

# Local food consumption and practice theory: A case study on guests' motivations and understanding

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**ABSTRACT:** This study explores the relationship between guests' perceptions of local food and the motivations leading to its consumption at restaurants. Applying practice theory to consumption studies, the research draws on the "practical turn" in social theories and the renewed interest in "everyday life" and "lifeworld". In doing so, the study uses Schatzki's and Reckwitz's reformulation of *practice* as a routinised set of behaviours interconnected with one another and rooted in a background knowledge made up of understanding, know-how, state of emotion and motivational knowledge. The research is organised as a case study collecting data from 162 potential guests of local restaurants in the municipality of Ooststellingwerf, in the northern Netherlands, via a survey questionnaire. The dataset was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science [SPSS] software, focusing on customers' understanding of "local food" and the factors motivating them to order a local dish at restaurants. The exploratory findings contribute to the understanding of the conceptualisation of "local food" from the consumers' perspective and shed light on the use of practice theory in tourism studies with regard to consumers' pro-sustainability behaviour.

**KEYWORDS:** consumer behaviour; food consumption; local food; practice theory

## Introduction

Despite the increasing academic interest in theorisations and paradigms of local food production and consumption (Blake et al., 2010; Eriksen, 2013; Sundbo, 2013; Sage, 2014), there is still no consensus on a definition of "local food", or shared understanding of its contribution to sustainability in tourism and hospitality (Hall & Mitchell, 2003; Brain, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles & Wijesinghe, 2019). In academic research, the conceptualisation of local food largely moves between local food as an expression of the local cultural identity and social capital (Hall, 2006; Hall et al., 2008; Sims, 2009; Johnston & Baumann, 2014), and local food as a critical response to a contemporary global mainstream food system that is perceived as having eroded the geographical and social linkages between the dimension of production and the dimension of consumption (Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Montanari, 2009; Boluk et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles & Wijesinghe, 2019). Such conceptualisations share – as a lowest common denominator – the acknowledgment that local food production and consumption is a nexus to sustainability within the frame of Goal 12 of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), envisaged by the United Nations as seeking to "ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns" (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg12>).

With regard to such patterns of sustainable consumption, this research aims to explore consumers' conceptualisations

and definitions of local food, and to understand the relationship between consumers' perceptions of local food and the motivations leading them to consume such food at restaurants. The study therefore seeks to contribute to the understanding of the antecedents and mediators driving the consumption of local food and the extent to which these influence pro-sustainability behaviour. The theoretical frame of the study rests in an application of practice theory approaches to consumption studies. The research draws on literature examining the "practical turn" in social theories (Knorr Cetina et al., 2005) and its link with a renewed interest in "everyday life" and "lifeworld" (Haluza-DeLay, 2008; Röpke, 2009; Halkier et al., 2011; Micheletti & Stolle, 2012; Warde, 2014). Conceptually, this study is driven by Schatzki's (Schatzki, 1996; 1997; Knorr Cetina et al., 2005) and Reckwitz's (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005; 2015) reformulation of the concept of *practice* as a routinised set of behaviours interconnected to one another and rooted in a background knowledge consisting of understanding, know-how, state of emotion and motivational knowledge.

The investigation is organised as a case study. Data were collected in 2018 in the Frisian municipality of Ooststellingwerf, in northern Netherlands, using a survey that reached 162 potential guests of local restaurants. The resulting quantitative dataset was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science [SPSS] software, focusing on customers' understandings of "local food" and the factors motivating them to order a local

dish at restaurants. The investigation takes into consideration the influence of food *neophobia* attitudes, and the demographic features of gender and age. Findings suggest that interpersonal relations are the most influential motivational factors and point to the pivotal role of customers' gender and age. Interestingly, the study did not find a significant relation between food neophobia and the choice of a local dish. Finally, and contributing to the development of further knowledge on the conceptualisation and definition of "local food" from the consumers' perspective, the article discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the use of practice theory in tourism studies with regards to consumers' pro-sustainability behaviour.

### Local food consumption

The urgent need to address the global challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and social and economic injustice underpins the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs) and provides the context for the contemporary debate rethinking the patterns of food consumption and production (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>). Tourism and hospitality contribute extensively to global food consumption, with 40 million tonnes of food globally consumed by tourists in 2011 (Gössling & Peeters, 2015). The World Travel and Tourism Council (2017) recognises and stresses the pivotal role of the tourism and hospitality industry in motivating consumers to contribute to sustainability through their food consumption choices and their support of local economies. Tourism and hospitality scholars have examined the juncture between food consumption and sustainability from several perspectives, including local food movements and food justice (Brain, 2012; Sage, 2014), the role of the restaurateur as a sustainability pedagogue (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2014) and sustainability facilitator (Higgins-Desbiolles & Wijesinghe, 2019), tourism as a force for gastronomic globalisation and localisation (Hall & Mitchell, 2003), carbon labels in tourism and hospitality (Babakhani et al., 2020), the influence of globalisation on food consumption and local gastronomic identities in tourism (Mak et al., 2012), and food "authenticity" and "locality" as strategies for regional tourism development (Sims, 2009).

Despite the increasing academic debate about paradigms of local food production and consumption, there is still no consensus on a definition of "local food" (Blake et al., 2010; Eriksen, 2013; Sundbo, 2013). In tourism and hospitality studies, the conceptualisation of local food largely moves between local food as an expression of the local cultural identity and social capital (Hall, 2006; Hall et al., 2008; Sims, 2009; Johnston & Baumann, 2014), and local food as a critical response to a mainstream global food system that is perceived as having eroded the geographical and social linkages between the dimension of production and the dimension of consumption (Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Montanari, 2009; Boluk et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles & Wijesinghe, 2019). Notwithstanding the importance of food consumption in the context of tourism and hospitality, little is known about the phenomenon in general. Previous studies have explored consumers' attitude towards local food through the use of alphabet theory (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015), consumer segmentation (Aprile et al., 2016), the theory of planned behaviour (Kumar & Smith, 2018), laddering and word association techniques (Roininen et al., 2006), and grounded theory (Kim et al., 2009). According to Feldmann and Hamm

(2015), these studies based their research on the difficulty of defining the term "local", usually understood in terms of distance – i. e. food that has travelled for a short distance (Holloway et al., 2007) or food that is marketed directly from the producer (Watts et al., 2005). Such understandings of local food become even more challenging when they refer to the variety of ingredients that may comprise a single dish – e.g. from main ingredients such as vegetables, meat and dairy, to spices and seasoning. Focusing on the consumers' role in prompting sustainability through their consumption choices in relation to food, this study aims at developing further knowledge about consumers' perceptions and understandings of local food in tourism and hospitality and focuses therefore on local dishes. It does so by applying social practice theory to consumer behaviour studies in order to explore restaurant guests' motivations towards the choice of a local dish when at a restaurant.

### Practice theory

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in applying practice theory to consumption studies, especially with regard to forms of sustainable consumption in daily life (Warde, 2005; 2014; 2015; Haluza-DeLay, 2008; Røpke, 2009; Hargreaves, 2011; Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). Speaking of "practices" is broadly understood as investigating the individual actions and behaviours that are the building blocks of social phenomena and social life (Reckwitz, 2002; Knorr Cetina et al., 2005). Reckwitz (2002, p. 244) claims that "the turn to practices seems to be tied to an interest in the 'everyday' and 'lifeworld'". The use of social practice theory in this research, therefore, allows the study of consumption to be interwoven with the understanding of everyday practices and routinised activities (Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). The study investigates guests' conceptualisation of local dishes and their motivations for consuming local food when at a restaurant from a *habitus* perspective. The concept of habitus allows the structuring of practices and routines, connecting them to the individual's personal history by making sense of biographical and historical experience as a crucial element in decision-making (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Shove et al. (2012) highlight that habits are practices constantly reproduced by committed practicers; moreover, all habits are practices but, actually, not all practices are habits requiring consistent reiteration.

While theories of practice present a high degree of variation, this study draws on the key features of practice theory as reformulated by Schatzki (1996; 1997). Practices are understood as the core of the social scientific analysis of social order and personal conduct and are presented as the primary entities of the social world, while the society itself is "a field of practices" (Warde, 2014, p. 285). As Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) highlights, ...[a] "practice" (*Praktik*) is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

Practice theory conveys a novel perspective on consumer studies since, in contrast to the main narrative on consumer sovereignty, it puts the emphasis on routine over action and on dispositions over decisions as a frame to better understand consumers' choices and behaviour (Warde, 2014). According

to this perspective, consumer behaviour and decision-making can be understood as a moment within a chain of practices, habits and daily routines connected to each other and for this reason difficult to change (Hargreaves, 2011). Recognising this resistance to change (Wilhite, 2013) is crucial if we are to be successful in addressing one of the key questions of our time, namely how to move such practices towards patterns of sustainable consumption. This study is therefore conceptually driven by Reckwitz's (2002, p. 249) formulation of practice as a "background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". Investigating the ways in which people understand and order local food when at restaurants, the study interweaves the lens of habits, practices and daily routine with the work of Kim et al. (2009), Kim and Eves (2012) and Mak et al. (2012), exploring tourists' motivations and factors influencing their choice of local food.

### Choosing local food at restaurants

This study draws on the work of Kim et al. (2009) and Mak et al. (2012) to explore the factors influencing the consumption of local food at a destination. Kim et al. (2009) identified three main categories: motivational, demographic, and physiological. Kim and Eves (2012) identified five motivational factors: cultural experience, excitement, interpersonal relations, sensory appeal and concern for health, together with physiological factors connected with food neophilia or neophobia (Kim et al., 2009). Mak et al. (2012) identified five sociocultural and physiological factors influencing tourists' food consumption: cultural/religious influences, sociodemographic factors, food-related personality traits, exposure effect/past experience, and motivational factors. Hence, Mak et al. (2012) add cultural/religious influences, food-related personality traits, and exposure effect/past experience to the factors previously identified by Kim et al. (2009). Concerning motivations, a motivational factor not included by the models of either Kim and Eves (2012) or Mak et al. (2012) is support for the local economy (Megicks et al., 2012). Finally, with regard to demographics, Sengel et al. (2015) show that gender is associated with significant differences in the degree of interest in local food.

Building on the above, this exploration of guests' understandings of local food and their motivations to order local dishes when at restaurants combines the use of practice theory with an exploration of guests' motivational factors – i.e. sensory appeal, interpersonal relations, local support and cultural experience, as well as food neophobia and demographic factors, i.e. gender and age (Kim et al., 2009; Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2012; Megicks et al., 2012; Sengel et al., 2015). While practice theory focuses on chained sets of habits and routinised behaviours underpinning actions and decisions, the attention on motivational factors makes it possible to explore guests' drivers for the choice of local dishes. In short, Reckwitz's (2002, p. 249) formulation of practice as a "background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" is used in conjunction with the motivational factors influencing tourists' local food consumption identified by Kim and Eves (2012) and Mak et al. (2012). In this way, the study explores the role of habits and practices with regard to the choice of local dishes at restaurants and the motivational factors underpinning this choice.

### Research design

The investigation is organised as a case study. Data were collected in 2018 in the Frisian municipality of Ooststellingwerf, in northern Netherlands, using a 36-question survey questionnaire that reached 162 potential guests of local restaurants. The resulting quantitative dataset was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science [SPSS] software to construct a model, focusing on customers' understandings of "local food", "local dish", and motivational factors in ordering a local dish at restaurants. The investigation takes into consideration the influence of food neophobia attitudes, and the demographic features of gender and age.

The questionnaire opened with a question about the restaurants the respondents had visited in Ooststellingwerf and how often they dine out there. Subsequently, four questions were related to the respondents' understanding of local food and local dishes, and one sought to ascertain the likelihood of them choosing a dish in a restaurant prepared with local ingredients if it were offered on the menu. In order to measure the motivational factors, the dimensions of cultural experience, interpersonal relations and sensory appeal were used (Kim & Eves, 2012). A question was added about supporting the local economy (Megicks et al., 2012). Then, the questionnaire explored a physiological factor, i.e. the participants' attitude towards unknown food through questions based on the food neophobia scale (FNS) developed by Pliner and Hobden (1992). The use of a six-point Likert-type scale allowed the respondents to indicate how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the statements (Saunders et al., 2000). The questionnaire ended with three demographic questions (on gender, age and place of residence) (Kim et al., 2009).

The population for this research were the current and potential guests of the restaurants in Ooststellingwerf, a Friesland municipality in northern Netherlands. "Guests" included both local and non-local residents, with the former being current and potential guests living in Ooststellingwerf and the latter being those living outside the municipality. The sampling population were the locals and non-locals who were actually in Ooststellingwerf at the locations and times where and when the questionnaire was distributed. The sample was selected based on the non-probability approach and with the strategy of convenience sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The respondents were approached on the streets, at a campsite and at various restaurants. A link to the digital version of the questionnaire was shared on the internet by the employees of the restaurants with potential participants. In addition, the questionnaire was posted on the municipality's Facebook page. The duration of the data collection period was around five weeks from the beginning of June until mid-July 2018. Ultimately, a total of 162 current and potential guests of restaurants in Ooststellingwerf completed and returned the questionnaire.

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software was used to analyse the collected data. Table 1 summarises the research design and presents an overview of the factors, dimensions, items and data analysis. A binary variable was computed, considering the median value as a discriminator. This was used as the dependent variable in logistic regression models to verify the influence of motivational, physiological and demographic factors on the choice of local food.

TABLE 1: Set of independent variables

Factor	Dimension	Item/category	Description
Sensory appeal	Motivational	<i>It is important to me that the local dish I eat tastes good.</i> <i>It is important to me that the local dish I eat looks nice.</i>	Two single items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type range scale that allowed the respondents to indicate how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the statements. They were synthesised with the mean value, and a binary variable was computed, considering the median value as a discriminator.
Interpersonal relations		<i>I like to talk to everybody about my choice for a local dish.</i> <i>Tasting a local dish enables me to have an enjoyable time with friends and/or family.</i>	Two single items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type range scale that allowed the respondents to indicate how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the statements. They were synthesised with the mean value, and a binary variable was computed, considering the median value as a discriminator.
Local support		<i>I choose a local dish because it supports local producers.</i> <i>I choose a local dish because I know where it comes from.</i> <i>I choose a local dish because it is processed in Ooststellingwerf.</i> <i>I choose a local dish because it is farmed (produced) in Ooststellingwerf.</i>	Four single items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type range scale that allowed the respondents to indicate how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the statements. They were synthesised with the mean value, and a binary variable was computed, considering the median value as a discriminator.
Cultural experience		<i>A local dish allows me to discover something new.</i> <i>Tasting a local dish in its traditional setting is a special experience.</i> <i>Experiencing a local dish makes me see the things that I do not normally see.</i> <i>Experiencing a local dish enables me to learn what local ingredients taste like.</i> <i>A local dish offers an opportunity to understand local cultures.</i> <i>Tasting a local dish is an authentic experience.</i> <i>Experiencing a local dish gives me an opportunity to increase my knowledge about different cultures.</i> <i>Experiencing a local dish helps me see how other people live.</i>	Eight single items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type range scale that allowed the respondents to indicate how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the statements. They were synthesised with the mean value, and a binary variable was computed, considering the median value as a discriminator.
Food neophobia	Physiological	<i>I like dishes from different countries.</i> <i>I am sampling new and different dishes.</i> <i>I will eat almost anything.</i> <i>At dinner parties, I will try a new dish.</i> <i>I like to try new ethnic restaurants.</i>	Four single items were measured using a seven-point Likert-type range scale that allowed the respondents to indicate how strongly they disagreed or agreed with the statements. They were synthesised with the mean value, and a binary variable was computed, considering the median value as a discriminator.
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Male/female</b>	
Age	Demographic	Under 24 years 25–34 years 35–44 years 45–54 years Above 55 years	
Residence		Local/non-local residence	The place of residence was asked in order to determine whether the respondent was a local or non-local resident.

The goodness of fit of the logistic models was tested using the Hosmer-Lemeshow (HL) test, which is especially suitable in the case of small sample sizes. If the HL test statistic is not significant, the model fit is acceptable (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). When the HL goodness of fit test was carried out for the logistic regression model, the resulting  $p$  value of 0.71 indicates that the model fits the data well.

## Findings

This section presents and discusses the exploratory findings of this research. The results about the participants' understanding of local food will be reported and discussed as well as the most influential factors for the choice of a local dish at a restaurant (respectively: interpersonal relations, gender and age group). Each one of these key findings will be presented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **The understanding of local food**

In this study, the understanding of local food is examined using the term "local dish" and through three dimensions: the geographical origin of local ingredients (farmed and processed), the respondent's opinion about the name of the dish, and how many local ingredients a dish must contain to be called local. Most of the respondents believed that in order for an ingredient to be referred to as "local" it should be farmed and processed in Friesland (respectively 59% and 62%) or, more strictly, in Ooststellingwerf (25% and 21%). A few respondents choose the option "other" and remarked that the ingredients should be farmed and processed in the north of the Netherlands. Most respondents answered that a local dish must contain 60% local ingredients (39%). This amount is closely followed by 80% local ingredients (36%). Just 6% of the respondents answered that a local dish must contain 20% local ingredients. The last question for the understanding of a local dish referred to the name of this dish. The majority of the respondents believed that a local dish should have a name that shows that the ingredients are produced locally (49%). The next largest group of respondents answered that the name did not matter to them (30%), while the least popular answer was that the dish should have a traditional name (21%).

These research findings reveal that respondents believe that local ingredients should be farmed and processed within the Friesland province, or even within the Ooststellingwerf municipality itself. Moreover, a few respondents mentioned that they were not aware of the geographical location of the place where they were, but they knew that they were in Friesland. Notwithstanding, the respondents' understanding of local food and – by extension – of a "local dish" aligns with Feldmann and Hamm's (2015) observation that "local" is usually understood in terms of distance, as food that has travelled for a short distance (Holloway et al., 2007). According to the literature, the most common geographical distance for local food ranges between 16 km and 48 km (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015, p. 156): "the most frequently found definition of local food referred to distances (i.e. miles or kilometres). The specifications ranged from 10 to 30 miles". With regard to the context of this study, it should be noted that the maximum distance within the territory of the Ooststellingwerf municipality is roughly 24 km, and within the territory of the Friesland province it is roughly 50 km. Moreover, Ooststellingwerf municipality is at the centre of the three provinces constituting northern Netherlands. This means that all the respondents' replies are consistent with the most common geographical distance identified by Feldmann and Hamm (2015) with regard to the understanding of local food. Nevertheless, with regard to such correspondence, it should also be noted that the geographical characteristics and the whole dimension of this part of the Netherlands actually facilitated the consistency between the respondents' replies and the most common geographical distance identified by Feldmann and Hamm (2015).

Most respondents, meanwhile, agreed that a local dish must contain either 60 or 80 per cent of local ingredients. Surprisingly, 10% of the respondents believed that the dish must consist of 100% local ingredients. It is questionable, however, whether they took into account the presence of spices and other ingredients that cannot reasonably be sourced locally.

Due to the lack of an official definition and regulation through standardised labels, not only is it difficult for consumers to identify local products, but there is also no guarantee that

products labeled as local also fulfill consumers' expectations. The absence of one universal definition of "local" makes it all but impossible to create a standardised label for local food (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015, p. 155).

This broad and relative understanding of the concept of "local food" seems to imply that the choice of local food is actually driven more by the context and motivational factors (Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2012). In this study, the respondents' understanding of local food is largely grounded in the geographical proximity of the ingredients comprising the dish, both in terms of farming and processing. Such an understanding of local food, however, is not consistent with the findings identifying "interpersonal relations" as the most significant motivational factor for ordering a local dish at a restaurant. The motivational factors of "local support" and "cultural experience" would appear to align more closely with the prominence that respondents afforded to the "local" dimension in ordering a local dish at a restaurant, but the logistic regressions for those factors in our study were not significant. Practice theory, however, helps to interpret such dissonance between a theoretical understanding of local food as predominantly farmed and processed within a short distance and its choice at the restaurant. The following section will present the findings and discuss the guests' interest in "interpersonal interaction" as a habit for social relations and convivial interactions while ordering a local dish at a restaurant. As Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) highlights "a 'practice' (*Praktik*) is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another... states of emotion and motivational knowledge". Hence, this study values guests' habits together with the emotional and social relations grounded in the convivial social dimension prompted by choosing a local dish at a restaurant.

### **Motivational factors**

In this section, for each factor – i. e. sensory appeal, interpersonal relations, local support, cultural experience – the regression coefficient  $B$ , odds ratio  $\text{Exp}(B)$  and  $p$  value are noted in brackets. The odds ratio, an exponentiation of the  $B$  coefficient, measures the strength of the statistical association between two variables: in the present case, motivational, physiological and demographic factors, and the choice of local food.

### **Interpersonal relations**

All other variables held constant, respondents scoring higher on the dimension of "interpersonal relations" were 3.160 times more likely to choose local food than respondents scoring lower ( $B = 1.151$ ;  $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.160$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). There was a significant positive correlation between the factor of "interpersonal relations" and the choice for a local dish: the higher the score for interpersonal relations, the higher the likelihood for a choice of a local dish. This result is in line with the statement by Mak et al. (2012, p. 933) stressing how local food can have a social function and that it can strengthen relations: "[food] might serve as an interpersonal motivator as meals taken on holiday have a social function including building new social relations and strengthening social bonds". The findings of this study therefore confirm the role played by emotional and social relations with regard to local food consumption (Mak et al., 2012; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). This study, however, does not reveal a significant relationship between the other motivational factors – i. e. sensory appeal, local support, cultural experience – and the choice for a local

dish, nor does it show a significant relationship between the physiological factor of food neophobia and the choice of a local dish at a restaurant (Kim et al., 2009).

Practice theory makes it possible to interpret such results through the lens of everyday practices and routinised activities, from a habitus perspective (Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). The concept of habitus articulates practices and routines, connects them to the individual's personal history, and makes sense of the biographical experience as a crucial element in decision-making (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Hence, the significance of the "interpersonal relations" factor can be interpreted as a habitus for emotional and social relations that guests seek by choosing a local dish at a restaurant. As Mak et al. (2012) highlight, the choice for a local dish at a restaurant fulfils a social function by building new social relations and strengthening social bonds via the interaction prompted in choosing a local dish at a restaurant. Since practice theory interprets social life as a set of repeated behaviours, speaking of "practices" means exploring patterns of individual behaviours and actions as building blocks of social phenomena (Warde, 2005), in this study referred to as local food consumption.

### **Demographic factors**

Demographic factors have previously been shown to influence the consumption of local food (Kim et al., 2009). In this study, the more significant demographic factors influencing the choice of a local dish at a restaurant are gender and age.

#### *Gender*

According to the statistical analysis, "female" respondents were 2.524 times more likely to choose local food than "male" respondents ( $B = 0.926$ ;  $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.524$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This confirms the findings of other studies on food consumption and consumers' behaviour that identify gender as an influencing factor for the consumption of local food, and specifically women as having a stronger interest in local food (Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Sengel et al., 2015). As explained by Kim et al. (2009), this is not unusual; according to the literature, women care more about the safety and healthiness of food and this care and interest can also be connected to their choice for local food (Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Sengel et al., 2015). In this study, we interpret women's choice of a local dish at a restaurant as part of their habits and routines on food choice. Hence, we discuss women's stronger interest in local food as a behaviour that is part of a chain of practices and habits women embody with regard to food choice. Practice theory helps to frame such daily routines as connected to each other (Hargreaves, 2011) and as rooted in "a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249).

#### *Age*

The findings suggest that respondents aged 45–54 years are 11.316 times more likely to choose local food than respondents under 24 years ( $B = 2.426$ ;  $\text{Exp}(B) = 11.316$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Hence, the statistical analysis reveals that age has a significant positive relationship with the choice for a local dish: older people choose a local dish more often than younger people. This result confirms both the study of Feldmann and Hamm (2015), discussing how older people are more supportive towards local food, and that of

Kim et al. (2009), revealing how age influences the consumption of local food. Mak et al. (2012, p. 932) highlight that "[e]lder interviewees and interviewees with higher education levels were found to be more concerned about health and had a stronger desire to understand and experience foreign cultures through local food consumption". Moreover, Feldmann & Hamm (2015, p. 156) stress that "the preference of older people for local products was due to their deeper roots in their home region and was a reaction to the preference of younger consumers for processed convenience food". Such an explanation chimes with the idea that the choice of a local dish is part of a set of habits and routinised behaviours grounded in "'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249).

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated local food consumption from the guests' perspective, examining their understanding of local food, and their motivations for the choice of local dishes when at a restaurant. Practice theory was used to interpret the choice for a local dish as a practice connected to a chain of habits and routinised activities. This novel use of practice theory in a study on the consumption of local food allows individual practices to be foregrounded as crucial in the study of consumers' behaviour and social phenomena (Reckwitz, 2002; Knorr Cetina et al., 2005). The results suggest that – despite the elusiveness of a definition of local food – the understanding of local food is consistently framed mainly in terms of a high percentage of ingredients being locally produced and processed (Kim et al., 2009; Kim & Eves; Mak et al., 2012; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). In addition, it is striking, that the results in respect to the motivational factors identify a predominant significance of "interpersonal relations". Here, again, the use of practice theory helps to frame the enhancement of the emotional and social relations prompted by the choice of a local dish at a restaurant as a social and convivial practice. Overall, therefore, the findings shed light on the role played by local food in questioning the mainstream global food system where the geographical and social linkages between production and consumption are lost (Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Boluk et al., 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles & Wijesinghe, 2019).

Despite the increasing academic debate and interest in paradigms of local food consumption and production (Blake et al., 2010; Eriksen, 2013; Sundbo, 2013) and in the juncture between food consumption and sustainability in tourism and hospitality studies (Hall & Mitchell, 2003; Brain, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2014; Sage, 2014; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017; Higgins-Desbiolles & Wijesinghe, 2019; Babakhani et al., 2020), little is known about the phenomenon of local food consumption in the context of tourism and hospitality. This study contributes to filling this gap by developing further theoretical and practical knowledge. With regard to its theoretical contribution, the novelty of this study lies in applying a theoretical framework grounded in practice theory, and the "practical turn" in social theories, to investigate local food consumption within the context of tourism and hospitality studies (Knorr Cetina et al., 2005). On a practical level, our study emphasises the importance of the social dimension of local food production and consumption that remains focused on human

beings, their practices, habits and interest in the enhancement of their emotional and social relations.

Despite the contributions of these findings, a number of limitations should be noted. First, the understanding of local food consumption can be affected by a wide and heterogeneous range of factors, which were impossible to incorporate fully in this study. That said, our study does not seek for universality but to identify novel lines of investigation and theoretical frameworks for the study of local food consumption in the tourism and hospitality context. Future research should investigate the relationship between local food and practice theories through other methodological approaches, possibly also qualitative, and by enlarging the sample of participants. Future studies should also explore other geographical contexts, both inside and outside Europe. Additionally, we advocate for further critical research on the link between guests' perceptions of local food and their choice for a local dish when at a restaurant, as well as on the ethical dimension of local food consumption.

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