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SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS A MOTIVE FOR PURCHASING ORGANIC FOOD

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to assess the significance of organic food purchases by consumers in Poland – motivated by supporting the local economy – against the background of other factors shaping consumer behaviour. The empirical material consists of a survey among 850 organic food consumers in Poland. The empirical material was analysed using Pearson’s chi-squared test of independence and the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test. The study shows that supporting the local economy appears to be an essential motive for its purchase for a large group of organic food consumers. The only factor significantly differentiating the two groups of consumers (motivated or not motivated by supporting the local economy) was the level of family income. The study allowed us to conclude that among consumers motivated by supporting the local economy, attitudes described as reflexive localism (the motive of supporting the local economy associated with concern for the natural environment) predominate.

KEYWORDS: organic food, purchase motives, supporting the local economy, reflexive localism

Introduction

The organic food market has been characterised by high production and turnover dynamics for at least a dozen years. According to the works of various authors, both in the United States and in Europe, the demand for organically-farmed products is growing systematically and rapidly. As a result, organic food is the fastest-growing segment in the US agriculture and food industry (Mulder & Liu, 2017). The same is true in Europe, which is the second-largest organic food market in the world, with Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Switzerland representing the largest market share (Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011; Ham, 2019).

The development of the organic food market provides two groups of benefits:

- organic agriculture supplying consumers with organic food has a positive impact on the natural environment, including in particular improved soil quality, reduced water and air pollution levels, and increased biodiversity (Hole et al., 2005; Mulder & Liu, 2017);
- consumers have access to food that meets their needs in a better way, especially health needs (Żakowska-Biemans, 2009; Kułyk & Michałowska, 2018).

The importance of organic farming and the need to shorten supply chains are underlined in the new European Green Deal. It is a reference to local development, production of local food, reduction of imports, and strengthening of local manufacturing and processing, which is in line with the strategy's goal of improving the resilience and competitiveness of the economy. Within the European Green Deal framework, there are the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy, which set out concrete actions that span the entire chain from food production to consumption, actions that also include international cooperation on sustainable food systems. An important element of these strategies is agriculture, including organic farming, which is closer to consumers by shortening supply chains. This means more goods produced and sold locally, which ultimately enables the shortening and reduction of global supply chains – the safe delivery of food to customers.

As a result, the growing production of organic food benefits farmers because it allows more efficient use of labour resources on farms and increases the income of farming families, which is related to the farming methods specific to organic farming (higher labour input than in conventional agriculture, higher prices for organic food). In turn, the benefits received by consumers include improved health and excellent taste. The production of organic food also benefits society as a whole in the form of an enhanced state of the natural environment. However, the development of

organic farming is determined by the dynamics of the increase in demand for organic food, which in turn can be motivated by various factors (Voon et al., 2011; Urban et al., 2012; Petrescu et al., 2017; Tandon et al., 2020).

Considering the global benefits of developing local organic food markets and taking into account the decisive role of the behaviour of organic food consumers in dynamising the development of such calls (Massey et al., 2018), we decided to make an attempt to assess the importance of organic food purchases by consumers in Poland – motivated by supporting the local economy – against the background of other factors shaping consumer behaviour. The results of the study are supposed to provide answers to the questions:

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of organic food consumers oriented towards supporting the local economy?
2. How important is supporting the local economy among the different motives for purchasing organic food?
3. To what extent is reflexive localism taken into account in the behaviour of organic food consumers, and what is its importance in supporting the local economy?

Review of the scientific literature

As shown in the literature, factors motivating organic food purchasing are most comprehensively characterised by the theory of planned behaviours (TPB) (Dean et al., 2006; Salleh et al., 2010; Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011; Schleenbecker & Hamm, 2013; Scalco et al., 2017; Ham et al., 2018). This theory has proved its usefulness in research on sustainable and organic food consumption and is commonly used in research on consumer behaviour.

The theory of planned behaviour was developed by Ajzen (1991) and belonged to the most popular testing instruments for measuring the cognitive factors of consumers. TPB proposes that behaviour is determined by a combination of an individual intentions to engage in a certain behaviour (Al-Swidi et al., 2014). It assumes that consumer behaviour in the organic food market is a consequence of the interaction of three groups of factors. One of them is the attitude towards this type of food. The more positive consumers' attitudes toward the presence of organic food on the market, the greater interest in buying it. The positive attitude results primarily from the acceptance of such features of organic food as health properties and taste values, as well as the beneficial impact of organic food production methods on the natural environment (Rana & Paul, 2017).

The second group of factors influencing the decision to purchase organic food are social norms (SN), understood as the adoption and reproduction of the behaviour of other consumers of organic food.

Therefore, the tendency to imitate the behaviour of other consumers of organic food plays an essential role. Previous studies on this topic show that family and friends have the most significant influence on such behaviour in the organic food market. In contrast, other people shape such behaviour to a lesser extent. The impact of social norms on consumer behaviour in the organic food market varies between countries. While the importance of this group of motivating factors was vital in the study conducted among consumers in the Czech Republic (Zagata, 2012), social norms were much less critical among young people in India (Yadav & Pathak, 2016).

The third segment of the TPB is formed by factors that limit access to organic food (perceived behavioural control – PBC), such as high prices, an underdeveloped distribution network, or a small range of organic items (Al-Swidi et al., 2014).

According to the TPB, decisions to purchase organic food may be simultaneously influenced by different factors from each of their three segments. In doing so, some of them may influence the strength of the other factors. As an example, the results of the study by Al-Swidi et al. (2014) show that factors classified as social norms influence the formation of the relationship between the other two groups of factors (attitudes and PBC) and consumers' purchasing decisions, which means that their importance may be greater than the others. However, as the authors of this study emphasise, such a situation may be typical only for consumers in the region they study. At the same time, factors other than SN may be more important for consumer behaviour in the different areas. This finding is supported by the work of Rana and Paul (2017). Based on a broad review of the literature on consumer behaviour in the organic food market, they found that there are differences between the motives for purchasing such food between highly developed and developing countries. In the first group, demand for organic food is motivated by satisfying needs such as esteem and self-actualisation, whereas in developing countries, the need for safety is more important. In such circumstances, social norms will be of minimal importance in developed countries, while in developing countries, factors such as the opinion of others may have a much greater influence on purchasing organic food. According to the mentioned authors, it is one of those issues that requires more detailed research.

An issue that has been poorly explored so far is the importance of supporting the local economy as a motivating factor for purchasing organic food. A study by Seyfang (2006) shows that with the growing importance of global corporations and supermarkets in the food market, a growing group of organic food consumers in the UK perceive their purchasing decisions in the context of supporting and strengthening the local economy, reflecting a search for new pathways towards sustainable consumption and the development of attitudes described as 'ecological citizenship'. Several arguments

support the need for such attitudes to become more widespread. First of all, purchasing food produced by local producers promotes local agriculture. It shortens the supply chain, which reduces distribution costs and allows for shorter transportation of food from the producer to the consumer. As a result, the scale of threats to the natural environment is also reduced due to the reduction of energy consumption by vehicles transporting agricultural raw materials and food products (Meas et al., 2015). Another important fact here is that, in contrast to the globalised food system, in the case of increasing interest in local products, the relations between consumers and producers of organic food strengthen, which is a condition for the development of ethical and social capital, as well as a source of increasing consumer knowledge about the pro-environmental significance of organic food production methods (Honkanen et al., 2006).

It appears significant to look for an answer to the degree organic food consumers are interested in its local origin. Studies conducted in Austria (Milestad et al., 2017) and Sweden (Bosona & Gebresenbet, 2018) have shown that organic food consumers exhibit a growing interest in its local origin, with the main causes being typically its high quality and support for the local economy. On the other hand, research conducted among organic food consumers in Denmark show a low interest in its local origin (Ditlevsen et al., 2020). In turn, a study from i.a. England has demonstrated that only a small portion of farmers running organic holdings was interested in placing their produce on local markets. The reason for this is the feeling that the barriers to the local market are too significant or lack sufficient population to make a predominantly local marketing strategy viable. Some farmers identified themselves as producers with neither the time, skills, nor inclination to get involved in direct marketing and prefer the relative security of selling on contract (Lobley et al., 2013). However, research from the USA (Yue & Tong, 2009) and Germany (Hempel & Hamm, 2016) has given basis to the conclusion that organic food consumers accepted the highest price for organic products, which originated from local suppliers.

Finally, the growing importance of local organic food markets contributes to sustainable rural development because it not only improves the state of the natural environment (the higher the number of organic farms, the lower the scale of environmental threats) but also contributes to improving the economic stability of organic farms because they become less dependent on large buyers. In addition, the creation of local supply chains translates into the development of the local economy by increasing the amount of money circulating locally (the money spent on organic food stays in the local market and has a much more significant multiplier effect than purchases in hypermarkets because in the latter case the money quickly flows out of the local economy) (Mitchell & Lemon, 2019; O'Hara & Pirog, 2013; Lobley et al., 2013).

When characterising the positive effects of developing local organic food markets, Seyfang (2006) points out that it is not about closing the most developed economies to international trade (defensive localism) and creating barriers to food imports from developing countries, which would deepen the scale of economic and social inequalities. Instead, it is about reflexive dialect, meaning an openness on the part of consumers of organic food to local markets and creating networks with the global market for those products that cannot be produced in a given local environment. It is mainly about openness to purchasing organic food from developing countries, as this is one of the conditions for improving the state of the natural environment on a global scale and for stimulating the development of the economies of these countries to reduce the scale of economic and social inequalities in the world. Such an attitude is, therefore, contrary to defensive localism and favours the introduction of the principle of sustainable development not only in the local environment close to the consumers of organic food in wealthy societies but also in economically less developed countries (Winter, 2003; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). As noted by some authors (Fonte, 2013; Spillare, 2016; Ferguson et al., 2017), it is a process that conditions the dynamisation of local development and is based on the concept of the common good and the concept of Shared Social Responsibility (SSR) and reduces the potential threats to local environments resulting from the negative effects of globalisation. As pointed out by DuPuis & Goodman (2005), localisation is not necessarily incompatible with globalisation and may be open to deployment in a neoliberal “glocal” logic. An inclusive and reflexive politics in place would understand local food systems not as local “resistance” against global capitalist “logic” but as a process in which the local and international make each other every day. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the term “glocal reflexivity” to combine global and local contexts.

Materials and methods

The analysis leading to the formulation of answers to the research questions was conducted based on a survey among 850 organic food consumers in Poland. The research sample was selected on the basis of age, gender, education level, number of persons in the family, a form of professional activity and place of residence of the respondents. The survey was conducted in December 2020 by a specialised research agency (ABM FAST SOLUTIONS), and the survey questionnaire was developed by the authors of the study. The survey was conducted using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method via an online panel.

Based on the literature review (Dean et al., 2006; Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011; Zagata, 2012), the survey questionnaire was constructed in such a way that the analysis of empirical data was subject to the assumptions of the theory of planned behaviour.

From the perspective of the research assumptions adopted in this paper, it was important to obtain an answer to the question about the motives for purchasing organic food, using their division into three segments: attitude, social norms and perceived behavioural control. The purchase motives belonging to the first group included: caring for one's own and family's health, high-quality values of organic food, concern for the natural environment and trust in organic food. In the second group, there were two features: friends' opinions and trends for purchasing organic food. The third group of factors were: low availability of organic food, small range and high price (Al-Swidi et al., 2013; Scalco et al., 2017; Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011; Ünal et al., 2018).

To precisely explain the importance of supporting the local economy as a motive for purchasing organic food, the studied population was divided into two groups. The first group included those consumers who, when choosing the five most important motives for purchasing organic food from among a dozen, and prioritising their importance, chose to support the local economy as one of them. The second group included consumers for whom such a motive was not significant enough in buying organic food to be included among the top five. The use of such a grouping method not only made it possible to situate the position of supporting the local economy as a motive for buying organic food among the other motives but also provided an answer to the question of what the relevance of this motive is to each of the three segments described by the TPB. This approach also facilitated (at least indirectly) the assessment of the behaviour of organic food consumers motivated by supporting the local economy in the context of altruistic attitudes (when such a motive is strongly linked to concern for the natural environment) or selfish attitudes (when it shows a solid link to concern for health). In our study, this is also one of the measures indicating the role of reflexive localism as a motivating factor for supporting the local economy. Another measure used for this assessment is the percentage of consumers who mostly buy organic food directly from producers (selling at organic farms and markets) and in small neighbourhood shops (which are generally supplied by organic farmers, bypassing long supply chains).

In order to fully assess the attitudes of consumers motivated by supporting the local economy, an analysis narrowed down to this group was carried out in the further part of the study, providing an answer to the question about the links between this motive and others, especially a concern for the natural environment. It was assumed that consumers supporting the local economy

also recognise the need to protect the natural environment, which could indicate attitudes corresponding to the approach characteristic of reflexive localism.

The hypotheses assumed for verification in this study were that:

1. Consumers who treat the purchase of organic food as a form of supporting the local economy are, to a greater extent than others, motivated by concern for the natural environment;
2. Consumers purchasing organic food to support the local economy spend more money on organic food and buy more often because they appreciate its high quality;
3. Among consumers of organic food motivated by supporting the local economy, an attitude characteristic of reflexive localism prevails.

Justification for this hypothesis formulation is provided by recent research findings (Kushwah et al., 2019), based on a broad review of the literature, which shows that there is little work to date examining the links between organic food consumption and support for the local economy. The literature also suggests that strong relations between organic food producers and consumers, which are only possible at the local level, are an enhancing factor not only for organic food market development (Torjusen et al., 2001) but can contribute to improving the state of the natural environment and boosting rural development (Ditlevsen et al., 2020; Eagle et al., 2017). Since motives for purchasing organic food vary between countries and change over time (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2008), it is reasonable to study the specifics of consumer behaviour in the organic food market in different countries.

As the study is based on qualitative data (consumer opinions), Pearson's chi-squared test of independence and the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to achieve the stated objectives and verify the hypotheses.

Results of the research

Consumers and their socio-demographic characteristics play an important role in the development of the organic food market, as the demand for such food is growing rapidly (Dimitri & Oberholtzer, 2005; Pelletier et al., 2013). Table 1 shows the characteristics of two groups of respondents, i.e., those who support and those who do not support the local economy (respectively: 45% and 55% of respondents). Statistically significant differences between the identified groups due to the adopted characteristics were also indicated. Pearson's chi-squared test of independence was used to examine the differences. The study shows that the majority of consumers supporting the local economy are women (4% more than men), graduates of secondary schools and higher education institutions, and inhabitants of rural areas and

small towns. However, the variation in this respect is small – there are no statistically significant differences.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents are divided into those supporting and those not supporting the local economy (Pearson's chi-squared test of independence – * $p < 0.05$)

Variables	Categories	Group I Support (n=437)	Group II No support (n=413)	P
Gender	Female	53%	47%	0.2930
	Male	49%	51%	
Education	Primary	35%	65%	0.2381
	Secondary	53%	47%	
	Higher	51%	49%	
Place of residence	Countryside	55%	45%	0.1813
	Town up to 10,000 inhabitants	65%	35%	
	Town between 10,000 and 19,900 inhabitants	47%	53%	
	Town between 20,000 and 49,900 inhabitants	51%	49%	
	Town between 50,000 and 99,900 inhabitants	51%	49%	
	Town with more than 100,000 inhabitants	47%	53%	
Professional activity	Wage work	51%	49%	0.4493
	Self-employed	53%	47%	
	Pensioner	44%	56%	
	Student	51%	49%	
	Unemployed	60%	40%	
Income per family member in EURO	Up to 175	51%	49%	0.0702*
	175-327	54%	46%	
	327-545	55%	45%	
	545-763	43%	57%	
	763 and more	46%	54%	
Age	($\bar{x} \pm \sigma$), Min; max	(38±13.6), 18;74.	(39±14.5), 18;75.	0.4666

Source: authors' work.

Consumers supporting and not supporting the local economy are differentiated by income per family member. In the first group, there is a slightly higher percentage of families with relatively low income, which indicates that for more affluent people supporting the local economy as a motive for purchasing organic food is less important.

Studies have shown that the most important motives for purchasing organic food include taking care of one's own and family's health, high quality and better taste of food, as well as concern for the natural environment. Therefore, health and environmental values play a key role in the food selection process. Caring for one's own and family's health as well as high quality and better taste of organic food were the top-rated motives by consumers for

purchasing such food. This is followed by concern for the natural environment. This motive for buying organic food, which is in line with the concept of sustainable development, is also an essential component of the first TPB segment. Support for the local economy, also belonging to this segment, was ranked fourth among the motives for purchasing organic food. The motives such as fashion and trends for buying organic food, which also belong to SN, were assigned minor importance and were not mentioned at all by the highest percentage of consumers surveyed (Figure 1 and Table 2).

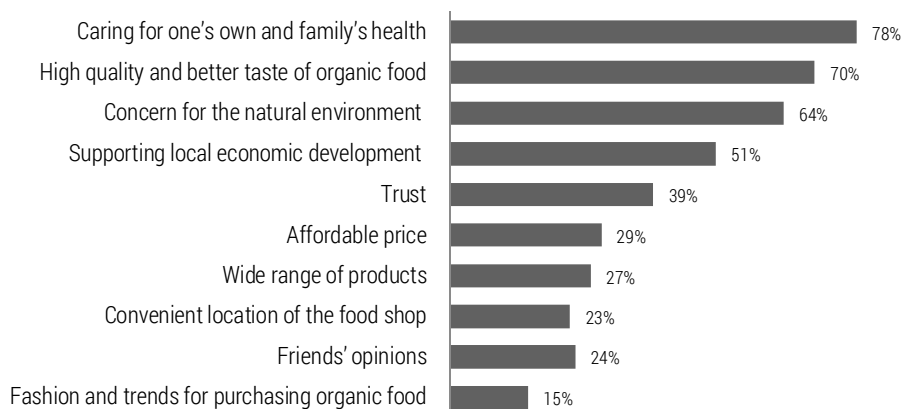


Figure 1. Motives for purchasing organic food (percentage of responses)

Source: authors' work.

Table 2. Supporting the local economy vs. other motives for purchasing organic food (Mann-Whitney U test results – *p<0.05; **p<0.001)

Motives	Group I Support (n=437)		Group II No support (n=413)		p-value*
	Me	Me	Me	Me	
Caring for one's own and family's health	2.99	4	3.03	4	0.5894
High quality and better taste of organic food	2.28	2	2.37	3	0.5661
Concern for the natural environment	2.06	2	1.82	2	0.0516*
Trust	0.76	0	1.30	0	0.0000*
Affordable price	0.52	0	1.07	0	0.0000*
Wide range of products	0.48	0	0.86	0	0.0000*
Convenient location of the food shop	0.51	0	0.76	0	0.0000*
Friends' opinions	0.35	0	0.85	0	0.0000*
Fashion and trends for purchasing organic food	0.25	0	0.50	0	0.0000*

Source: authors' work.

The study showed that, apart from the two motives for purchasing organic food, i.e. caring for one's own and family's health as well as high quality and better taste of organic food, in the case of all the other motives analysed in the study, there are statistically significant differences between the two separated groups of consumers, i.e. supporting and not supporting the local economy (significance at the level of $p < 0.001$, and in the case of concern for the natural environment $p < 0.05$). Referring to the research assumptions adopted in the study and the answer to the question about the motives for buying organic food, using their division into three TPB segments, i.e., attitude, social norms and perceived behavioural control, it should be noted that with regard to the purchase motives belonging to the first segment, statistically significant differences occurred in the case of two of the four characteristics, i.e., concern for the natural environment and trust in organic food. Regarding the purchase motives belonging to the second segment, statistically, significant differences were found for features such as friends' opinions as well as fashion and trends for purchasing organic food. Regarding the purchase motives belonging to the third segment, statistically, significant differences were also found for features such as the availability of organic food and its range and price. It should be added that only concern for the natural environment – as a motive for purchasing organic food – is more associated with the group of consumers supporting the local economy. The other reasons, i.e., trust, affordable price, a wide range of products, convenient location of the food shop, friends' opinions as well as fashion and trends for such purchases, are more related to the group of consumers not supporting the local economy (Table 2).

The study showed that both consumers are supporting and not supporting the local economy list caring for their own and their family's health as the first motive for purchasing organic food, high quality and better taste of organic food as the second, and concern for the natural environment as the third. It should be added that the group of consumers supporting the local economy rated this last motive higher. Thus, it is more important to them, which confirms the first hypothesis posed in the paper, i.e. consumers treating organic food purchases as a form of supporting the local economy are more motivated by concern for the natural environment than the others. The group of consumers not supporting the local economy, on the other hand, gave higher ratings to such motives for purchasing organic food as trust, affordable price, a wide range of products, convenient shop location, friends' opinions as well as fashion and trends for such purchases (Table 2).

In addition, in order to verify the second research hypothesis, it was examined whether people who purchase organic food to support the local economy allocate more significant amounts of money to the purchase of organic food and whether they make such purchases more often because

they appreciate its high quality. However, the results of the Pearson's chi-squared test of independence showed that there is no statistically significant relationship either between the amount that the consumers surveyed spend on organic food or between the frequency of such purchases and the fact that they support the local economy (in the first case – $p > \alpha$, $p = 0.8880$, and in the second case – $p > \alpha$, $p = 0.9132$). Therefore, the conducted study did not confirm this hypothesis, so it should be rejected.

As the presented study shows, consumers of organic food motivated by supporting the local economy associate their purchasing decisions with concern for the natural environment protection more strongly than other consumers, which can be treated as a manifestation of care for the common good, and this, in turn, is a feature of the attitude characteristic of reflexive localism (Spillare, 2016).

In this context, the question of not only the presence of such behaviour among Polish consumers treating support for the local economy as a motive for purchasing organic food but also their socio-demographic characteristics is justified. In fact, the studies conducted in other countries show that consumers of such food do not treat the place of its production as an essential motive for purchase (Ham, 2019) or do not perceive a connection between organic food purchases and concern for the natural environment (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2008).

In this study, the group representing the attitude of 'reflexive localism' (RL) includes consumers supporting the local economy who – as a motive for purchasing organic food – listed concern for the natural environment as well (286 consumers). The remaining consumers declaring support for the local economy were included in the 'defensive localism' (DL) group (151 people). The results of the Pearson's chi-squared test of independence allowed us to conclude that the characteristics are significantly differentiating the two groups of consumers were: gender ($p < \alpha$, where $p = 0.0042$), as women constituted 64% among those representing the RL attitude and 50% – in the DL group. Moreover, a characteristic feature of the RL group was a lower average age of consumers (37 years, while in the DL group – 40 years; $p = 0.0382$), as well as a significantly higher percentage of students (12%, while in the DL group – 3%; $p = 0.0376$), determining the difference in terms of professional activity. On this basis, it can be assumed that the results of the study confirmed the third hypothesis posed in the paper, assuming that among consumers of organic food motivated by supporting the local economy, an attitude characteristic of reflexive localism prevails.

However, no statistically significant differences were found in terms of education, place of residence and household income. There was also no difference when it came to the amount spent by the two groups on organic food. However, consumers with an attitude corresponding to the characteristics of

RL made purchases more frequently (42% made purchases several times a week compared to 31% in the DL group, while the percentage making purchases once a month was 14% for RL and 20% for DL). A significant difference in this respect is also evidenced by the $p < \alpha$ ratio, where $p = 0.0465$.

In order to further determine the motives for purchasing organic food by consumers classified to the RL and DL groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was performed (Table 3).

Table 3. RL and DL attitudes and motives for purchasing organic food (Mann-Whitney U test results – * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$)

Motives	Attitude reflexive localism (n=286)		Attitude defensive localism (n=151)		p-value*
	Me	Me	Me	Me	
Caring for one's own and family's health	3.08	4	2.81	3	0.2018
High quality and better taste of organic food	2.37	3	2.11	2	0.1429
Supporting the development of the local economy	2.56	2	2.82	3	0.0472*
Trust	0.60	0	1.05	0	0.0003*
Affordable price	0.37	0	0.81	0	0.0000*
Wide range of products	0.35	0	0.73	0	0.0008*
Convenient location of the food shop	0.29	0	0.92	0	0.0000*
Friends' opinions	0.21	0	0.60	0	0.0004*
Fashion and trends for purchasing organic food	0.19	0	0.37	0	0.0166*

Source: authors' work.

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test give grounds for stating that regardless of the importance of the motive of concern for the natural environment to consumers of organic food, the most crucial reason is a concern for their own and their family's health (high average number of points for this motive in both groups on a 5-point scale). As can be seen from the data presented in Table 3, in the RL group, this is a much more important motive than supporting the local economy, while among DL consumers, both motives are rated similarly. Furthermore, consumers in the RL group rated the quality and taste of organic food slightly higher, but the differences between the two consumer groups were not significant in this respect. In both groups of consumers, the impact of the motives described by TPB as social norms was relatively weak, meaning that friends' opinions or fashion for organic food had little influence on purchasing decisions, with a completely marginal impact among RL consumers, especially against the background of motives classi-

fied in the attitude segment (health care, high-quality values, trust in organic food).

The study showed that consumers supporting the local economy tend to buy organic food either at the local market (bazaar) or at the supermarket, with this being slightly more relevant for consumers in the RL group. This is followed by a small neighbourhood shop or an organic farm (direct sale), but in the latter case, it especially concerns consumers from the DL group. On the other hand, a small percentage of consumers supporting the local economy purchase organic food in a hypermarket or via the Internet, whereas in the first case this is slightly more relevant for consumers in the RL group and in the second case for consumers in the DL group. Thus, there are no significant differences in terms of where organic food is purchased between consumers representing RL and DL attitudes, regardless of whether this place is the so-called 'local market' or a large retail chain, with a slight predominance of the second group in buying at the local market, including directly from organic farms (Figure 2).

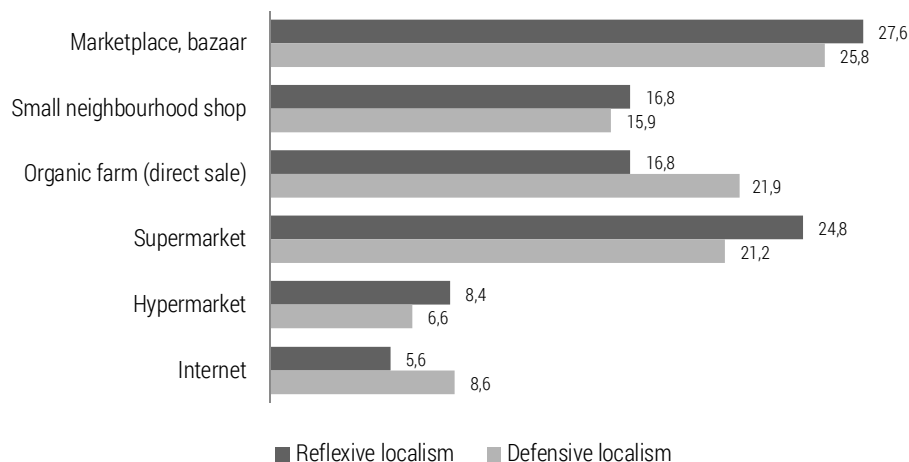


Figure 2. Place of purchasing organic food (percentage of responses)

Source: authors' work.

Thus, the presented findings support the thesis that not only the production of organic food itself is significant, but also, or perhaps above all, its processing and distribution, with direct farm sales being an essential part of the organic food distribution system. Direct sale is one of the activities related to the improvement of food quality and safety, thus having a direct impact not only on consumer health but also on supporting the local economy. It consists of the farms taking over the function of food processors and distributors, and its characteristic is shortening the route of food products between

farmers – organic food producers and their consumers (direct recipients), which is very important in the context of building closer and more durable mutual relations in order to not only better adjust the offer to the needs but also to reduce transport costs and thus contribute to the improvement of the natural environment protection.

Discussion

From the perspective of the EU Green Deal Strategy and determinants of sustainable development, including one of its important aspects, i.e. sustainable consumption, an important issue is the attachment of the consumer to the local product and thus to the development of the local market (Bio districts). Previous studies conducted in Poland show that consumers expressed different opinions about supporting local development through the production and marketing of organic food produced close to where they live (Nesterowicz et al., 2016; Grzybowska-Brzezińska & Grzywińska-Rapca, 2018). Similarly, a study by Bryła (2016) among 1000 consumers in Poland shows that the most important motives for buying organic food are health properties and taste values. A lesser role is played by concern for local producers, sustainable development and identification of products with the area of their origin. All this indicates that the characteristics of organic food consumers in Poland are close to attitudes described as defensive localism, which is not confirmed by the results of our study. This may be a sign of the evolving attitudes of Polish organic food consumers in recent years.

Comparing the results of our own study with those of other authors, it can be seen that among the motives for buying organic food, consumers list health concerns in the first place. In Canada, 89% of consumers associate the choice of organic food with respect for proper nutrition and health. French consumers who buy organic food also perceive it as better for their health and the environment. Among 566 Dutch consumers of organic food, 85% indicated health, 73% environment, 65% animal welfare and taste as motives for choosing organic food (Kesse-Guyot et al., 2013). Health and quality considerations for organic food are the main motive for consumer purchases in Denmark (Hjelmar, 2011). Similarly, Polish consumers mainly justify their choice of organic food by caring for their health and by being convinced of the absence of harmful substances (Nesterowicz et al., 2016).

The results of the presented study give reason to conclude that no matter how strongly some consumers of organic food are motivated to purchase it to support the local economy or to improve the natural environment, the most crucial motive for purchase remains to care for their own and their family's health. In this context, it should be noted that the results of the study do not

provide a basis for concluding that some consumers tend to have selfish attitudes (caring for their own health) and others altruistic attitudes (caring for the natural environment) because no matter what division was applied among consumers (supporting or not supporting the local economy; motivated by caring for the natural environment or not mentioning this motive) the primary motive for buying organic food remained caring for one's own health. In this respect, the results of this study are consistent with the conclusions formulated by other authors (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2008; Wägeli & Hamm, 2016; Krishnakumare & Niranjana, 2017; Mulder & Liu, 2017).

The study results show a high percentage of consumers motivated by supporting the local economy (51%), of whom as many as 65% listed concern for the natural environment as one of the five most important motives for buying organic food. Thus, this was the group of consumers who perceive not only personal benefits from the purchase of such food but treat such decisions as contributing to the protection of the natural environment, and such a motive is beyond the interests of the local environment. All this means that the attitude characterised by RL is quite common among the surveyed consumers of organic food in Poland and differs from the behaviour of consumers of such food in the USA, where – according to the study by Thomas and Gunden (2012) – consumers do not associate the purchase of organic food with caring for the natural environment or supporting the local economy. In contrast, consumers in Denmark perceive a link between organic food production and improving the state of the natural environment. Still, they are not guided in their purchasing decisions by the need to support the local economy (Ditlevsen et al., 2020).

Studies also confirm the variation in motives for buying organic food between countries in Europe by other authors (Bojnec et al., 2019; Thøgersen, 2009; Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011). Cultural factors that motivate consumers in some countries to buy local organic products are cited as one of the reasons (Govindasamy et al., 2010; Thomas & Gunden, 2012; Saraiva et al., 2018).

However, this raises the question of more precisely defined reasons for the different motives of consumers to buy organic food in different countries.

Conclusions

Supporting the local economy turns out to be an important motive for buying organic food by consumers in Poland. Although it is not the most important motive, as care for one's own and family's health remains the most important motive in various countries in the world, most of the surveyed consumers treat this motive as a factor significantly influencing their purchasing decisions. Consumers motivated by supporting the local economy

have similar socio-demographic characteristics as other consumers, which means that this motive is not very related to consumers' age, education level or place of residence.

However, statistically, significant differences were visible between the two groups of consumers in terms of the importance of motives for buying organic food (with the exception of health care and assessment of food quality values), consumers declaring support for the local economy generally stressed the importance of caring for the natural environment. Their purchasing decisions were less likely to be motivated by a wide range of products, an affordable price, or a convenient location of the shop. Motives classified as social norms, i.e. fashion and friends' opinions, were much less important for this group of consumers. This can be seen as an argument demonstrating the lasting attachment of these consumers to buying organic food, built on their own knowledge of the benefits of this type of behaviour.

A more detailed analysis of the motives for purchasing organic food by consumers declaring support for the local economy showed that the reason significantly differentiates this group is the perception of such purchases in the context of concern for the natural environment. Most consumers listed both motives simultaneously, which may indicate that they perceive the purchase of organic food as benefiting not only the consumers themselves and their local community but also in a supra-local context (care for the natural environment as a common good). This is an attitude characteristic of reflexive localism.

There was also a large group of consumers for whom supporting the local economy was not associated with concern for the natural environment. This may indicate that in their purchasing decisions, they are guided by selfish motives described in the literature, which is characteristic of defensive localism (interest in their local environment and perceiving the external environment as a competitor posing a threat to the closed local group).

Further research on this issue should be directed towards analysing questions related to, but not limited to, explaining the motives driving consumers to RL-specific behaviour and limiting DL-specific behaviour.

An important limitation of this study is only a preliminary recognition of the issue concerned. It seems justified to focus further research on the issue of social relations between local producers and consumers of organic food, aiming to shorten supply chains and contribute – by reducing transport costs – to the improvement of the natural environment protection. Another critical aspect of future research in the context of the importance of RL among organic food consumers is the search for an answer to the question of the actual scale of openness of organic food consumers, motivated by supporting the local economy, to external markets offering food not produced in the local environment. Such openness would mean an acceptance of the need to

develop not only 'my' local economy but anywhere in the world because only then it is possible to achieve the full benefits of the development of the organic food market.

The contribution of the authors

Adam Czudec: conception – 40%, literature review 80%, writing – 40%, analysis and interpretation of data – 40%, conclusions – 40%.

Teresa Miś: conception – 30%, literature review 10%, writing – 30%, analysis and interpretation of data – 30%, conclusions – 30%.

Dariusz Zając: conception – 30%, literature review 10%, writing – 30%, analysis and interpretation of data – 30%, conclusions – 30%.

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