

The contemporary food economies and cultures are characterised by unprecedented abundance, diversity and technological advancements. At the same time, though, again and again in this situation of wide choice we experience concerns and anxieties about our everyday diet. Information reaches us about the threats from eating specific products regarding how much, how often and in what conditions we eat, as well as the origin of our food. These food fears are not only related to our physical condition and health status, but also have ecological, technological, ethical or cultural aspects. The sense of threat translates into a negative diagnosis of the contemporary eating system and points to its imperfections. Such food fears are part of our everyday food supply strategies.

The project will test the role played by food fears in using unconventional, alternative and informal food supply channels at domestic level. In particular, the qualitative, in-depth analysis will cover informal food exchange networks outside the official economic system, individual own-use food production and home production, as well as participation in new types of food networks such as cooperatives or exchange within the community-supported agriculture model. By studying bottom-up food provision channels, the project will firstly identify the threats as they are perceived by the consumers themselves, and not experts, and secondly present the dynamic of bottom-up food exchange processes. A number of studies on Eastern European food cultures have indicated that informal economies have a significant role as a distinguishing feature of this region. The project develops these interpretations using the concept of food fears and avoidance strategies, which are a significant key ordering our everyday diets. By gaining an insight into the social perception of food threats, the research will also provide a better understanding of the dynamic of food models and the relations between official and informal provision channels. In the longer term, it will permit a critical diagnosis and planning of an intervention in food and public health.