territorially based subsidies (Kocur-Bera, 2016).

Not all farmers benefited equally from subsidies. Because most subsidies were distributed on a flat rate basis per hectare, farmers with more land received more subsidies. Other factors, such as increases in competition and dwindling profits because of rising input costs, led to an overall decline in the number of farms. Growing possibilities of working abroad also enabled migration and, consequently, there was a shortage of skilled labor in rural areas. In short, EU accession entailed a partially reworked positionality, as new relations between places were created but old ones remained, like a dependence on Russia as an export market. At the supranational scale, the EU continued integrating its agri-food sector within globalizing markets by eliminating measures that had sheltered farmers from price fluctuations through production quotas (Daugbjerg and Swinbank, 2011).

The necessity of adhering to neoliberal policy prescriptions negotiated at the global scale had been evoked by national and EU policy makers to support the liberalization of the EU's agricultural subsidy system. This was a scalar narrative that reinforced the idea that neoliberal globalization was inevitable, and that only the most efficient farmers would be able to compete in a liberalizing global market. Scalar narratives such as these are not static and given; they are always in production and require constant reinforcement. Similarly, all scales are composed of heterogeneous interests, which may compete with each other. These interests change over time as some groups gain more influence and others lose influence. During the EU accession process, a handful of large dairy-processing companies were able to modernize their facilities, acquire smaller companies, and consolidate their power over the processing sector, and, by extension, dairy farming. In their interactions with these companies, farmers have usually been forced to accept whatever remuneration and terms are on offer. Despite the EU's milk quota system (which was in existence at the time) milk prices in the Baltics were the lowest within the EU. Small-scale farmers were particularly marginalized because they received the lowest prices. The number of large-scale farmers started to increase more steadily in the early 2000s and after EU accession. The power of these farmers was also slowly growing as they exerted more influence over lawmakers, thereby slowly reconfiguring the heterogeneity of the national scale.

For dairy farmers, however, 2008 brought significantly lower milk prices, further increasing tensions between farmers, processors, and governments. Milk prices started dropping in comparison to the previous year's prices, leading to an approximately 30% drop in producer prices in 2009 (Savas Ūkis, 2009). As a result, the number of raw milk AFNs multiplied, as greater numbers of medium-scale dairy farms began to participate, in an act of desperation. Faced with rising prices for dairy products in stores, consumers welcomed the cheaper products sold directly by farmers.

In early April 2008, dairy farmers gathered to discuss problems in the dairy farming sector. They considered possibilities for regulating the mark-up on dairy products charged by processors, traders, and retailers. They received a reply from the Ministry of Agriculture stating that Lithuania had ceased regulating prices in 1995, but that a draft law was being tabled in the Parliament at the time (Žemės Ūkio Rūmai (ŽŪR), 2008). Farmers blamed the processors for the milk price crisis, but they also blamed the government because of its role in encouraging farmers to increase their production, which lead to surplus milk production.

Despite the demands issued by the farmers' organizations, the milk price crisis persisted. Farmers continued their pressure on the government. They organized protests on scales that had been rarely achieved in the Baltics. At these protests, they organized to give away free milk in central parts of the capital cities. The protest actions gained significant support from the population. This forced the national government to confront the issue of direct marketing, especially of raw milk.

The government started to formulate and finally issued new regulations for the sale of small quantities of raw milk and other dairy products directly by the farmer. This created an opening for producer and consumer organizations subsequently to hold several meetings with the State Food and Veterinary Service over the course of 2008 to create new and simpler regulations for home processing and the direct

marketing of most food products. The regulations for farmers' markets were also eased, making it easier for farmers to sell food of animal origin at temporary marketplaces.

By then, the financial crisis had already started to cripple the Lithuanian economy. In 2009, Lithuania's GDP contracted by about 15%. The national government responded by implementing austerity measures, including massive cuts to public spending, increases in certain taxes, and wage cuts, to restore competitiveness. These policies caused an increase in poverty, inequality, and high rates of out-migration (Woolfson, 2010). At the same time AFNs thrived because they provided farmers with better livelihood opportunities at that moment and because the crisis had prompted a turning point for consumers. More consumers in Lithuania began to demand locally grown food.

This put pressure on the government to keep on reducing the requirements for AFNs by changing or implementing new regulations to more fully take advantage of the provision of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004. In 2008, many of the monitoring requirements decreased. In subsequent years, the agri-food sector experienced another crisis following Russia's retaliatory embargo against EU sanctions (Venkuviene and Masteikiene, 2015). Due to their sociospatial positionality, the agri-food sectors in the Baltic states were particularly affected by the embargo (Venkuviene and Masteikiene, 2015). New amendments continued to be passed to make small-scale processing and marketing through AFNs easier for farmers. The most recent revision Nr. B1-839, issued in December of 2017, eliminated several requirements that regulated food processing procedures. Not only were the regulations made simpler, some of the requirements that could be interpreted strictly by inspectors were eliminated.

The milk price crisis that preceded the financial crisis in 2008 provided the opportunity for farmers' organizations to challenge a disabling scalar narrative in which Europeanization was understood as the imposition of strict food safety requirements, made even stricter by the practices of national bureaucrats and lawmakers. Farmers' protests, the manifestation of an increasing number of AFNs marketing raw milk directly, and consumer demands forced the government to change existing regulations and to introduce new requirements that solidified the national scale as a regulatory arena on food safety and hygiene. A confluence of political, economic, and social factors prompted this shift. For national lawmakers, the financial crisis and the Russian embargo further heightened the importance of stimulating local production and processing for local consumption, as well as legalizing existing and new AFNs. Since then, various state-supported programs have been launched to encourage the creation of AFNs, signaling a shift in the state spatial strategy in support of producers and processors of small quantities of food. But for many farmers, especially those who operate on a small scale and have little political influence, these changes come too late for them and their agricultural careers. In other words, changes in regulations have not eliminated the AFNs that operate as part of the informal economy. Instead, they have generated a more competitive landscape of diverse AFNs, with more large-scale farmers operating in multiple farmers' markets (Blumberg, 2015, 2018).

Conclusion

AFNs are gaining increasing policy prominence in the EU as farmers continue to be marginalized by the conventional food sector and EU citizens are demanding access to fresh and healthy food. Literature on Europeanization has yet to conceptually examine the formulation and implementation of policies on AFNs, including those related to food safety or hygiene. In this article, we have utilized conceptual tools from geographical research on the politics of scale and positionality to explain the evolution and changes in food safety regulations in Lithuania that shape current AFNs.

The changes in food safety and hygiene regulations since 2008 in Lithuania signaled a shift in the state spatial strategy on food safety and hygiene for small-scale producers and processors, and for a brief period of time the scalar narrative of a unidirectional Europeanization was challenged as well. However, it has not been displaced by another narrative, in part because of how Lithuania's positionality has led to multiple, successive challenges

for the agricultural sector, but also due to other policy developments at the national scale. While some regulatory changes were initiated prior to the financial crisis, the implementation of severe austerity measures and the failure of large-scale protests to change the course of austerity politics in Lithuania had an impact on scalar narratives. A broad sense of disillusionment with the possibility of changing national politics was reinforced. In addition, not all farmers benefited equally from the changes in regulations and many did not even know about them. The small-scale farmers who had already been marketing raw milk through AFNs continued to do so, whether they gained permission or not. Although the new and changed regulations made it easier for some small-scale farmers to operate legally, while still conforming to EU law, they also opened the door to large-scale farmers who could now build their own processing units without having to adhere to the standards required of large-scale industrial processors.

A focus on the politics of scale and positionality helps to illuminate that Europeanization is not only a political and economic process originating at the supranational scale, but it is also a part and parcel of the larger geopolitical transformation that reorganized Lithuania's relations to Russia in particular, and global markets, more broadly. In explaining shifting outcomes in the adoption and implementation of EU law, our study demonstrates that it is necessary to think beyond Europeanization as a legislative project and to understand how dynamic sociospatial contexts produce Europeanization as a contentious and ongoing process of scalar relations. Our research highlights a complicated interplay of global and regional scales in the Europeanization project. A closer look at the shifting political support for AFNs in Lithuania complicates a unidirectional scalar narrative of European integration and it demonstrates how heterogeneous actors at the national scale reshaped scalar relations for the overall benefit of farmers in AFNs. Although the large- and mid-scale farmers have taken advantage of changing regulations to create AFNs, during and after the accession process, small-scale farmers, consumers, and processors also played an active role as agents of change in the Europeanization process. They subverted, circumvented, and challenged the political prescriptions delivered to them by the national elites, European technocrats, and global trends. They were integral in the process of maintaining a culture of direct sales, even as new regulations increased competition in AFNs and reduced their niche in the market. Many of them lost their livelihoods and land in the process. Others, especially older women, are still struggling to survive in the grey economic zones, while providing concrete and viable alternatives to the industrial food system. In fact, researchers focusing on AFNs in the region are now suggesting that these older, subsistence-oriented and informal food practices and networks can offer possible pathways towards sustainable development in the region (Ančić et al., 2019; Blumberg, 2018; Pungas, 2019; Smith and Jehlička, 2013; Spilková and Vágner, 2018; Yotova, 2018).

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