Editorial
Towards Sustainable Foodways and Research

Liia-Maria Raippalinna, Riikka Aro, Maija Mäki & Kirsi Sonck-Rautio

The current food system is the major driver in breaking our planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2020). Transforming the food systems requires that we break some of our old food-related rules, norms and practices and make new ones – or even turn to some old ways. Whereas changing foodways – here understood as the social, cultural and economic practices, traditions and conventions of food – is difficult, major transformations can take still place relatively quickly, as evidenced by, for instance, the past (half a) century of Finnish food history: while meat shifted from being a rarity item to a matter of daily choice, vegetables and fruits have also become year-round nutritional options. We as researchers cannot causally direct change, but we can use our tools to make the various paths more understandable and – recognising a golden opportunity – to take a stance on a desired future. With four empirical articles and two commentary texts, this special issue of *Ethnologia Fennica,* edited by the visiting editors **Riikka Aro** and **Liia-Maria Raippalinna**, explores sustainability-related transgressions and contestations in various parts of the food system, looking for more sustainable foodways and offering guidelines for future research. In addition to these thematic articles and commentaries, this issue also includes two articles outside the theme, three book reviews and two conference reports.

Ethnological food research has a role to play in understanding, challenging and changing the multiple dynamics of (un)sustainability. Bruno Latour (2017) describes the recent notion of the Anthropocene as an unexpected gift to anthropology: denoting the geological scale of the impact the human species has had on this planet, the concept places culture and power relations – the core subject of the discipline – at the centre of transdisciplinary concerns. The stage has been opened for cultural scholars, and it is up to us to decide whether or not we step up and engage. The situation is particularly exiting for food researchers: if ethnologists of food used to work in the margins of their own discipline (see Jönsson, this volume), their research has now un-

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foreseen collaborative potential. What we need to do is to engage, to put our viewpoints, methodologies and concepts at work in the larger world. This is not easy in our currently overheated (Eriksen 2016) academic environment. Nevertheless, with this issue, we encourage ethnologists, among other cultural scholars, to take up the transdisciplinary discussion on sustainability and participate in the making of sustainable foodways.

This thematic issue draws inspiration from the panel and from the roundtable 'Braking norms and traditions in pursuit of sustainable food ways' discussion held at the SIEF 2021 congress: *Breaking the rules? Power, Participation and Transgression*. The panel discussed the pursuit of sustainable foodways and related norm-making and norm-breaking practices, asking the following question: 'What kinds of transgressions are, and are not, made when seeking more sustainable foodways?' The panel and roundtable discussion built on the idea that the pursuit of a sustainable future involves the breaking of old food-related rules, the making of new ones and the bending of both. The aim of the roundtable was to encourage further discussion on whether and how ethnologists can participate in the pursuit of sustainable foodways. By mapping the past, present and future state of the ethnological study of food and sustainability, this issue continues these discussions.[1]

The four thematic empirical research articles in this volume discuss organic food markets, food companies, agricultural modes of production and local debates on aquatic production, representing a general shift in food studies from consumers and consumer identities to food production and markets. If the ethnological study of food and sustainability has previously been biased towards the marginal, small-scale and alternative, the articles here expand on a context that can now be characterised as mainstream and conventional. By contrasting sustainability and a scientific emphasis on measurability, they highlight the situatedness of sustainability negotiations and the role of emotions and senses in framing, arguing, imagining and enacting sustainability.

The first two articles discuss sustainability in mainstream business contexts. Anthropologist **Alexandra Hammer** investigates how sustainability is framed and negotiated by actors in the German organic food market based on ethnographic data from several workshops. Drawing on more-than-human anthropology and anthropology of time, she illustrates how actors in the organic food chain (re)imagine sustainability in the context of capitalist markets. She

1 The event was convened by Matilda Marshall, Andreas Backa and Liia-Maria Raippalinna. Riikka Aro participated as a roundtable discussant. We are sincerely grateful to Matilda Marshall and Andreas Backa for their invaluable contribution. Without them, this special issue would not have been possible.

notes that while some of the actors envision profound structural transformations, they must also navigate a complex web of constraints, for instance retail practices, to realise more sustainable foodways. **Jessica Jungell-Michelsson and Minna Autio** (ecological economics and sustainability sciences) investigate how Finnish food companies make and give sense to sustainability based on interviews with company representatives. They stress that while businesses are operated by people, they also have their own cultures, practices and meaning-making processes. Further, their transformation potential is framed by their operative context, especially capitalist markets: while food companies actively create, change and spread sustainability narratives, their transformative potential is limited since social and ecological aims are always subordinate to profit-making objectives.

Anthropologist **Will LaFleur** investigates alternative modes of production at a biodynamic farm and Ecovillage in Italy, discussing recent attempts to detach production from the techno-industrial modes of production characteristic of the mainstream food chain. As a frame for his sensory ethnographic investigation, LaFleur describes the 'alternative' as a web of multiplicity often involving, for instance, crops and modes of operation with community and sustainability values as opposed to a food chain characterised by unicrops and a corporative business mode aiming at maximum yields. He suggests that ´storying the sensuous atmospheres´ of different agricultural formations makes it possible to expand our thinking about sustainability and imagine new horizons of possibility.

Finally, folklorist **Karin Sandell** analyses local newspaper debates on in-sea fish farming in Finnish Ostrobothnia, spotlighting local contestations over sustainability. Using affect theory as a starting point, Sandel investigates how sustainability is expressed by those arguing for or against fish farming. She shows that the two sides not only have different views on what can be considered sustainable; they also frame sustainability in different ways. Sandel notes that the challenges facing the global system of production and consumption remain rather invisible in the debate, being less about sustainable food and more about cultural sustainability, understood as the durability of local livelihoods and ways of life. This reminds us of the complexity of sustainability issues and leads us to ask: Who should be heard when making sustainability decisions, those consuming, those producing or those who are in various ways affected by the processes of production and consumption?

Another source of inspiration for this volume was provided by the SIEF 2021 congress closing plenary event, entitled 'Baking the Rules', where four discussants focused on food and rules, elaborating on eating and food 'as a way to consider the dynamics of how to break the rules through collaborative action both inside and outside the academy'. The two commentary texts in this volume continue this discussion: in the plenary, environmental anthropologist **Eva Berglund** associated herself with activists and counter-movement actors challenging the current food system, while food ethnologist **Håkan Jönsson** described himself as taking an anti-activist stance, mostly collaborating with food producers and businesses. In their commentaries, written for this volume, they further elaborate on their ideas about the roles of cultural scholars and research in the past, present and future. The commentaries provide two different perspectives on the recent history of food and sustainability studies and challenge researchers to seek and find their own ways to engage, conduct research and collaborate with both the research community and with the wider society.

Like the commentaries, the thematic articles in this volume also present different strategies for framing and defining sustainability. While researchers can certainly conduct research in a context where sustainability is not used as an emic concept, all four articles here focus on the ways in which people conceive of or enact sustainability. The focus makes visible the different views and experiences of people and sheds light on the related contestations, frictions and power struggles. Researchers themselves may *or* may not take a stance on just what is sustainability or sustainable, with the latter enabling dialogue between different positions instead of only researchers themselves engaging in the debate. Whichever approach is chosen, however, it is important to acknowledge, explicate and justify one´s own framings and assumptions and to avoid mixing emic and etic understandings of the phenomenon, whether we take a normative stance or not. In addition, the foodways under investigation may contribute to reproducing structural domination and injustice – sustainability has become a buzzword often merely covering up destructive practices (Tsing 2017; Heikkurinen 2014), and the sustainability discourse often imposes dominant understandings on less powerful others (see Berglund, this volume). When investigating something labelled as sustainable or promoted in the name of sustainability, can we afford not to ask the question: Is this sustainable and a solid basis for pursuing a transformation?

Finally, in being concerned with sustainability, one might wonder how we can justify our own research in a world suffering the effects of climate change. Our research practices and academic careers inevitably contribute to environmental deterioration. Even when we sincerely plan and report sustainability measures and strategies in our research plans and funding applications, we cannot, for instance, avoid producing climate emissions via the same research practices. Often, we cannot but hope that our research somehow compensates for it, contributing to the many small steps back and forth that will ultimately lead to a more sustainable future. Our key directions are truthful self-reflection and tolerating uncertainty. 'Breaking the fishbowl' (see Katajavuori 2022) requires a subtle consideration of when we should dare to speak out and when we should reserve our own judgments to make other voices heard.

The two research articles outside the theme of this volume concentrate on the lives and experiences of two different groups of young people. **Inés Matres's** article focuses on adolescents' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in Finland. Matres studied 75 diaries collected by museums and archives and utilised oral history and media ethnographic methods to examine the emotional resilience of the narrators and how the adolescents were invited in and responded to making the stuff of history. The second article outside the theme, authored by **Päivi Granö, Teija Koskela** and **Brita Somerkoski**, analyses the relationships between international university students from Africa and local Finnish communities from the perspective of their local friendship families. The friendship families were appointed as part of a newly established programme designed to help foreign students better adjust to their new environment. In their article, the authors also reflect on these experiences in order to further develop this programme, and as such, to improve the help offered to foreign students as they adjust to life in Finland.

The volume also includes three book reviews. Two of the new books reviewed concentrate on the current discussion about ethnographical methodologies and field work practices. *Etnologiskt fältarbete. Nya fält och former* (2022) and *Challenges and Solutions in Ethnographical Research: Ethnography with a Twist* (2020) both call attention to an active, reflexive and innovative field of ethnological research in the Nordic countries. The engaging reviews of the books were written by **Jenni Rinne** and **Ida Tolgensbakk**. One book review is about protecting cultural property and heritage in times of war and uncertainty. Mattias Legnér's ambitious work, *Värden Att Värna: Kulturminnesvård som statsintresse in Norden vid tiden för Andra världskriget* (2022), is reviewed by **Niklas Huldén**. The war in Ukraine creates new meanings and significance for the book, which offers readers a serious message from the destructiveness of the war. This volume also includes two conference reports from events held in 2022 – finally, after so many remote conferences and seminars during the last couple of years. **Helena Laukkoski** reports on Ethnology Days, held in March 2022, in Jyväskylä, with the theme *Cultural Knowledge in a Changing world*. **Inés Matres** and **Shikoh Shiraiwa** report on the 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference, held in June 2022, Reykjavik, with the theme *Re:22*.

This issue is dedicated to our beloved and respected colleague Andreas Backa (1978–2022) and the work he did for sustainability, both inside and outside academia.

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OBITUARY

Andreas Backa (1978-2022)

To our great sorrow, Doctoral Researcher, folklore scholar Andreas Backa suddenly passed away in the end of 2022. Backa commenced his studies in Nordic folkloristics at Åbo Akademi University in 2006. Before this he achieved a degree in IT-engineering. In 2011 he became a Master of Philosophy and his master's thesis was awarded the Ragna and Olov Ahlbäck-price from the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (SLS).

In his licentiate thesis *Att beskriva det finlandssvenska. Kultursemiotiska analyser* (2017), Backa makes a cultural semiotic analysis of the 2011 parlia-

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mentary elections with a focus on the Swedish People's Party of Finland and their manifesto. The thesis analyses ideals, values, and ideological motives presented in election material.

Backa's work with a doctoral thesis took another direction and became an ethnographic study of self-sustainability in contemporary Finland. The focus being on the people living according to principles of self-sufficiency and self-sustainability, and especially how affect and corporality cooperate, visualise, and communicate in different empiric materials. This work had come a long way and Backa's end-seminar was planned to be held in spring 2023 with a possibility to defend the finalised thesis in autumn 2023.

Backa held the position as secretary for the Committee for Ethnology and Folkloristics at The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (SLS) for two different periods ending in spring 2022. He had also been a salaried researcher in the project "Bitar av samma pussel" (Pieces in the same puzzle) 2010–2013 and worked in the Cultura Archive at Åbo Akademi University with a special engagement in digitalisation and databases.

As a folklore scholar Backa was actively engaging in the academic society, presenting his research in multiple conferences and articles as well as being part of the editorial teams of *Elore* and *Ethnologia Fennica*. At Ethnologia Fennica Andreas was always there when needed and did meticulous editorial work.

Andreas' work on self-sustainability inspired many fellow PhD students and postdoctoral researchers interested in the search of knowledge of sustainable practices of everyday life and search for a better future. The interest in self-sustainability and sustainable foodways was not kept only on a theoretical level but practiced together with his wife Sofie Strandén-Backa at the small-scale farm Sudda lantbruk. Andreas will be truly missed by his colleagues; he was thoughtful and well-advised.

Blanka Henriksson
Lena Marander-Eklund
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Alexandra Hammer

Negotiating Sustainabilities.
Navigating Organic Practices in Capitalist Markets[1]

Abstract
Organic agriculture aims at enabling sustainable food economies. But agricultural temporalities and practices do not necessarily align with demands and schedules posed by packers, processors, or retailers – a detachment that complicates the actors' pursuits of sustainability. This paper builds on participant observation during nine workshops with actors along the German organic food supply chain. Viewing these events through an ethnographic lens reveals the complex web of agricultural, political, and economic constraints that needs to be navigated from farm to supermarket. Situated at the intersection of more-than-human anthropology and anthropology of time, this article asks how actors involved in the production, distribution, and marketing of organic foods negotiate and (re)imagine sustainability. What obstacles do they see, and whose agencies and fates do they consider within their negotiations? How do these narrations and practices point to possible reconfigurations of sustainability? The analysis sheds light on sustainability's emergent nature and its relations to prevailing (global) power imbalances and wealth gaps. Looking at the organic food supply chain through the lens of time frames and rhythms allows for a conceptualization of sustainability as a situated endeavor, variable across time and space and deeply dependent on nonhuman agencies and specific situational contexts. Following globalized connections further demonstrates how sustainability must include disadvantaged and exploited people within and across national borders.

Keywords: sustainability, organic agriculture, more-than-human anthropology, food supply chains, capitalist logics, Germany, ethnography

1 The study is supported by funds of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) based on a decision of the parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany via the Federal Office for Agriculture and Food (BLE) under the Federal Program for Ecological Farming and Other Forms of Sustainable Agriculture.

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Introduction[2]

In the context of its strategy for sustainable development, the German government seeks to increase the share of organic farmland to 30% by 2030 (Koalitionsvertrag 2021–2025, 46).[3] Based on the Brundtland definition of sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland 1987, 16), this strategy enacts a framing of organic farming as a sustainable form of agriculture. Cultural and social scientist on the other hand claim that it is impossible to identify whole bundles of practices or entities as (not) sustainable (Jonas 2016, 347). Sociologist Siegehard Neckel (2018, 13) proposes to conceptualize sustainability as a problem to be analyzed rather than the solution: Debates and practices regarding sustainability make visible, "which socio-economic change is taking place, which new lines of conflict and which inequalities and hierarchies are emerging". [4] This points to the necessity of research about the interconnections of sustainability and societal power relations.

Ecofeminists and critical anthropologists of climate change position the roots of recent ecological crises in the context of global capitalism. Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer (2014) argue that "climate change perhaps more than any other environmental crisis illustrates the unsustainability of the capitalist world system" (Baer & Singer 2014, 76; see also Gaard 2017, 9). Organic agriculture as a way of farming that is supposed to align more with nature aims to be part of more sustainable food systems. But within capitalist food markets, (organic) farmers must arrange their practices not only with weather and ecological but also "economic cycles from season to season and year to year." (van Dyk 2021, n. pag.). As agricultural temporalities do not necessarily

2 My thanks go to all the actors who participated in our workshops and gave us insights into their perspectives and (work) realities. Moreover, I want to thank my colleagues within the AVOeL project: Hanin Al- Gassani, Regina F. Bendix, Seline Bezen, Laura Bulczak, Johanna Käsling, Alexandra Keinert, Sascha Kesseler, Konstanze Laves, Torsten Näser, Henning Niemann, Antje Risius, Constanze Rubach, Achim Spiller, Johanna Tepe and Matthias Wiemer. I'm also extremely grateful to Valeria Hänsel, Elisabeth Luggauer, Svenja Schurade as well as the participants of our doctoral colloquium, especially Jonathan Kurzwelly, all of whom added valuable perspectives and ideas to the discussion. I thank Regina F. Bendix, Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas, Riikka Aro and Liia-Maria Raippalinna and the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of the manuscript and their many insightful comments and suggestions.

3 In 2021, 10,8% of German farmland was cultivated organically, which puts Germany only slightly above the EU average (Eurostat 2022; BÖLW 2022: 7 & 23). Currently, German organic farms cannot meet the domestic demand for organic food (Hartmann 2022).

4 A note on language: citations from secondary literature in German have been translated by the author, all of the empirical material cited has been translated from the original German.

align with demands and schedules further along the supply chain, analyzing frictions between those different temporalities sheds light on emerging struggles for sustainability and the impacts of capitalist logics. Capitalism is typically understood as an economic system that is controlled through the market and based on private ownership of the means of production and the principle of profit maximization (Walsh 1998, 16). But it is shown to transform social live beyond economic spheres by quantifying the value of people, actions and things and turning them into commodities (Jenks 1998, 3). Anna Tsing (2015, 38–40) defines capitalist logics as those that stem from and reinforce striving for uniformity, homogeneity, and interchangeability of (living) things.

Drawing on more-than-human anthropology and anthropology of time, this paper analyzes efforts made toward sustainability within the German organic food market. In this article I ask, how actors involved in the production, distribution, and marketing of organic foods negotiate and (re)imagine sustainability: How is sustainability understood and what current obstacles are discussed? Whose agencies and fates do these conceptualizations take into account, who do they exclude and how does this relate to societal and economic power imbalances? How do these narrations and practices point to possible reconfigurations of sustainability? Concepts from more-than-human anthropology diversify who counts as an actor and has the ability to shape the world. More-than-human agency "encompasses all enabling and constraining (inter)effects within diverse actor constellations" (Langthaler 2021, 42) – including animals, plants, or fungi as well as microorganisms and inanimate objects, the weather, or soils (ibid.; Peselmann 2021). Posthumanist practice theory helps to focus on phenomena in their continual emergence, instead of conceptualizing them as quasi-natural objects. Practices are not to be equated with intentional actions, but describe types of activities (e.g. practices of speaking, cooking, or shopping). Posthumanist or more-than-human practices are composed of multiple participants, which can again be conceptualized as specific practices consisting of multiple participants (material and immaterial, organic and inorganic, human and nonhuman) (Schadler 2013, 58). The field of anthropology of time breaks with the notion of absolute time that dominates everyday language. It questions the idea of time as a neutral, objectively given framework, which is prior to the realm of culture and society (Hengartner 2002, 33; Reckwitz 2016, 117). The sociologist Andreas Reckwitz (2016, 172) proposes a praxeological concept of time, which can show how practices organize temporality. Time then appears to be "the result of performed activities that realize, for instance, a certain rhythm", time frame or temporality.

Looking at organic food supply chains through these lenses allows for a view of sustainability as a situated endeavor. This theoretical framework encourages critical reflections of the intersections of nonhuman and human agencies, different time frames and rhythms, and prevailing (global) power imbalances and wealth gaps. Although this study is primarily interested in the way in which sustainability is framed and negotiated by the actors, this reflexive-critical perspective does not oppose the normative claims that are associated with sustainability within current discourse (see also Neckel 2018, 14). Therefore, the notion of sustainability is used as a concept that describes the positive effects of a given practice on nonhuman and human actors and entities (see also Cielemęckac & Daigle 2019). By doing so, I simultaneously recognize the desirable nature of sustainable endeavors and the fact that sustainability is not an objective, extrinsic feature of entities or practices.

The study draws on fieldnotes written about nine workshops with actors working at different nodes of the German organic food supply chain – from farm to supermarket. In the context of the research project "Authenticity and Trust in Organic Food",[5] we elicited discussions on the realities of the German organic food system in the manner of focus groups (Bloor & Frankland & Thomas & Robson 2001). At the core of the inquiry were questions of (enabling) sustainable futures. The participants painted a picture of the complex web of agricultural, political, and economic constraints which they need to figure into production and distribution of organic foods. Farmers voiced the rhythms and effects of non-human animals, plants, and other entities – narrations that can be read as calls for a more-than-human perspective on food supply chains (see also Heitger & Biedermann & Niewöhner 2021; Peselmann 2021). They narrated organic agriculture as a place where agricultural – framed as 'natural' – and capitalist logics clash, complicating their pursuit of sustainability.

After a brief outline of the project's methodological approach, the paper looks at the German organic food market as a whole, and examines how a simple contrast of organic versus non-organic foods renders invisible situated aspects that are shown to deeply influence the sustainability of practices. Then follows a closer look at organic farms as places of clashing temporalities and logics, with more-than-human agencies on the one hand and marketing practices on the other side jointly affecting the agricultural realities. The farmers' framing of organic as more 'natural' food is shown to suggest a more-than-human conceptualization of sustainability. From there I will further broaden the perspective, following the connections which the actors draw to global-

5 In German „Authentizität und Vertrauen bei Bio-Lebensmitteln" (AVOeL). Apart from the focus groups with actors from the organic sector on which this article draws, our project team conducted semi-structured interviews with consumers, participant observation in shopping settings, media analyses and consumer surveys (see Hammer, Näser, Bendix & Risius 2021).

ized markets and the interconnections of power and different time frames. These negotiations bring forth a vision of sustainability as a project that takes (global) wealth gaps and power imbalances into account. Throughout, it is the emergent nature of what is when sustainable for whom that is of interest, as striving for sustainability can never be the pursuit of a singular concern. Organic food production and distribution illustrates this complexity and dynamic. Sustainability is one major motivating factor in producing organic foods; especially the farmers present elements constitutive of sustainable thinking and acting from their on-the-ground perspective.

Ethnographic perspectives on organic food supply chains: Workshops at the intersection of focus groups and participant observation

Our team consists of agricultural economists, researchers from the division of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, cultural anthropologists, and a practice partner who is an organic farmer and a consultant for actors in the organic food sector. Together, we organized nine workshops in which actors along the German organic food supply chain discussed organic food markets. Six workshops focused on one organic product each: vegetables, milk, apples, meat, cereals, and eggs. They were followed by two joint workshops that addressed all plant products and all animal products respectively. Finally, we invited actors across all groups for a joint event. All workshops were documented with fieldnotes which serve as the empirical basis for the present paper.

Our workshops integrated differing disciplinary conventions and expectations, with agricultural economics more positivist in its orientation and a more critical and reflexive cultural anthropology. The events' success depended on incorporating questions relevant to the participating actors so they would willingly spend four to six hours there. This required that we successfully incorporated the potential participants' interests and needs. Our practice partner identified such pressing issues in cooperation with other practitioners. We further invited stakeholders – representatives of producer or animal welfare groups – to give presentations as part of the workshops. They also participated as discussants and were chosen by our practice partner, who was responsible for hosting the events. He, as well as other project members, moderated different parts of the program. From an ethnographic perspective, this inclusion of the organic sector's current issues proved valuable as it ensured the format to hold space for unexpected, potentially surprising topics that we did not anticipate.

Our events were attended by farmers, representatives of certification organizations, distributors, packers, processors, and retailers. The largest group represented were farmers; representatives of the big German retail companies accepted our invitation less frequently – a circumstance that reflects the power imbalance between those groups as the later are less dependent on communication with the former. Our workshops benefited greatly from our practice partner's contacts and his ability to launch events that bring together different voices from the organic food sector – including those that are usually hard to come by. Some of the attendees – farmers, but especially packers, processors, and retailers – handled both, organic and conventional products, while others were so-called organic pioneers – actors that are known for having advanced the organic project and sector in the 1970s and 80s. Several actors had known each other for years of decades – due to doing business together, being part of the same producer group, or collectively working on different projects. On average, 16 people participated in each workshop – for a total of about 130 participants. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we switched to a digital format in 2020. Most of our in-person events were held in northern Germany, wherefore actors from this area tended to be overrepresented. More people from other regions joined our online workshops. Some of the workshops were built on an ongoing roundtable for actors in the vegetable sector. One attendee repeatedly praised this roundtable for being a great format bringing together even those who used to be at odds with each other (Fieldnotes, Workshop 1 & 3).

The workshops featured open discussion rounds about the attendees' experiences and their opinions regarding chances and issues of the organic food market. Specific questions relevant to the respective groups were debated in a more focused manner. During our "World Café" (Brown 2007), participants then formed three smaller groups, rotating between tables, and discussing different questions. While some of those methods included written documentation by the participants in the form of mind maps and note cards, others relied on spoken words and had to be transferred into writing by the researchers. Three team members took separate notes which we compiled into joint, more detailed fieldnotes afterwards. Our different disciplinary backgrounds were noticeably reflected in the focus and writing style of our notes. The result was fieldnotes that unified these conventions, expertise, and foci while also leaving differing experiences and priorities visible.

In terms of format, the workshops are situated at the intersection of focus groups and participant observation. The verbal dimension of the discussions allowed us to capture the actors' narrations and perspectives while our participation made it possible to gain deeper insights into non-discursive practices (Cohn 2014). Our practice partner used preexisting social relations and networks to launch the invitations, we did not define criteria for constructing a group of people 'representative' of the respective sectors. Thus, these group settings allowed for an integration of social contexts and interpersonal relations between actors sharing aspects of a given lifeworld, surpassing what we could have achieved in the form of individual interviews.[6] The focused nature of the workshops offered access to experiences and bodies of knowledge shared by the actors, yet also gave space to divergent positions.

The analysis of the material aimed at a material-guided approach. My research ethics are generally informed by critical perspectives regarding the intersections of "gender, race, class, sexuality, species, and […] justice" (Gaard 2017, 9), as well as dis/ability; hence those theoretical concepts shaped my reading and analyzing of the material in profound ways. In order to prevent the research object from being narrowed down too much, the material was first coded openly with the aid of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 2008; Götzo 2014). When recurring topics arose, the material was condensed further, now deliberately taking into account concepts from the fields of more-than-human anthropology and anthropology of time, as these themes were prevalent throughout the material. Thus, the themes of the analysis were classified in theoretical contexts after their categorization. This approach made visible regularities as well as contrasting interpretations and practices of the actors (Strübing 2008, 18–22).

"Retail has an incredible amount of power". Consumer communication and the invisibilization of situational contexts

This section focusses on the different stages of the German organic value chain and the way they relate to one another. Participants problematized a power imbalance from retail to processors to farmers. This hierarchy reinforces market practices that separate the nonhuman actors that are our food (see also Watters 2018, 4) from their situational contexts. This tendency goes hand-in-hand with capitalist logics that adhere to ideas of exchangeability, uniformity and homogeneity. In discussing the German organic food market as a whole, the actors also enacted a concept of sustainability that includes the specific situational contexts of food production.

Throughout, the actors equated 'organic' with a sustainable way of farming that benefits nonhuman and human actors and environments. One fruit grower asked rhetorically:

> "Why do we do organic at all? To do something good for the world, to not exploit the land on which we farm as much as the conventional farmers do. But the population must be made aware of these reasons before it is too late". (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3)

6 I conducted a qualitative interview with an organic farmer and recurring workshop participant to gain a deeper understanding and further contextualization of topics addressed in those events (Interview 1). Informal conversations in different contexts were collected in my field diary and added to the material.

His argumentation stems from the idea, that ultimately consumers are responsible for the success of products and in consequence the sustainability of the food market. Thus, the urgent question is how to communicate this "added value" to consumers (ibid.). This is especially relevant in the context of a food market in which many stages of the value chain stand in between producers and consumers (Niggli 2005). Farmers and consumers rarely communicate directly, as most grocery shopping in Germany is done at supermarkets and discounters (Ahrens 2020). This "filter through the supermarket" – as one attendee called it – allows retail companies to control the flow of information, leaving consumers and farmers alike dependent on the stores' communication policies (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3; see also Hering & Fülling 2021, 341–342). This special position of retailers is also based in the power imbalance from retailers to processors to farmers. The imbalance was repeatedly problematized by the other actors (Fieldnotes, Workshop 1 & 3). A retail representative redirected the responsibilization associated with this assessment by claiming that retail, as much as everybody else within the supply chain, is subjected to the consumers' choices (Fieldnotes, Workshop 9). The German Bundeskartellamt (the federal authority responsible for enforcing antitrust and competition law) on the other hand confirms a very high market concentration of a few big retail companies that results in structural advantages (Bundeskartellamt 2014). This hierarchy also appears to be enabled in the context of globalized food markets (see the final section).

The retailers' communication policies include the supermarket chains' implementation of their own organic labels. It was problematized how those labels deliberately equalize organic products from different origins, concealing information about the sites of production and the actors and practices involved (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3).[7] Therefore, those organics appear to be interchangeable units. This practice is based in (and reinforces) the idea that the central distinction policy is the one between organic and non-organic origins, making invisible situated differences and varying practices on site. This is closely interwoven with the regulation of organic agriculture through certification practices. Certification often unifies conflicting interpretations (Wiegand 2018, 44) and can then be taken into account in making economic, political or shopping decisions. However, it does so at the expense of includ-

7 Organic-food associations such as Demeter, Bioland or Naturland require their members to adhere to more ridged standards than EU-law. Thus, the organic actors frequently debated the implications of the fact that "organic does not equal organic". Especially the "organic pioneers" communicated fears of a "conventionalization of organic" in the context of its growing market (Fieldnotes, Workshop 1 & 2).

ing concrete, situational aspects.[8] Similarly, information necessary for consumers to make regional food choices are made invisible. When processed in noodles, for example, the local origin of eggs is not labeled. With a focus on short transport routes, regionality is viewed as a sustainable quality. But this equation is questioned by others. When striving for $C0_2$ reduction, consumers often choose regional over organic produce. But attendees argued that buying regional to live sustainably may lead to the exact opposite. Different crops have different needs regarding soil or weather. To render food chains regional by only selling produce that was grown 'nearby', one would have to grow crops under conditions that don't meet their needs – increasing the demand for energy or water. And without enough demand on site in regions with better conditions, produce might not even be harvested and left to rot on the field as this might be the most profitable option (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6 & 9). Here, organic products are framed not as a general category of food, but as situated, depending on work attending to individual entities, growing in specific settings that are variable across space and time.

Against such specificity, a retail representative argued for clear information via packaging: "The message that has to come across is: it is an organic product." (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6) As actors along the organic chain now have the ambition to sell produce unpacked; the space available to convey information shrinks. This development was viewed as one downside of increased environmental consciousness (ibid.). The use of packaging may well lead to a reduction in overall environmental impact, because it can protect food from damage and contamination and extend its life (WBAE 2020, 189). Similarly, due to the interwovenness of current marketing structures, a lack of organic dairies especially in northern Germany, the different weight of the packaging options and the respectively necessary resource investments, the attendees identified milk in cartons as a more sustainable alternative than bottled milk (see also Kauertz, Bick, Schlecht, Busch, Markwardt & Wellenreuther 2018; Hammer 2020). The number of dairies has been declining for years throughout Germany, resulting in longer transport routes. The attendees agreed that this situation rendered bottled milk less sustainable – demonstrating how such an assessment relies on more aspects than the properties of a material. Still, the idea that reusable bottles are theoretically more sustainable is at the core of this discussion: the northern German actors reflected upon how it might be possible to collectively build an organic dairy "up here" to reduce CO_2 emissions (Fieldnotes, Workshop 2).

8 Similarly, studies show how depending on the situated context the sustainability of organic farming varies, see Smith et al. 2020.

The retailers' position in the German food market has consequences beyond the transfer of information to consumers. In making their decisions, retailers weigh between their knowledge and interests and thus limit as well as enable consumers in their choices – "You can't buy something if it's not on the shelf." (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6; see also Jonas 2016, 352–353) When asked whether retailers ought to be included in the efforts towards more sustainable food supply chains, responses differed. Some argued in favor of such an inclusion to develop joint strategies. Others saw little use in this, and one farmer pointed out that retailers would always act according to their own interests (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3). The representative of a juice factory called out the "violent and cynical structures" of the market. The group had discussed how a drought causing crop failures may prove positive for pricing, and he exclaimed: "A good harvest is… bad. This is cynical!", for which farmer would wish for environmental disasters in order to keep the prices from dropping? (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3) With his indignation, he points the finger at how in the present food system, ecological sustainability and the survival of enterprises are constantly in danger of undermining one another.

At the same event, an apple grower problematized the usual procedure of calculating retail prices (ibid.). Organic farming is more cost-intensive due to several aspects such as lower yields per hectare, the need for more manual labor or scaling effects, as the organic food sector is smaller than its conventional counterpart (Field diary, 02.03.2022). Currently, retailers calculate retail prices by adding mark-ups relative to the purchase prices: the higher the purchase price for a kilo of produce, the more the retailer earns without having to do additional work. The apple grower claimed that this results in organic foods being disadvantaged. To show how this procedure of calculating prices is a result of active decisions guided by the logic of the market and not without alternative, he recalled how in the 1990s the *REWE*-store chain[9] deliberately forewent margins to establish their position in the organic food market. By not adding the usual mark-ups, they had aimed at becoming a market leader – a strategy they no longer pursue. He called for a different way of thinking among the buyers at the retail companies. But "all are trained according to the same pattern," he said and demanded: "market economy orientation must move toward responsible thinking." (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3) Antitrust laws prevented the participants from discussing the topic of pricing in more detail. These laws prohibit producers from directly or indirectly setting retail prices with retailers (Field diary 24.10.2019; Bundeskartellamt 2017). Those laws were never discussed in depth during the workshops, but when questions arose

9 REWE is the second largest food retailer in Germany, offering both conventional as well as a range of organically produced goods.

about pricing, participants were quick to remind others to be careful (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3, 6 or 9). Thus, those legal concerns hovered like a constant threat in the backs of the participants heads, potentially influencing the way they talked and what topics to avoid.

Others did not criticize structures as openly. One organic farmer argued: "Everyone must do their job. The buyers' job is to get the best quality at the best price. We have to counter this, and despite opposite interests, this can work with understanding and sympathy." (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6) Another farmer disagreed:

> "In fact, it is precisely these concepts of the past that have led to the problems of today – in agriculture but also in the environment. […] Yes, the system works like this, but our aspiration should be to move forward from here."

Later he went on to state: "Retail has an incredible amount of power", and "communication about the added value of organic products remains on the back burner". Therefore, retail must be part of the solution: "Our current crises are too big to take the time to convince 80 million consumers." Supermarket buyers, so this participant's assessment, were the ones who had to be convinced to communicate the linkages of organic foods to sustainable goals to consumers (ibid.). While he openly questioned the current structures, his proposed solution is still based on the idea that with the right information, it is up to consumers to accomplish sustainable foodways. Similarly, participants repeatedly argued in favor of integrating the ecological costs of modes of production that are not environmentally friendly in the retail prices (Fieldnotes, Workshop 2 & 4). With both strategies, the ability to act sustainably remains dependent on the consumers' financial resources; the concept of sustainability those solutions enact renders sustainability an endeavor one has to be able to afford. While participants argued fervently for those different solutions – educating retailers or questioning current economic practices and structures in general – their arguments congeal into an ambivalent assessment of the organic food market and possibility and necessity for changing it. Here, arguing about organic food turns into arguing about production and distribution contexts and the limits of communication.

The discussions revealed the complexity of implementing sustainable food industries. One manufacturer pointed to the downside of the institutionalization and regulation of organic practices through European Union law. These regulations concern everybody who wants to produce or trade organic food. They regulate what seeds, fertilizers, pest control or food additives are allowed and forbid genetically modified organisms. Other requirements concern soil fertility, biodiversity or animal welfare (EC 2018/848). Practices that go beyond those regulations usually cannot be communicated to consumers and made profitable as retail communication prioritizes price and organic labels. Thus, he argued: “Every form of creativity is prevented. If someone has a good idea that is not in the law, it cannot be implemented. Even if the new aspect is constructive and useful.” (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3) This is the core issue of the attendees’ discussions about sustainable food chains: in the context of a complex food market built on the idea that it is consumers’ choices that accomplish sustainability, simple distinctions and information are needed to put them in the position to make such decisions. As our workshops show, practices of homogenization and simplifying are based in the separation of nonhuman entities – such as vegetables or fruits – from their situated origins (see also Maasen, Sutter & Trachte 2018, 185–186). Practices of certification help to enact those distinctions. But standardization also potentially hinders the implementation of more sustainable practices as it may be precisely those situated contexts on site that render products (un)sustainable. Without communicating such factors, one cannot make them profitable. In the current economic system, the implementation of sustainable practices in companies must be economically justifiable (Wiegand 2018, 44). “In capitalist farms, living things made within ecological process are coopted for the concentration of wealth” Anna Tsing argues, drawing attention to how the pursuit of sustainability is not the main goal of capitalist endeavors (2015, 62–63).

Those previous examples point to the emergent nature of sustainability. The question of what practices, products or substances are viewed as sustainable are constantly up for change, depending on short-term and long-term developments, the situation on site as well as the question of which factors are included in the calculations (see Meurer 2021). As the question of milk packaging shows, such diagnoses might not be transferable to a general, nationwide level: the authors of a study on the environmental impact of different packaging found that it is impossible to develop a model of a returnable system for UHT milk containers representing average German conditions. Their findings only apply to fresh milk (Kauertz et al. 2018, 165–166) – a limitation, that makes the complexity of generalized assessments of sustainability visible. To Anthropologists Marc Brightman and Jerome Lewis (2017, 27), sustainability is dependent on diversity, on a “pluriverse of multiple worlds [that] must be defended against the ‘one world world’ of pedlars of top-down development and outdated, ill-considered visions of ‘progress.’” Such diversity is at stake in the present-day food markets that render situated differences invisible. If it is up to consumers to enforce sustainable practices through their shopping choices, the lack of information about the situational contexts that impact sustainability is a problem. Moreover: “How are consumers supposed to keep track? I don’t want to have to do a whole study to decide on a pack of eggs. And then I have to do the same at the meat counter and in the bakery. That way I will never be able to leave the store“, as an egg farmer argued (Fieldnotes, Workshop 7). Retail prices – that were shown to be not just the result of more cost-intensive organic practices, but also of active decisions and routinized retail practices guided by the logic of the market – exclude people from lower income households from the organic food market. The inequality in negotiating prices along the chain thus reinforces the inequality of purchasing power within society.

In the web of interconnected factors and entities that make up organic food and supply chains, the characterization of practices, substances, or products as sustainable is always at stake. Once something has been identified as a sustainable option, this quality cannot simply be transferred across time and space into other contexts. Thus, this conceptualization of sustainability cannot only rely on generalized assessments but needs to take specific situational contexts into account. Tsing (2015, 62) argues that capitalism today “requires acts of translation across varied social and political spaces”, framing translation as “the drawing of one world-making project into another”. Regarding organic food chains, such translation becomes obvious: complex realities and situated practices that make up the organic products must be translated into simplified and recognizable labels and symbols. Tsing further argues that one main aim of supply chains is the translation of value between non capitalist and capitalist value systems to the benefit of dominant firms (ibid., 63). What comes to light in our workshops is the huge amount of context that gets lost in translation, making it impossible for consumers to consider all the aspects that make up a food to make a sustainable decision.

“Not everything is uniform, because that is not how nature works”. Arguing for a more-than-human perspective

This section focusses on organic farms as places of clashing temporalities and logics, with natural agencies on the one side and marketing practices on the other jointly affecting the agricultural realities. Due to the power of retail companies in shaping shopping environments, prices, and product palettes, educating supermarket buyers was identified as necessary to render German food supply chains more sustainable. To this aim, the farmers’ argued that communicating the reality of farming as highly dependent on nature was needed further along the supply chain. These narrations demonstrate an understanding of sustainability as more-than-human endeavor (see also Cielemęckac & Daigle 2019; Tschackert 2022, 15).

Our workshops were scheduled within a series of regularly held roundtables, brought into existence by an organic producer organization in the early

2010s. This format stemmed from the farmers' desire for being understood by others along to supply chain. As shown in the previous chapter, this goal was considered crucial for consumer communication and thus for the implementation of sustainable food industries in the current market system (Field diary, 20.07.2021). As shopping environments and product ranges impact consumer choices, retail decision makers need to be (made) aware of the advantages of organic production: "The ecological footprint and the protection of species in the context of organic agriculture" need to be emphasized (Fieldnotes, Workshop 1). Even though organic law and regulation affect all stages of the supply chain, the participants focused on pointing out advantages of organic farming. In so doing, they represent the farm as the focal point of discussions concerning the sustainability of organic food. The equation of organic food systems with organic agriculture is reenforced by marketing strategies that purposefully reduce food systems to farms, while other spatial contexts that are not considered to be as effective in marketing – such as logistics – deliberately remain invisible (Hering & Füller 2021, 342–343).

Farmers identified the effects of nonhuman entities on organically produced foods as a reality that needs to be communicated more effectively to further actors along the chain: "We are more dependent on nature than the conventional sector "(Fieldnotes, Workshop 9). The participants argued in favor of firsthand experience over pure information transfer: inviting other actors – especially retailers – to the farms and showing them the realities of their workdays would, so they hoped, impart knowledge through experience. It would make the realities of "seasonal impacts, weather dependencies, or crooked vegetables" tangible, as one attendee claimed, and it would show that "not everything is uniform, because that is not how nature works." (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6) Organic farmers thus depicted 'nature' as a powerful actor shaping their workdays, the food, and agricultural rhythms, thus needing to be viewed as an important factor within the whole supply chain.

This argument breaks with two modern ideas. It views nature as an actor that takes part in making up the world, including spheres we have come to think of as human domains such as economic markets (Gesing, Amelang, Flitner & Knecht 2019, 7–8). Further, it challenges the idea of nonhuman, natural entities as mere backdrops against which human activity takes place (Gibas, Pauknerová & Stella 2011, 10). Recent posthumanist scholarship has come to reject classic humanistic divisions that "draw a sharp distinction between humans as 'cultural' and 'active' and other living beings as 'natural' and 'passive'." (Langthaler 2021, 40) Those concepts consider human existence as deeply interwoven with other species and entities. Humanity as a species is not only highly dependent on nonhuman actors to survive; recent scholarship regards modern anthropocentric narrations of human exceptionalism as vast simplifications, ignoring the agency and the constant co-becoming of nonhumans and humans (Fenske 2019, 177; van Dooren 2014, 293).

Mirroring such the debates, organic actors questioned anthropocentric framings of sustainability. One person pointed out how organic farming tackles species extinction, adding: "Compared to our problems with biodiversity, even climate change is a rather minor problem" (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6). As another actor stated in a different context, the consequences of climate change will affect the planet for an estimated one million years, while the loss of species through extinction will be evident for more than ten million years and thus long after humans have been living on this planet (Field diary, 22.11.2021).[10] Such a reframing introduces a concept of sustainability that depends on whose destinies are considered relevant and worthy of consideration. It points to the multitude of potential focus points, goals and consequences that can be put at the center of negotiation – deliberately including those that cannot be made profitable for humans. In this perspective, sustainability turns into sustainabilities: the sustainability of a given practice depends to a large extent on the actors that are considered in the assessment. The question we must then ask is: "Sustainable for whom?".

The question of whose agencies to consider was also discussed in regard to the impacts of 'natural' entities and processes on the quality of organic produce: The farmers depicted themselves as caught between the demands of 'their' livestock, plants, and agricultural rhythms, while also trying to fulfill the market's demands and schedules – a tension that often hinders sustainability. This became visible when the representatives of a group of organic farmers gave a talk at one workshop (Fieldnotes, Workshop 9). The talk critically reflected on prevailing quality criteria for potatoes. Those criteria result in excluding big amounts of potatoes from the food market (Fieldnotes, Workshop 9) – potentially leading to food waste (Hermsdorf, Rombach & Bitsch 2017, 2534).[11] The presenters argued for a reassessment of criteria that concern purely aesthetic features. During the discussion that followed the presentation, one farmer explained: "Such quality criteria primarily ensure that I do not include the crooked carrot [in the delivery to the next stage] in the first place, instead of risking that quality management might send it back." He added that due to the many stages along the chain there are many instances at which the actors

10 Climate change and mass extinction are closely interwoven phenomena, as the climate crisis is shown to also result in further species' extinction, see Thomas, Cameron & Green et al. 2004.

11 For an analysis of the relations of marketing standards, consumer expectations and food waste see Risius & Schneider 2021.

– farmers, packers, or processors – have to decide "whether one takes the risk that the next station might send the produce back" (Fieldnotes, Workshop 9). Here, Zsuzsa Gilles'(2012, 31) assessment that "the ability to shield oneself from risks and to increase another's exposure to them is a key source and result of power", rings true. This issue reveals how in the structures of today's food market, even actors who actively want to act more sustainably are potentially hindered from doing so. In this, an enabling factor appears to be the power imbalance from retailers to processors to farmers, that perpetuates rigid marketing standards.

By foregrounding nonhuman agency, farmers are akin to cultural and social scientists who view human culture as highly influenced by and dependent on nonhumans. In farming, the practitioners experience how what is generally called natural has been vastly manipulated by human practices and interests. (Organic) agriculture reveals just how impossible it is to distinguish nature and culture (Fenske & Peselmann 2021). Still, the producer group framed organic potatoes as "natural product" that is therefore "variable": in a cold and wet spring, potatoes might be planted two weeks later, have less time to grow and thus be smaller than usual. Weather, soils, the size and number of farms in a region, their ratio of direct marketing to selling to the retailers, as well as the number of harvested potatoes and their storage stability constitute components that "are composed anew every year", influencing the "available quantities in the market". None of these factors can be fully controlled or adhere perfectly to the market's schedules: "We plan of course, but it still remains seasonal dependent! It is just a plan. " (Fieldnotes, Workshop 9) In choosing to thoroughly explain the vagaries of organic farming to an audience mainly consisting of farmers familiar with the matter, the presenters at our workshop targeted retailers. They addressed retail's main interest in a reliable potato supply, using their economic concerns. This is one strategy the farmers employ to navigate this situation of unequal power and still strive for sustainability.

Market realities and nonhuman actors jointly affect agricultural practices. This is also visible in the customary rhythms in which farmers butcher their laying hens. When hens reach a year, they molt – they loose and regrow feathers as part of their life cycle. Just before molting, hens lay eggs with a thinner shell that cracks easily. While hens molt, they do not lay eggs at all. To avoid losing a productive stretch, most farmers butcher the hens before they reach a year. An actor narrated the case of an organic farmer who has three groups of hens. The first group would be butchered just after Christmas, the second group after Easter. That is due to the high demand for eggs for those holidays. The third group would be butchered right before the summer holidays, because of the very low demand for organic eggs during summer – those who can afford to buy organic, often spend their holidays abroad (Field diary, 22. March 2021). Not only agricultural practices but also the lives and deaths of nonhumans are related to both multispecies and economic time frames.

As previously shown, temporal and spatial variability is enormously relevant in growing food sustainably, and it leaves a deep imprint on the produce itself. Yet in the food market, produce is expected to be quite uniform. Organic farming entails cooperation with the different rhythms that impact growth and ripening. Selling organic produce, however, entails negotiating with food retailers (represented by quality management) who base their practices on the idea that produce must meet the same criteria throughout the years – regardless of such situated differences. For organic farmers, such consistency over time is an illusion based on economic practices that have been decoupled from agricultural realities. By arguing in favor of taking differences into account, the presenters render organic food as a variable, temporalized entity that does not adhere to the market's standardized desires for uniformity, interchangeability, and consistency (see also Tsing 2015, 38–40).

These examples show the effects of nonhumans on organic practices and strives for sustainability: the weather, pests and the agencies of plants are incorporated in the product's aesthetic and taste as well as its availability. But the discussions also make clear that agricultural realities are highly influenced by the realities and logics of capitalist markets. Market and societal rhythms, expectations, and quality criteria as well as the agricultural and marketing structures on site jointly affect each other. When calling for a diversity perspective of sustainability, Brightman and Lewis (2017, 19) seek to take the plurality of actors, entities, situations, cultures, or economies into account, that impact the sustainability of practices, and ask us to diversify what counts as sustainable (ibid., 26–27). The farmers' narrations demonstrate such a perspective. They work with a more-than-human concept of sustainability that takes a variety of actors and entities into account. It also becomes obvious, how attempts to neatly separate and untangle those factors, sorting them into categories such as 'cultural', 'natural', 'agricultural', or 'economic' is a hopeless task (see Gesing et al. 2019). Nonetheless, framing some factors deliberately as natural holds the promise of making them appear as unchangeable and inherently good (Maasen et al. 2018, 184).

"African domestic poultry markets are collapsing". Organic supply chains in globalized capitalist markets

In the context of globalized markets, national food production can no longer be thought of outside a global context (Schmidt 2020, 175). International connections shape organic food supply chains, the actors working along it, and thus also the workshops this paper draws on (Langthaler 2021). In several instances, the workshop attendees pointed to global connections and/or differences between the German situation and other countries regarding organic food. In this section, I trace the mentions of globalized markets in the fieldnotes of our project. I discuss how sustainability remains emergent in the interweaving of power imbalances and differing time frames along organic supply chains. These discussions point to the necessity of a concept of sustainability that takes global wealth gaps and power imbalances into account as well as the continuing consequences of colonial exploitation.

During our workshops, imported organic vegetables were repeatedly identified as an issue affecting German actors and their striving for sustainability. A complex web of ecological and social consequences of imported foods unfolds when looking at the debates around Egyptian new potatoes in German markets. One farmer portrayed the following recurring scenario: “We have great [German] potatoes in stock, but consumers buy Egyptian new potatoes” – despite their connection with “water scarcity and social ills”, as another participant added (Fieldnotes, Workshop 9). Partly, this issue has been addressed by now. The buyer of one big organic food supermarket “ensured, that [they] no longer sell Egyptian new potatoes.” (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6)

International connections were also discussed regarding migrant workers. Due to the concentration of work during harvest, farmers are dependent on additional labor for those limited time spans (Schmidt 2020, 128). Because of the precarity and low pay of such labor it is difficult to find workers in Germany. Thus, German farmers directly profit from the wealth gap in the EU when hiring seasonal workers – nowadays manly from East and Central Europe (ibid., 125–128). This is true also for the organic sector (Fieldnotes, Workshop 2). The precarity of the workers’ situation was identified as an unsolved problem. Several organic actors founded a cooperative to render organic supply chains fairer – but so far, their agenda does not explicitly mention seasonal workers (Fieldnotes, Workshop 1; Field diary, 19.07.2022). During the lunchbreak at one of our events, the owner of the restaurant – an organic blueberry farmer – mentioned how this season, the harvest was so late in the year, that some of the seasonal workers went home before the picking was finished (Fieldnotes, Workshop 8). Her narration points to differing concepts of a ‘season’ that apply in this situation. While the farmer’s season is more-than-human in nature, adhering to the time when the blueberries are ripe and ready to be harvested, the workers’ seasons do not necessarily align with that time frame but are also dependent on their (work) life’s rhythms at home (see also Peselmann 2021, 64–65).

The coexistence of different conceptions of season in the context of agriculture seems self-evident. But alternate concepts of season now coexist that have developed alongside these agricultural temporalities. They do not even have to be congruent in relation to the same food from the perspective of different human actors. A retail representative explained her company's seasonal planning: "We try to create a season schedule so that all actors know what is planned for the next season." This information is forwarded to the suppliers and then further on along the chain. She talked about the option of giving consumers additional information at the start or the end of a season: "For example, at the beginning of the season, organic lemons are a little greener, and then at the end of the season basically everything is ok." (Fieldnotes, Workshop 6) She puts the retailers' definition of the season at the center of the practices and rhythms of all the actors along the chain. In the context of globalized markets, German food retail companies are in the position to more or less simply inform other actors along the chain of their needs and these actors may or may not be able to actually decide whether they can adhere to it. Attendees repeatedly argued that depending on resources, not every actor is in the position to decline such selling options (Fieldnotes, Workshop 3). Using the notion of a season, the retailer draws on the connection between the time periods in which a food item is offered in the supermarket and the agricultural rhythms of planting and harvesting goods. The former might still vaguely adhere to the actual times of the respective produce being available from German farms, but the notion of seasons also points to the (growing) disconnection from these origins. Her use of lemons as an example – a fruit that Germany primarily imports from Spain and that is not cultivated in Germany (Backhaus-Cysyk 2020) – highlights the disconnections of retailers' seasons from domestic agricultural seasons.

Due to the globalization of (organic) food markets, the supermarket season of a given produce usually lasts longer than the domestic agricultural season.[12] Such differing concepts and realities of a season in different stages of the organic food supply chain appear to be crucial for upholding the power imbalance in the food chain. Global interconnections allow for a longer retail season, as the areas, from where agricultural seasons are incorporated, go far beyond national borders. As a consequence, retail is less dependent on domestic farmers' supply. However, recently, the farmers' investment in storage technologies have resulted in also stretching agricultural seasons. This investment was narrated as a deliberate reaction to the current market situation regarding the prevalence of Egyptian new potatoes (Fieldnotes, Workshop 9).

12 For reflections on the role of logistics in those redefinitions of seasons see Hering & Fülling 2021, 350–351.

Differing seasons shape and clearly relate to one another while also unfolding effects regarding their respective spheres of the supply chain – the farm in the case of agricultural season, retail in the case of the selling season. Seasons function as a way for retailers to structure their array of products that resonates back into agricultural practice. The interwovenness of these spheres indicates how agricultural rhythms themselves – even though framed as natural by the farmers – have incorporated societal and economic logics and expectations and thus cannot be fully grasped without taking globalized interconnections and prevailing power imbalances into account.

Global power imbalances and the wealth gap also became graspable during a discussion concerning specifics of raising male chicks. Within laying hen husbandry, male chicks used to be killed after they hatched as they do not lay eggs. But as of 2022, this practice is illegal in Germany (Bundesregierung 2021). One farmer asked whether it is true, that “the sister, the old laying hen, is exported to Africa as poor people’s food?” He recalled a documentary about the severe consequences such exports have for farmers in the Global South: by “exporting the poultry that we don’t want to eat here, African domestic poultry markets are collapsing, young people have no jobs”. Another attendee stated that this was true for old conventional laying hens, “African local farmers don’t even dare to keep their own chickens anymore.” Old organically raised hens are more easily sold in the German market, “but the conventional old laying hen really goes super cheap to Africa.” (Fieldnotes, Workshop 7) By considering how current economic practices harm people in the Global South, this debate frames organic agriculture as a bundle of practices not only striving for intergenerational sustainability, “where the current generation chooses to […] (sacrifice) her own benefits […] (for) considering future generations.” (Shahen, Kotani & Saijo 2021, 1) By contrasting it with the exported conventional chickens, resulting in further exploitation of citizens of formerly colonized countries, organic supply chains appear to also render sustainability an intragenerational effort. Once again, this appears to be more a result of better marketing options rather than deliberate choices. Again, profitability impacts the sustainability of practices.

This farmer’s distress in the face of profound debates and political decisions regarding the ban on chick-killing highlights the extent to which sustainability efforts not informed by postcolonial critique run the risk of making human suffering invisible and thus potentially enforcing it (see James & Tynes 2021; Davis, Moulton, Van Sant & Williams 2018; Folkers 2020, 594). In looking at these globalized connections, the danger becomes visible how efforts to attain sustainability rely on and reinforce global inequalities. These aspects need to be considered when aiming for more sustainable food systems.

Taking situational contexts, more-than-human entities, and intersecting inequalities into account: Emergent conceptualizations of sustainability

This paper illustrated how actors working along the German organic food chain negotiate sustainability in the context of capitalist markets. The characterization of this chain as 'German' is in itself a simplification. It conceals the multitude of global interconnections and dependencies in which German organic actors and their work is embedded. However, this simplification proved valuable to carve out parallel, partly overlapping or even conflicting concepts of sustainability. In foregrounding temporalities, the relations and interdependencies of human and more-than-human rhythms and practices could be made graspable, as they come together in the context of asymmetrical relations of power that impact organic supply chains – a power imbalance that they also reproduce.

When discussing the sustainability of the (organic) food market, the attendees reflected upon its (current) limitations: efforts toward environmental and social sustainability potentially undermine one other – as organic agriculture is dependent on precarious labor to remain profitable. An emphasis on regionality or avoidance of packaging may foster a waste of other resources. The goal to produce less food waste is hindered by prevailing marketing standards. All these instances show, how the implementation of more sustainable practices is prevented by the need to legitimate decisions with their profitability, by capitalist ideals of uniformity, homogeneity, and interchangeability, and by power imbalances that reenforce those ideas.

Still, many actors viewed sustainability as mainly to be achieved via consumers making conscious choices. The workshops can be read as situations in which different stakeholders negotiate possible and necessary food system transformations. The two main strands of the argument span along the question of the transformative potential of communication and those who need to be included in it. Those arguing in favor of enhanced – even more-than-human – communication of agricultural realities and organic values do so in line with the modes of operation of the current food system. They do not offer solutions for a better inclusion of so far excluded, exploited, or disadvantaged groups of people in Germany, East and Central Europe or the Global South – may they be consumers or workers. This group made up the majority of participants. To others, those structures themselves are violent, thus, they need to be overcome to achieve more sustainable food systems. To them, enhanced communication within the supply chain or towards consumers does not address the underlying problem.

Nevertheless, the attendees collectively negotiated different understandings of sustainability. In the course of this, sustainability was reimagined in three ways: First, it was grasped in regard to situational contexts, not only generalized abstractions. This way, sustainability can be seen as oscillating between an abstract level of causalities and interconnections (e.g. of transport routes, CO_2 emissions and the climate crisis) and situated actors and practices. Secondly, efforts towards sustainability need to include the agencies and fates of more-than-human entities. Drawing on this conceptualization, the lives of nonhuman others that cannot be made profitable will still be seen as worthy of consideration. And thirdly, the sustainability envisioned here includes disadvantaged, excluded, and exploited people within Germany and beyond. This is important for sustainability to not remain a project only of and for middle-class and wealthy people from the Global North.

Depending on whose fates are considered, the sustainability of a given practices varies. Sustainability cannot be viewed as an objective, extrinsic feature of a product such as organic food. But as Brightman and Lewis argue, “our collective actions have become a planetary force that is destabilizing the very life systems on which our future depends.” Therefore we “must urgently formulate a more explicit project of transformation and transition.” (2017, 27) The actors present at our workshops are envisioning such a project. Organic practices promise to be part of that transformation. But organic actors need to navigate a complex web of constraints in order to enact more sustainable foodways. Their debates show how pathways to enable a sustainable food economy are too complex to be adequately represented and implemented by just asking consumers to follow simple rules of thumb such as: ‘buy local!’, ‘buy organic!’, and ‘avoid packaging!’

“Problems don’t care about disciplinary boundaries” (Bendix 2020) and our project’s transdisciplinary integration of different expertise proved valuable for generating a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of sustainability and it’s (current) limitations. The economies provided an expertise regarding the realities of organic supply chains and the food sector, while the didactics added valuable competences regarding moderating and conceptualizing the workshops as a trusting, open environments. Our research greatly profited from the collaborative nature of our endeavor: working with an organic practitioner with his expertise and ability to launch events that bring together different voices from the organic food sector. Ethnographic methods allowed for the collection of rich, qualitative data that provided insights into the various actors, practices and logics that shape organic food chains. Further, a reflexive and critical cultural anthropological perspective can contribute to a more critical and nuanced understanding of the way capitalism works in practice and can inform efforts to create more equitable and sustainable economic systems.

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SOURCES

Ethnographic materials

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Fieldnotes, Workshop 3, "Organic Apples", 07. July 2020. 14 participants.
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Jessica Jungell-Michelsson &
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Transforming Foodways: Sustainability Sensemaking Processes Among Finnish Food Companies

Abstract

Food companies are central actors in driving sustainability transformations at the interface of production and consumption. Still, only limited attention has been directed to how sustainability-related meanings are being created within various food industry organizations. In this article, we explore the characteristics of the sustainability sensemaking and -giving processes among food companies and analyze how these processes influence sustainability-related transformations of current foodways. Our analysis is based on qualitative data (transcripts and notes) from interviews with managers from 15 Finnish food companies. By using organizational sensemaking literature, we shed light on the companies' cultural talk and social meaning creations of sustainability. Our findings indicate that food companies' sustainability sensemaking is an intra- and inter-organizational, social process occurring between the individual and organizational spheres of the organizations. Food companies act as sensegivers, as they actively communicate with stakeholders to achieve the position of a knowledgeable sustainability forerunner. Sustainability has been normalized in the talk and action of food companies, but the discursive space offered by them is limited to weak sustainability perspectives. While socio-material transgressions of current foodways may emerge, we argue that a shift from communicating and commercializing sustainability to a focus on ecological material aspects and ecological sensemaking is essential for transforming foodways towards strong sustainability.

Keywords: sustainability; sustainable food systems; foodways; organizations; food companies; sensemaking; sensegiving

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Introduction

The global food system is a major force that contributes to exceeding known planetary boundaries (Steffen et al. 2015; Campbell et al. 2017), including climate change, biodiversity loss, and degradation of land and freshwater (Foley et al. 2011; Poore & Nemecek 2018). Furthermore, social challenges are increasing as food continues to be unevenly distributed, leading to food wastage and excess in certain parts of the world, and hunger and malnutrition in others (Willett et al. 2019; FAO, 2019). As the undesired ecological consequences of our current food system are becoming more evident and severe (e.g., IPCC 2019), understanding how to break away from unsustainable modes of food production and consumption is becoming increasingly important. Transitions towards sustainability requires modifying current foodways, including the social and cultural processes, rules, and meanings that are part of the food chain from the production and processing to the cooking and consumption of food (Peres 2017; Bortolotto & Ubertazzi 2018).

Food industry organizations are central actors in driving sustainability at the interface of food production and consumption. Food companies influence food supplies in stores by introducing new products, making assortment changes, promoting certain products, and marketing their brands. They have an impact on what we eat and how we perceive and talk about food, i.e., the food cultures of our societies. Food companies are indeed faced with increasing political pressure to take responsibility for various sustainability issues (IPES-Food 2017; European Commission 2020). Consequently, organizations in the food sector are strengthening their agency for food system sustainability and integrating various sustainability aspects into company operations, products, and brands (e.g., van der Heijden & Cramer 2017; Long, Looijen & Blok 2018; Cortese, Rainero & Cantino 2021).

Organizational perspectives to food system sustainability have mainly been provided by the field of supply chain and strategic management research, in which corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been linked to the food industry as an empirical context (e.g., Maloni & Brown 2006; Hartmann 2011; Gold & Heikkurinen 2013). While these studies are useful for understanding sustainability in corporate organizations, they are limited to management activities, strategic decision-making, and business outcomes in general (Luhmann & Theuvsen 2016). Sustainability is context dependent (e.g., Geels & Schot 2007; Dedeurwaerdere 2014), and the transformation of foodways requires a deeper understanding of contextual, socio-cultural aspects underlying daily food activities, including those of organizations. As Perey (2015) noted, sustainability is a contested concept, and adopting it in organizational practices continues to be problematic. Hence, it seems warranted to direct more attention to how sustainability-related meanings are being created within various food organizations.

Such attention is provided by the concept of organizational sensemaking (Weick 1995), which enables a focus shift from organizational outcomes to the social processes foregoing these outcomes (Mills, Thurlow & Mills 2010). Sensemaking is a theoretical framework for bringing to light how meaning is created and sustained within organizations through continuous cycles of making sense of and giving sense to cues in the organization's environment. Sensemaking typically occurs when organizations are faced with ambiguous issues, such as sustainability. Organizational sensemaking has been used to analyze sustainability in diverse business fields (e.g., Angus-Leppan, Benn & Young 2010; Onkila, Mäkelä, & Järvenpää 2018; van der Heijden, Cramer & Driessen 2012) and in non-profit organizations (Perey 2015). In the food sector, sustainability sensemaking has been studied in relation to food banks (Elmes, Mendoza-Abarca & Hersh 2016), organic food (Hilverda, Kuttschreuter & Giebels 2017), and restaurants (Ocampo, Marshall, Wellton & Jonsson 2021). A few case studies have been conducted within food companies, e.g., in the pig farming and meat industries (van der Heijden & Cramer 2017; Hübel 2022), but the sensemaking processes across a broader range of companies in the food industry have not yet been researched. With this article, we aim to fill this gap by focusing on companies that produce and sell food retail products in Finland — a previously untouched area and a relevant context for exploring foodway transformations at the intersection of production and consumption.

In our qualitative study, we analyze the sustainability sensemaking processes of 15 Finnish food companies by focusing on how company representatives (on a managerial level) talk about sustainability from their organization's point of view. We focus on the socially constructed meanings of sustainability that are created, negotiated, and enacted within the organizations. Our aim is to provide a better understanding of what characterizes the sensemaking processes of food companies and how these influence sustainability-related transformations of current foodways.

The article is structured as follows. Next, we present the theoretical framework of organizational sensemaking and the application of it in food and sustainability studies. This is followed by a description of the methods, context, and data that we used as the basis for our study, continued by our analysis of the findings. In the final section, we discuss the findings and reflect on their broader implications for food system transformation.

Theoretical framework

We apply the concept of organizational sensemaking to sustainability to explore transformations and transgressions of foodways from an organizational perspective. Whereas transformation towards sustainability implies profound changes across systems (Nelson, Tallontire, Opondo & Martin 2014; Helenius, Hagolani-Albov & Koppelmäki 2020), transgression refers to boundary crossings of food practices, knowledge regimes, discourses, and norms (Goodman & Sage 2014), which can lead to food system transformation on a larger scale. The food system is transformed as the actors within it respond to cues in their social, environmental, cultural, political, and economic environments (Ingram & Thornton 2022). Inherent to this is the transgression and changes in foodways, i.e., the cultural and social expressions of food in various activities such as the production, harvesting, processing, cooking, serving, and consumption of food (Peres 2017; Bortolotto & Ubertazzi 2018). Moreover, sustainability is here understood through the distinction between weak and strong sustainability. Weak sustainability rests on the assumption that natural capital is substitutable with human-made capital, while strong sustainability implies that these forms of capital are merely complementary (Daly 1996; Ayres, van den Bergh & Gowdy 2001; Neumeyer 2003). In strong sustainability, social, cultural, and economic systems are considered to be subsystems of the natural system; consequently, sustainability is dependent on the intra- and interactions of these subsystems in a way that does not exceed the natural limits of the biosphere (Ericksen 2008; Dedeurwaerdere 2014). For a transformative change to happen, there is a need to complement solutions based on assumptions of weak sustainability with alternatives informed by the premise of strong sustainability (Daly 1996; Ayres et al. 2001).

In the following, we focus on explicating the theoretical framework of organizational sensemaking and related research, as it forms the basis for our data analysis.

Organizational sensemaking and sensegiving

Sensemaking is an interpretive approach to organization and management research, which builds on the work of Karl E. Weick (see e.g., 1979; 1995; 2001). In its simplest form, sensemaking relates to how people negotiate and sustain meaning of their environment and changing circumstances (Brown, Colville & Pye 2015). It is about turning ambiguous situations into comprehendible ones through continuous processes of noticing and extracting cues from our lived experience, interpreting them, and directing action accordingly (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). Sensemaking has been characterized as a never-ending cycle of creation (making initial sense through bracketing, noticing, and extracting cues), interpretation (refining the initial sense into a more complete, narratively organized sense), and enactment (acting upon the more complete sense made). This process typically occurs when something triggers uncertainty and complexity (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005; Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015), and sensemaking has often been studied in cases of major disruptions, changes, or crises (Mills et al. 2010). Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015, 22), however, emphasize that non-episodic and continuous basic activities are equally important foundations of sensemaking.

In the context of organizations, Weick (1995, 17–62) proposed seven explanatory properties of sensemaking. According to this widely accepted framework, sensemaking as a process is grounded in identity construction and retrospective. This means that: "who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity" (Weick et al. 2005, 416). Thus, sensemaking is enactive of sensible environments, and social. Sensemaking is also continuously ongoing, along with being focused on and by extracted cues, i.e., based on personal experience and beliefs, certain elements are chosen and others ignored when creating meaning of an event. Finally, sensemaking is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. We look for cues to form a story that is plausible, not accurate, to be able to go on with our activities. Weick et al. (2005, 409) have conceptualized sensemaking as "an issue of language, talk, and communication," which implies that sensemaking is a linguistic and cognitive activity.

For cultural studies, which are perhaps more familiar with the concept of meaning making, the sensemaking perspective offers a tool to explore how meanings are created and negotiated within organizations. It enables a focus on the social construction of meaning that help individuals and organizations make sense of their world and act (Perey 2015; Fellows & Liu 2016). Sensemaking resonates with the understanding of culture as "meanings and practices produced, sustained, and altered through interaction" (van Maanen 2011, 221) and studies that aim to provide deeper understandings of meaning making in particular contexts. Consequently, sensemaking has commonly been studied through ethnographies and case studies, which are based on information-rich, qualitative data, e.g., interviews and observations (Maitlis & Christianson 2014).

The ethnographic study by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) has been particularly influential for developing the theoretical foundations of sensemaking. They studied the leaders of a large university that was about to undergo significant organizational changes and found that the leaders' attempts to influence the meaning construction of others were important for redefining the organizational reality. Through this study, the concept of sensegiving was established, and has later been widely adopted within sensemaking research (e.g., Dunford & Jones 2000; Christianson, Farkas, Sutcliffe & Weick 2009; see also Maitlis & Lawrence 2007). Sensegiving can be seen as a response to the criticism stating that Weick's original view on sensemaking was retrospective, and sensegiving offers a way to also grasp *pro*spective meaning making and action (Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015, 23–25).

While many have focused on leaders' sensegiving (e.g., Rouleau 2005; Foldy, Goldman & Ospina 2008; Sparr 2018), the sensegiving process is not limited to managers but is, in fact, intrinsic to the process of sensemaking in general (Maitlis & Lawrence 2007; Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, 442), sensegiving and sensemaking occur "in an iterative, sequential, and to some extent reciprocal fashion." In other words, a sensegiver is always also a sensemaker. For example, a manager must first make sense of a situation to be able to give sense, and a manager's sensemaking is consequently influenced by others who give sense. Thus, sensegiving connects individual sensemaking processes between actors, and the importance of sensegiving was later also acknowledged by Weick (1995, 61), who stated: "how can I know what I think until I see what I say." In this study, we adhere to the understanding that sensegiving is immanent to and important for the organizational sensemaking process.

Sensemaking research on organizations, food, and sustainability

Perey (2015) analyzed the dynamics between individual- and organizational-level sustainability sensemaking processes. He concluded that embedding sustainability into organizations is dependent on the creation of discursive spaces that allow for new sustainability narratives to become established. Sustainability is, as Perey (2015, 166–170) noted, a polyphonic discourse that requires context and reduced ambiguity to be successfully implemented in organizations. From a sensemaking perspective, sustainability is associated with a large number of interlinked cues that must be interpreted in relation to each other. According to Seidl and Werle (2018, 833–834), such a "strategic meta-problem" (i.e., a problem characterized by a high degree of complexity and unclear boundaries) can exceed the sensemaking capacity of individual organizations. Therefore, organizations that face a strategic meta-problem, such as sustainability, tend to engage in inter-organizational collaboration to pool expertise from outside the organization. Seidl and Werle (2018) demonstrated that the selection of participants for inter-organizational collaboration impacts the dynamics of the sensemaking process in an organization, as the extraction of cues becomes subject to the participants' different interests.

Sensemaking has been widely adopted in organization studies, and increasing attention has been directed towards *sustainability* sensemaking, particularly within the CSR/corporate sustainability field. Hahn, Preuss, Pinkse and Figge (2014) analyzed the differences in corporate responses to sustainability based on two cognitive frames — the business case frame and the paradoxical frame — and discussed how sustainability sensemaking based on these frames rarely leads to radical changes in corporate organizations. They argue that managers with a business case frame tend to focus on narrow sustainability solutions following existing practices, while managers with a paradoxical frame move forward slowly due to their higher awareness of conflicting sustainability aims (ibid.).

A sensemaking perspective has been applied when studying sustainability at various food system scales. Elmes et al. (2016) explored ethical sensemaking among food bank leaders in the United States and pointed to the critical role these actors play in making sense of ethical and justice dimensions of hunger and food-related illnesses. Focusing more on the consumer level, Hilverda et al. (2017) analyzed the sensemaking of organic food through social media data and showed that online interaction with experts and peers impacts the perceptions of risks and benefits related to eating organic foods. Pétursson (2018) similarly analyzed meanings of organic food, through an ethnographic study of consumption practices, and described how organic has turned from niche to mainstream consumption through emotional practices. A practice-oriented approach was also taken by Ocampo et al. (2021), who explored the meaning making of food and sustainability in six restaurants in Sweden. Pétursson (2018) and Ocampo et al. (2021) do not explicitly use the concept of sensemaking, but nevertheless bring forward how the meaning of sustainability is socially constructed and negotiated.

Studies of sustainability sensemaking have also been conducted in the food sector at the organizational level. Van der Heijden and Cramer (2017) examined how individual change agents engage other actors in an agri-food supply chain to shift towards sustainability. In their longitudinal study of a pig farming company, they highlight the importance of supply chain collaboration for sustainability in the food sector and suggest that “sustainability becomes embedded not as a result of a systematic stepwise approach but by skillfully and adaptively navigating social interactions” (van der Heijden & Cramer 2017, 978). Recently, Hübel (2022) analyzed sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship by analyzing the sensemaking processes of top and middle managers in a large meat company. She found that sustainability sensemaking among these managers is an emergent, bidirectional process, i.e., managers make sense *for* and *of* entrepreneurial sustainability activities. Hübel (2022) further argues that such a bidirectional process can accelerate the sustainability transformation of organizations.

Making sense of sustainability in food industry organizations requires diverse sensemaking processes because of the diverse nature of the environment and the ecological changes that the organizations must deal with (Weick 1979). While not focusing on the food system per se, Whiteman and Cooper's (2011) introduction of *ecological sensemaking* has been important for a more nuanced understanding of the sensemaking processes related to sustainability. Through this concept, they highlight organizational aspects that have previously been argued to be lacking in the sensemaking literature such as ecological materiality and ecological embeddedness (i.e., deep knowledge and experience of specific ecological conditions and the impacts of disturbances). Whiteman and Cooper (2011) emphasize the importance of understanding the processes involved while organizational members create meaning of the dynamics and changes in their natural environment. They showed that actors that are ecologically disembedded focus their enactments on social relations in talk and action and have limited ability to make sense of ecologically material connections. As Whiteman and Cooper (2011, 907-908) argue, ecological sensemaking can provide a valuable concept in times of ecological crises and increased awareness of sustainability issues.

To conclude, research on food companies' sustainability sensemaking processes are rather scarce and limited to a few cases. The perspective taken to sustainability transitions are seldom explicated or discussed in these studies. Therefore, there is a need to broaden existing literature by focusing on a group of food companies and the sustainability sensemaking processes across these organizations. In this paper, we acknowledge the idea of organizational sensemaking as social, interactive, and bidirectional process (sensemaking and sensegiving) that in the context of food systems and sustainability requires organizations to engage in highly complex problems. We assume that transforming current foodways will require the recognition and prioritization of ecological limits, i.e., strong sustainability (Daly 1997; Ayres et al. 2001), and a better understanding of diverse sensemaking processes, including ecological sensemaking (Whiteman & Cooper 2011).

Material and methods

The Finnish food and beverage industry is the largest manufacturer of consumer goods and the fourth largest industry in Finland, making it central to the process of transforming foodways towards sustainability. To understand how food companies perceive and make sense of sustainability, we conducted a qualitative study by interviewing personnel responsible for sustainability management in 15 Finnish food companies. The first author has over 15 years of experience working within the Finnish food business context in various positions, which supported an in-depth cultural understanding of the industry, along with access to relevant company contacts for the study.

We chose the food and beverage companies for the study based on three characteristics. First, the organizations produce branded, ready-packed food products that are sold to Finnish consumers. The companies are not involved in the production and sales of fresh, unprocessed, and unpacked food such as fruits or fresh fish. Second, the organizations operate as private or listed limited liability corporations. Third, the companies have expressed concern for sustainability issues in their external corporate communication. This means that sustainability is emphasized on their webpages as separate themes or in blogposts, and/or brought forward in company reports. The framing of sustainability varies among the companies, but a brief overview of their external communication shows that most adhere to the conventional three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic). In particular, the companies emphasize efforts related to environmental and social sustainability, e.g., projects that aim for less environmentally harmful production processes or for ethical and fair trade in the supply chain. The 15 organizations that participated in the study vary in size, as we did not want to restrict the study to only include small or large companies. An overview of these organizations and their sustainability foci is provided in Table 1.

The interview participants were selected based on how actively they are involved in their organization's sustainability matters. Hence, the position and title of the interviewed person varied depending on the organization[1]. When the researcher (the first author) approached the organizations, she asked to be directed to the person(s) most suitable for an interview regarding the organization's sustainability work. Typically, the CEO was the most informed person in smaller companies. In larger companies, sustainability was often managed by a specific sustainability manager or a person involved in marketing and communication. Two organizations (organization 5 and 9 in the table below) had two people involved in driving and taking overall responsibility for sustainability, and the researcher interviewed both. Otherwise, the researcher conducted one interview per organization, following the suggestion of the company. This led to a total of 17 interviews with the 15 organizations. Due to anonymization concerns, the interviews are not linked to the organizations in this article.

1 The interviewees' titles are listed in the interview list under Sources.

Table 1. Interviewed organizations by size, product type, and company sustainability agenda.

Food company	**Size***	**Product type**	**Core sustainability themes as mentioned in external corporate communication**
Organization 1	Large	Food	Eco-friendly packaging; Climate change/carbon emissions; Health; Environmentally and socially sustainable supply chain
Organization 2	Small	Food	Organic farming; Carbon neutrality; Nutrition; Traceability of raw materials in the supply chain
Organization 3	Large	Food and beverages	Safe and resource-efficient production; Climate and biodiversity; Animal welfare; Food safety and quality; Supply chain transparency
Organization 4	Large	Beverages	Carbon-neutral production; Recycling; Health; Employee safety and well-being
Organization 5	Large	Food and beverages	Well-being of people and the planet; Climate change; Circular economy; Socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains
Organization 6	Large	Food	Healthy lifestyles; Safe products; Socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains; Carbon footprint
Organization 7	Small	Beverages	Transparency; Ethical and fair supply chains; Package recyclability
Organization 8	Small	Beverages	Local production and supply chains; Recyclability; Carbon compensation
Organization 9	Mid-sized	Food	Eco-efficiency in production to minimize negative environmental impacts; Circularity; Employee well-being; Environmentally friendly farming methods
Organization 10	Large	Food and beverages	Health and nutrition; Human rights and ethical trade; Climate change; Clean water; Circularity; Waste
Organization 11	Small	Food	Locally produced raw materials; Package circularity; Renewable energy in production
Organization 12	Large	Food	Profitable business operations; Safe and high-quality products; Ethically produced raw materials; Carbon neutrality; Employee well-being
Organization 13	Mid-sized	Food	Carbon-neutral eco-efficient production; Organic; Healthy and sustainable eating; Caring for the personnel
Organization 14	Small	Food	Organic; Healthy lifestyles; Transparent sourcing
Organization 15	Large	Food and beverages	Safe and high-quality products; Human well-being; Caring for the environment through the supply chain; Carbon emission reduction

* Small: < 50 employees and annual turnover < 10 million euros; Mid-sized: < 250 employees and annual turnover < 50 million euros; Large: > 250 employees and annual turnover > 50 million euros (according to Statistics Finland's (2022) definition)

The interviews were conducted by the first author during September to December 2021. The ambition was to interview each informant in person and visit each company at their production/office sites to be able to make additional field observations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such field work was not possible, and several interviews had to be organized as online meetings. Seven interviews were conducted at the participating company's office, two at the researcher's office, and eight as online meetings. Online meetings have drawbacks compared with physical interviews, such as limiting out informal conversations before and after the interview that may be informative for the study. Still, every online interview was performed with the video turned on, making it a rather normal face-to-face dialogue and comparable with the physical interviews. Each interview, including online and physical meetings, was between 55–90 minutes long. Instead of observing the physical surroundings of the companies, we chose to analyze the companies' digital sustainability material, which was possible for all participants. Access to the field and experiencing the companies' environments would have yielded more versatile material for the researcher. However, the analysis of the companies' webpages and digital reports provided sufficient information on their sustainability strategies (see Table 1).

The aim of the interviews was to capture the process of making sense of sustainability in the participating organizations. Hence, we chose a semi-structured interview methodology, as it is considered a resourceful way for obtaining descriptions of the interviewees' lived experiences (Brinkmann 2018) and useful for exploring multipersonal phenomena such as sensemaking (Bradbury & Lichtenstein 2000; Murto, Hyysalo, Juntunen & Jalas 2020). As Moisander, Närvänen and Valtonen (2020, 9) have noted, the interview is "a vehicle for producing cultural talk, which can be analyzed to gain cultural knowledge about the marketplace." By 'cultural talk', Moisander et al. (2020, 9) refer to social texts that are "produced, shared and used in culturally specific, socially organized ways." In the interviews, we focused on discussing how sustainability is understood within the organization, what the organization does when faced with sustainability issues, and how sustainability has become visible in organizational practices. Additionally, we asked personal questions about how the interviewees perceive sustainability in their private, everyday lives (see the Appendix). While sustainability in this paper is approached from the perspective of weak and strong sustainability, we refrained from defining sustainability during data collection and, instead, left it to the informants to describe sustainability as understood in their organization.

The written interview transcripts (172 pages in Word) and personal notes made by the first author during and directly after each interview (64 pages of handwritten notes) formed the basis of the analysis. Additionally, the first author's experience of working within the Finnish food industry supported the data interpretation. The analysis process was informed by the Gioia methodology (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton 2012); an interpretive, systematic way of approaching qualitative data that has gained ground within organizational research and influenced the sensemaking and sensegiving literature (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991). The analysis began inductively, as the first author performed a first-order reading of the data, focusing on recurring themes and topics in the interviews. This led to an initial list of identified concepts and constructs. After this, the first author performed a second-order reading of the data, which was more guided by the research question and chosen theoretical framework (sensemaking and sensegiving). Thus, the analysis moved on to a more abductive stage, in which data and theory were considered in tandem (Alvesson & Kärreman 2007; Gioia et al. 2012). In the next phase, both authors conducted a content analysis investigating what kinds of expression the informants used when they positioned their company in relation to sustainability, including how they talked about the organization's sustainability activities; how they described clients, consumers, competitors, and other value chain actors; and how they communicate with these. Content analysis is useful for analyzing sensemaking processes, as it focuses on "themes that are made sense of and are 'talked into existence'" (Jørgensen, Jordan & Mitterhofer 2012, 110).

It is worth noting that many of the interviewees have a background in corporate communications and marketing or have overall responsibility of the company as CEO. Thus, their professional experiences become part of the company's "sustainability talk" that they perform during the interviews. For example, an interviewee with marketing expertise easily emphasizes sustainability branding or a CEO may be focused on the overall economic performance of the company. However, by asking more personal questions related to sustainability, we aimed to reduce this professional bias and positioned the interviewees also as citizens and consumers. The interviewed companies frequently used the metaphor of "profit, people, planet" when referring to economic, social, and ecological aspects of sustainability. Balancing "the 3 Ps," also known as the triple bottom line, was originally introduced by Elkington (2013) and seems to be a core dilemma when food companies are making sense of as well as giving sense to sustainability. As one interviewee explained: *"I also talk about profit, people, and planet all the time, so these 3 Ps; so it's the environment and the people and then of course the profitability. Sustainability just must also be economically sustainable."* (Interviewee 3)

Furthermore, in a sensemaking study it is also important to reflect on how sensemaking occurs not only within the studied organizations but also as part of the research setting. Sense was made and given in the interview sessions, between the first author and the interviewee. As the interviewee described sustainability from an organizational perspective, they were simultaneously engaging in sensegiving, assumably trying to form an educated and knowledgeable discussion around food sustainability issues with the first author. Thus, the interviewees continued to develop their personal and the researcher's understanding of sustainability during the interview sessions.

Findings

Our analysis was initially focused on sensemaking, but as the data unfolded, we recognized that sensegiving was central to the food companies' processes. The company representatives highlighted how they and their company give sense to, as much as they described how they make sense of sustainability. Therefore, we present our findings from both a sensemaking and sensegiving perspective. The distinction between making and giving sense as separate categories provides a useful theoretical tool for the analysis, although they cannot be so clearly distinguished from each other in the activities and processes of the organizations.

Sustainability sensemaking — a food chain-dependent strategic challenge

Finnish food companies perceive sustainability as a complex, strategic problem. The companies are continuously faced with cues in their social and natural surroundings that challenges previously held beliefs about their operations and sustainability. It is an uncertain and complex issue to handle, which involves feelings of ambiguity and unclarity. The interviewees described the organizations' sustainability work as a complicated process of trying to grasp an extremely broad topic, often starting off as a chaos of information and ideas, from which the initial sense of sustainability is gradually created.

> Possibly the largest challenge was this [emissions] compensation world, at least at the beginning. Now it is sort of clear, nothing special around it. But in some way, when it was all totally new, it was just a strange mess. It was difficult to understand how it works. We had to go through it many times, like, does this compensation really save the world. But once we got the catch, well, it was not that confusing…" — Interviewee 9

As Interviewee 9 illustrates in their example of a current sustainability issue (carbon emissions compensation), sense is being made through an iterative process. Sustainability concerns need to be broken down into smaller parts and overseen several times, i.e., the sustainability-related cues are bracketed, selected, and refined to enable the organization to enact the interpretation made. Hence, the sensemaking cycle also involves trade-offs. The interviewees depicted sustainability as a continuous learning process, which requires acceptance of incomplete knowledge and insufficient actions. Step-by-step, the companies take on new areas of sustainability, actively choosing to focus on some aspects while ignoring others. The interviewees emphasized that the organization cannot do everything, and sustainability therefore involves a continuous, conscious extraction of cues:

> But then again, we cannot do everything at the same time, and it is not worth to, instead we should now concentrate on those things that we have defined to be central to us in the upcoming years. And where we can create a positive impact, and make sure that we concentrate on the right things. — Interviewee 5

When Interviewee 5 talks about "concentrating on the right things" that the organization has "defined to be central," it shows that despite the perceived complexity and difficulty, food companies aim for a rather pragmatic stance to sustainability. The interviewees acknowledged that one organization cannot proceed with all aims concurrently and that working with sustainability involves trade-offs in terms of which issues to focus on and how much resources to put into it. From a sensemaking perspective, this is when the organizations begin refining the initially created sense into a more complete, narratively organized sense, i.e., a more explicit interpretation of what sustainability means for them.

During the interviews, informants often brought forth that food value chain dependency along with business market logics influence which cues are extracted when the organizations create a first sense of sustainability and begin interpreting it. The food companies are situated midway in the food value chain, making them dependent on primary producers for raw material, large retail customers for product distribution and on consumers to buy their products. This dependency appears to make the organizations focus on sustainability cues that are relevant for other proximate actors. For instance, what consumers find important (e.g., more sustainable food packaging) or what sustainability issues farmers are dealing with (e.g., carbon emissions), receives a lot of attention from food companies. The social relations between these actors in the food system are important for extracting cues and interpreting what sustainability means. Additionally, the characteristics of the business market in which the food companies operate, such as growth, profit, and competition orientation, influence how sustainability is perceived and framed. The companies are operating in a competition-driven market, and sustainability perceptions are therefore also made sense of in relation to competitors. This seems to have led to rather quick adaptations in the food business market as a whole, and sustainability is currently perceived as something every food company needs to be involved in. Hence, sustainability was frequently described as navigating among the varying interests and demands of other food system actors, which indicates that sustainability sensemaking is not only a process taking place within the food company but is also dependent on the sensemaking processes of other organizations.

Together with other food system actors, the food companies gradually refine their sense of sustainability, which can then be enacted. Sustainability enactments that were highlighted, both during the interviews and on the company webpages, often related to environmental sustainability. Such enactments mentioned by the interviewees frequently linked to the food system as a whole or to product-specific aspects. According to the interviewees, awareness of the negative impacts caused by the food system on climate change has been growing during the past couple of years within as well as outside of the organizations. To engage in emissions reduction is therefore considered a "natural" thing to do, as Interviewee 17 explicates, and the ambition of reducing carbon emissions or becoming "carbon neutral" is commonly referred to by food businesses.

> Themes that stand out are, well, naturally climate change, and that concerns our own operations as well as operations down the supply chain. Because the largest emissions come from our type of industry and the activities in the industry's value chain. Also, there is a lot of talk about biodiversity and deforestation and such things. —Interviewee 17

Larger companies often talked about collaboration with primary producers to support more environmentally friendly farming and better social conditions (e.g., fair trade or social justice), which indicates that social sustainability throughout the supply chain is also being put into practice. Additionally, enactments of sustainability at the product or consumption level were emphasized. The interviewees narrowed down the level of discussion from planet to product (profit) by pointing out that sustainability can include different things depending on the product. They argued that the perceptions of consumers and producers meet at the product level; thus, aspects relevant at the food consumption stage also influence which cues the organization initially focuses on when making sense of sustainability. For example, packaging was pointed out as a central issue related to sustainability. Food packaging, which usually is made of plastics, is considered a large environmental problem and something that consumers are concerned about. The reduction in plastics use and improving the recyclability of individual product packages has therefore become a way to engage in environmental sustainability for many food businesses. Moreover, the importance of taste, product quality/safety, and nutrition was frequently stressed. The interviewees talked about the relevance of providing people with safe and nutritious food, i.e., focusing on more social aspects of sustainability (people). The interviewees argued that sustainability cannot be achieved with products that taste bad and are of low quality. One interviewee put this notion into words:

> It is our task to support the change [sustainability transition] by bringing products that are really good, because if they weren't good, then nobody would buy them and that wouldn't change the world in any way. — Interviewee 14

Interviewee 14 asserted that more (environmentally) sustainable food products are not enough to change the course of the food system. The products need to be "good" as well, i.e., they need to taste good and be of high quality for people to be willing to buy them. This indicates that sustainability sensemaking in the food system is also a socio-material process. In other words, food companies, along with other actors in the system make sense of sustainability through material aspects of the food that are part of our social foodways.

The food companies' notion that food system change requires the consumption of "better" and tasty products shows a concern for the planet and people, but it also demonstrates that a sustainability transition is expected to come about through increased consumption and by outcompeting other products. Such market logic can furthermore be identified in the way sustainability has been normalized in the food system, as food companies compete for market shares and try to differentiate from one another.

> So, if we go back, say, three years, then sustainability was perhaps a sort of differentiating factor in food. You could profile a product with it. But now it is becoming more and more a hygiene factor and a sort of license to operate, it is strange if you don't do it [sustainability]. — Interviewee 6

Interviewee 6 calls sustainability a "hygiene factor," which no longer differentiates a company from others. This depicts the influence of market logics on how sustainability is perceived and shows that sustainability has been normalized among food companies. This normalization of sustainability also became clear during the interviews through the way in which the interviewees talked about their organizations' sustainability enactments. The business representatives (particularly from larger companies) mastered the concepts of sustainability (language) and even the technical terms, which made them seem knowledgeable in the area.

> We are talking a great deal with the retailers about regenerative farming, like, how could we arrange carbon farming education at the farms…and then, of course, all these fields and especially the reduction of emissions from peat fields, and the reduction

> of emissions from production. And then we come to [the topic of] biodiversity, which currently seems to be very interesting. —Interviewee 3

Interviewee 3 uses several concepts and words that show a rather detailed understanding of sustainability, such as “emissions from peat fields” and “biodiversity.” When the interviewee uses specific terms (e.g., “regenerative farming”), it underlines that the organization has to some degree acknowledged the link between natural processes and the business. The normalization of sustainability in the industry seems to have led to an established language and a common understanding of which sustainability aspects are important. The interviewees used statements such as “naturally climate change” (Interviewee 17), which further strengthen the normalization of sustainability in the food business.

Overall, sustainability sensemaking in food companies involves navigating among various domains and demands. One the one hand, sustainability is connected to feelings of complexity; a broad and difficult issue to handle. On the other hand, sustainability has been normalized within the food business, and the interviewees were able to talk about it in a professional manner. Enactments of environmental or social sustainability are often emphasized, but economical reasonings seem to currently be guiding the actions (e.g., staying in business, profiting from certain products). The continuous sensemaking cycle (creation, interpretation, and enactment) of the food companies appears to be directed towards the social relations and dependencies present in the food value chain.

Sustainability sensegiving — communicating and taking leadership in the field

The focus of most discussions with the company managers turned to sustainability communication and various types of social interaction. The interviewees explained how their perception of sustainability continuously develops through reading and by attending seminars and education sessions organized by other industry actors. In addition to these somewhat formal modes of interaction, the influence of casual discussions in private situations was also highlighted. The interviewees illustrated how conversations with friends, family, and colleagues, as well as simply following the “sustainability buzz,” often provide a source of input for making sense of sustainability, as Interviewee 15 describes:

> It [the sustainability understanding] also comes from discussions with people, friends, and many others. And many things might come this way, like “hey, did you know…?”,

> like the word-of-mouth method is probably really important. But of course, I am interested, I read a lot of newspapers. — Interviewee 15

The quote above shows that social interaction and everyday conversations are essential for developing a sustainability understanding and points to the importance of *giving* sense as a way to *make* sense (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991). Informal discussions in private situations influence the perceptions of sustainability that are then fed into the organizational sensemaking process by organizational members. When describing how the organization forms its interpretation of sustainability, the interviewees mentioned various social occasions. In some organizations, which do not work with sustainability on a strategic level (often smaller companies), sustainability was presented as growing organically from within the organization through casual discussions. In other organizations that have taken sustainability to a higher strategic level (larger companies in general) — including explicated visions, roadmaps, and structures for how to work with sustainability — external connections were also emphasized. The interviewees noted that it is important to create social networks outside their own company and connect with researchers and other experts to stay up-to-date with sustainability issues. Hence, different kinds of co-operations in relation to sustainability, e.g., with research institutes, NGOs, or other organizations in the food value chain, were often mentioned:

> We are now collaborating a lot with different partners, like LUKE [Natural Resources Institute Finland], SYKE [Finnish Environment Institute], ETT [Animal Health ETT], and BSAG [Baltic Sea Action Group], these kinds of actors. And then of course retail actors and our direct customers, like industry customers, HoReCa [the Hotel, Restaurant, Catering sector]. So of course, we also get a great deal of information this way. —Interviewee 3

> I have realized that always when I give a presentation, like “this is our roadmap and these are the [sustainability] pillars”, and someone asks, “what does this and that mean?”, e.g., deforestation and how can we be sure that there is no deforestation. Then I go “mmm, wait a moment”… such situations, and through such questions; when you start to get hard questions and you need to go deeper and deeper, that’s how you learn. — Interviewee 13

As Interviewees 3 and 13 describe, interacting with other actors within as well as outside the food system is not only a way to gain information and extract cues about sustainability; it is also a tool for sharing how the company approaches and understands sustainability. Being a sensegiver (a leader rather than a follower) portrays the food companies and their sustainability managers as active agents in the field.

The interviewed food companies described sensegiving as important for establishing an organizational narrative around sustainability and for taking sustainability leadership in the industry. The interviewees asserted that their organization is a sustainability forerunner and that the company has been involved in sustainability longer than many other competitors. Such claims were made by most interviewees, regardless of their company's size or products. Interviewee 11 exemplified this by stating that their organization is only talking about "real" sustainability actions, while indicating that competitors are exaggerating and doing more talking than acting:

> One main point is that we talk about those real [sustainability] issues, what we *do*, with concrete examples. We don't only declare that we are the best in the world at something… — Interviewee 11

Interviewee 11 does not explicate exactly what is meant by "real issues," but their statement shows an attempt to downplay what competing organizations are doing and saying while legitimizing their own company's efforts. The interviewee's company is posited as a forerunner that acts ("what we do") for a more sustainable food system. Communicating this was, however, considered slow and frustrating. This became clear through the way the interviewees talked about consumers and competitors. According to the interviewees, consumers are unable to process the flux of information related to sustainability, and food organizations should guide consumers towards more sustainable foodways. Interviewee 17 verbalized their thoughts on this:

> Then how do we commercialize our sustainability work and what gets the consumer interested, because these are such difficult issues that most consumers don't…they don't have a clue. They are not interested in our Scope 1 and 2 emission reductions. — Interviewee 17

The interviewee emphasizes that consumers are unaware of company sustainability processes, such as Scope 1 and 2 emission reductions (a scientific method for measuring carbon emissions), and ignorant of sustainability on a more in-depth level. By positioning consumers in this way, the interviewee pictures the food company as a more highly educated actor that should take responsibility for sustainability.

The fear of being blamed for either doing too little or talking too much was often reflected in the interviews (and the informants often blamed their competitors of such behaviors). On the one hand, doing too little could constitute a reputational risk, for example, if the company disregards certain sustainability issues that salient stakeholders consider to be the responsibility of the company. On the other hand, if the organization focuses too strongly on talking rather than doing, it may be accused of greenwashing. This is described by Interviewee 14, who emphasizes the focus on communication and marketing in the company's sustainability enactments, and by Interviewee 11, who talks about reputation management:

> The whole production is carbon neutral and now we are thinking about how to define it and what to say about it, on what level. Today the news [talked] about a company in Sweden that had gotten attention because of their advertisements. They claim to have net zero emissions, or whatever they say, but this was found to be misleading. — Interviewee 14

> In a way, it is also crisis management. Because if you might get caught for [doing] things [unsustainably], well, nowadays such things spread like wildfire through social media. A large company like this cannot afford such a situation, in which our values are questioned. — Interviewee 11

The quote by Interviewee 14 illustrates the food companies' anxiety about slipping into bragging and greenwashing while getting others to understand that they handle sustainability issues in a professional manner. Concurrently, if the company does and says nothing about sustainability, their whole business may be at risk, as Interviewee 11 worries. Hence, sustainability sensegiving is a balancing act for food companies.

Altogether, the focus on communication and positioning, which was brought forth during the interviews, illustrates the active sensegiver position that food companies are taking. In this position, the food companies can choose to focus on cues that are relevant for legitimizing the company's own operations and creating a credible image towards other actors. For the food companies, sustainability sensemaking is an iterative and social process of continuously engaging in highly complex issues. This process is characterized by intra- and inter-organizational interaction taking place between the various actors in the food value chain as well as between the company and its individual organizational members. In this process, sustainability language has been normalized as part of the general food discourse, and food companies push transformational acts to the socio-material spheres of food products consumed by individuals.

Conclusions

The studied food companies perceive sustainability as a broad and complex issue; a continuous learning process characterized by ambiguity, unclear boundaries, and trade-offs. Our findings confirm Perey's (2015, 169) suggestion that "sustainability […] presents the sense-maker with polysemy, with competing priorities, not only from multiple contexts to which the term is applied, but also from the paradoxical imperatives inherent in its definitions […]." The companies struggle to balance the different contexts that they are operating in (e.g., the food retail business, agricultural production, consumer everyday practices) and the 3 Ps (profit, people, planet), with business case framings often being prioritized (see e.g., Hanh et al. 2014). This balancing act develops in a process of making and giving sense, through which a plausible narrative is formed that enables the food company to go on with its activities. According to our findings, this process is continuous and non-episodic (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) and is characterized by social and communicative activities (Weick 1995; Weick et al. 2005).

For the studied food companies, sustainability constitutes a strategic meta-problem, which, according to Seidl and Werle (2018), often leads organizations to engage in inter-organizational collaboration to ensure sufficient variety of perspectives for the sensemaking process. Seidl and Werle (2018) suggest that organizations actively select collaborators, but based on our findings, we argue that inter-organizational collaboration also occurs more as a passive act out of necessity. This is due to the dependencies on other value chain actors that the food companies must manage. Food companies cannot act or change in isolation from the processes of primary producers, the demands of powerful retailers, and consumer practices. Their operations are contingent on collaboration with these actors and so are their sustainability sensemaking processes. Furthermore, the sensemaking process is not only taking place at the organizational level, between food companies and other external actors. It is also occurring between the individual and the organizational spheres, as the individual organizational members make sense of sustainability. In the studied Finnish food companies, the perceptions and understandings of sustainability, which were created as part of the private lives of the organizational members, were interlinked with the organizational sensemaking process and cues were fed from the individual to the organizational spheres, and vice versa. Similar interlinkages of individual and organizational sensemaking processes were also noted by Perey (2015). Moreover, our findings reinforce the argument put forward by van der Heijden and Cramer (2017) that sustainability sensemaking in food value chains is, in fact, an act of navigating and adapting to social interactions and a less clear and systematic process than the organizations aim to externally communicate.

As emphasized in earlier organizational sensemaking research (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence 2007; Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015), our study also points to the importance of giving sense as a way to make sense. The interviews uncovered how the meaning of sustainability is socially constructed (see e.g., Pétursson 2018; Ocampo et al. 2021) through both informal and formal discussions along with various forms of interaction within and outside the organization. A sensegiving imperative seems to prevail among food companies, as they stress their central position for gathering information concerning sustainability, reducing its complexity, and spreading knowledge to other food system actors. Food companies act as sensegivers and actively communicate with consumers, farmers, competitors, and employees to achieve a position of a knowledgeable sustainability forerunner. Thus, food companies have taken it as their responsibility to not only make sense of but to also give sense to sustainability. This bidirectional process has been identified in previous research (e.g., Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Sparr 2018; Hübel 2022) and is, according to our study, important for the sustainability sensemaking of food companies. However, whether such bidirectionality accelerates a sustainability transformation, as Hübel (2022) argues, cannot be determined based on our study, which was focused on the characteristics of the sensemaking process. We suggest researchers continue with this topic to turn more attention to temporal aspects of sustainability transformations in the food system, e.g., by analyzing specific sustainability enactments of food producers and consumers and the rhythms of changing food practices.

For transforming foodways, it is important to acknowledge that food companies are positioning themselves as sustainability sensegivers. In the ongoing process of reducing complexity and capturing sustainability in language — which food companies increasingly seem to be taking agency for — food-related narratives are created and changed. On the one hand, our study indicates that sustainability has been normalized in the talk and action of the food companies and their representatives. Considering the central position of food companies in the food value chain, these narratives inevitably spread to other food system actors. For instance, if food companies integrate the concept of carbon emissions into their products and brand marketing on a large scale, such new food features will gradually turn from niche to mainstream (Pétursson 2018) also among consumers. Consequently, this is likely to influence what and how consumers talk about in relation to food. On the other hand, Perey (2015, 167–168) maintained that for sustainability to become successfully embedded, the organization must provide sufficient discursive space to its members to enable new sustainability narratives to get established. Currently, the dominant role of the 3 Ps (profit, people, planet) appears to limit the discursive space to a win-win-win paradigm or to weak sustainability assumptions, in which business and profit-making logics dominate social and ecological aims. To enable more radical changes based on the idea of strong sustainability, i.e., the economic and social systems are subordinate to the ecological system (Ayres et al. 2001; Neumeyer, 2002; Dedeurwaerdere, 2014), more numerous and less narrow discursive spaces may be needed within food companies.

The studied companies try to legitimize and commercialize their sustainability enactments in their external communication, although this was often perceived as risky (being accused of either greenwashing or of not doing enough). While the food companies acknowledge system-level sustainability, i.e., the link between their business and the ecological system, they tend to focus their enactments on selected parts of the food chain, e.g., packaging, or on the product level, e.g., product quality. Such enactments are tangible and comprehendible for individual consumers and, thus, easy to commercialize for the food companies. As they shift the focus of their communication to product-level enactments of sustainability and argue that food system transformation can only occur through "better" products and changed consumer behavior, socio-material transgressions of current foodways emerge. For instance, as food companies promote new products or packages and market them as "better" and "more sustainable," they establish what is to be considered as good and sustainable in relation to food. Consequently, this pushes consumers to reassess their food activities such as changing recipes or how food packages are recycled. The cultural and social expressions of food activities (Peres 2017; Bortolotto & Ubertazzi 2018) are influenced and changed through the food companies' sensemaking and sensegiving processes.

Socio-material aspects of a foodways transformation seemed to prevail among the studied food companies, but Whiteman and Cooper (2011) have argued that ecological materiality should receive more attention. Rather than focusing on cues in the natural environment, food companies seem to turn their attention to signals and information from customers, competitors, and consumers to enable successful business development. Such a focus on social relations in talk and action, instead of ecological cues, indicates a rather low degree of ecological embeddedness; consequently, important ecological material connections of the food system may be overlooked by the food companies (Whiteman & Cooper 2011). Moreover, such ecological disemebeddeness does not support the notion of strong sustainability, i.e., acknowledging that the socio-economic system is dependent on the ecological system and its natural limits (Dedeurwaerdere, 2014). We argue that a shift from communicating and commercializing sustainability to a focus on ecological material aspects and ecological sensemaking (Whiteman & Cooper 2011) is essential for transforming foodways towards strong sustainability. Examples of this can often be found in small-scale, local agri-food organizations, but the meaning of ecological embeddedness in larger industrial food corporations should be further examined.

Complex objects in a diverse environment require complex sensing systems and diverse organizational sensemaking processes (Weick 1995; Seidl & Werle 2018). We have presented the sustainability sensemaking processes of food companies as a multilevel, multifaceted phenomenon, which influences current foodways and contributes to sustainability transformations of the food system. Sustainability and organizational sensemaking are always context dependent, and with this article, we have contributed to the understanding of sensemaking and -giving in the context of food business. We have also advanced the understanding of *sustainability* sensemaking as a theoretical concept. Future research could continue to develop an even more nuanced picture of sustainability sensemaking by adding similar research from other contexts or by focusing on certain phases of the sensemaking cycle (e.g., the enactments or particular framings) of food sustainability. Furthermore, we suggest increased focus on ecological sensemaking, which may provide a valuable alternative perspective to understanding sustainability in times of intensified food system crises.

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SOURCES

Interview materials

The interview material consists of 17 interview transcripts and notes that the first author wrote during and after each interview. All research materials are in the first author's possession and are stored digitally at the University of Helsinki. Detailed information and archival codes will not be presented to protect the anonymity of the interviewees. The list of informants below does not follow the same order as the organizations in Table 1. All interviews were conducted by the first author.

Interviewee 1. September 28, 2021. Manager, Public affairs. Interview conducted at the food company office.
Interviewee 2. October 11, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted at the food company office.
Interviewee 3. October 12, 2021. Sustainability director. Interview conducted via Zoom.
Interviewee 4. October 12, 2021. Brand manager. Interview conducted via Teams.
Interviewee 5. October 15, 2021. Communication and sustainability director. Interview conducted at the interviewer's office.
Interviewee 6. October 21, 2021. Sustainability and public affairs director. Interview conducted at the food company office.
Interviewee 7. October 27, 2021. Communication director. Interview conducted at the food company office.
Interviewee 8. November 2, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted at the food company office.
Interviewee 9. November 5, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted via Zoom.
Interviewee 10. November 10, 2021. Owner, Chairman of the board. Interview conducted via Zoom.
Interviewee 11. November 16, 2021. Commercial director. Interview conducted via Zoom.
Interviewee 12. November 16, 2021. Sustainability manager. Interview via Teams.
Interviewee 13. November 19, 2021. Marketing and brand manager. Interview conducted via Zoom.
Interviewee 14. November 23, 2021. Quality, sustainability and legal director. Interview conducted at the food company office.
Interviewee 15. November 25, 2021. Commercial director. Interview conducted at the food company office.
Interviewee 16. December 8, 2021. CEO. Interview conducted at the interviewer's office.
Interviewee 17. December 10, 2021. Strategy and sustainability director. Interview conducted via Zoom.

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APPENDIX
Interview guide

These questions formed the basis of each interview but were adapted according to the discussion (including ignoring and adding some questions if needed).

Sustainability in the organization

- How would you describe sustainability from the perspective of your organization?
- How is sustainability present in your organization? Could you give an example of some specific situations?
- Could you describe your own work in the organization and how sustainability is present in it?
- Could you give an example of a recent sustainability activity in the organization?
- Where did the initiative for this activity come from?
- How did you obtain the information and knowledge regarding this sustainability matter?
- Which topics have become important during the last couple of years? Why do you think this is?
- How do you prioritize what to focus on in terms of sustainability?
- Could you describe any challenges regarding sustainability in your organization? How do you experience these challenges?
- Have you experienced any successful situation in terms of sustainability in your organization? Could you give an example?
- How has sustainability impacted the way your organization approaches consumers?
- What do you think makes your organization and its products sustainable?

Personal questions

- What does sustainability mean to you personally?
- How is sustainability present in your private, everyday life?
- What kind of consumer are you?
- Has sustainability impacted your behavior and habits? Could you describe how?
- In what kind of situations do you usually encounter sustainability matters?

Concluding questions

- What kind of thoughts and feelings does this discussion trigger in you?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Will LaFleur

Storying Sensuous Atmospheres of Peaches and Wheat

Towards New Horizons of Imagination and Possibility for Sustainable Food Systems

Abstract

Policy initiatives, research, and professional advice concerned with sustainable food systems remain largely stuck conceptualising individual consumers as rational subjects in need of technocratic interventions to induce behaviour change. While critical approaches do account for the relevance of socio-ecological, political, and economic circumstances, the affective, sensuous, and im/material relations — sensuous atmospheres — that are indissoluble from everyday life are either left out, or effectively conceptualised as the inert, given background on which life plays out. Taking the imagination as a key political participant in the struggle for a more just and sustainable world, this article aims to 'story' the sensuous atmospheres of everyday life in agricultural practice, making sensuous atmospheres visible as the very sensory-material substance that socio-ecological, political, and economic formations take. Drawing from sensuous (auto)ethnographic encounters on a farm in northern Italy, I ask: what kinds of stories are the sensuous atmospheres of techno-industrial and alternative agricultural practices made of, what kinds of stories do they tell, and how might they help to imagine new horizons of possibility in the making of more sustainable food systems? I begin the article with a discussion problematising food systems and the inadequate approaches often used to render them sustainable. I then conceptualise the notion of 'storying sensuous atmospheres', presenting the sensory ethnographic material in the style of 'sensuous scholarship' in which the fieldwork is simultaneously analysed and evocatively storied. I conclude the article by suggesting that the storying of sensuous atmospheres is one strategy to precipitate new horizons of imagining — in food systems and beyond — a more sustainable world.

Keywords: Sustainable Food Systems, Agriculture, Atmospheres, Sensory Ethnography, Politics of Imagination, Sensuous Politics, Sensory Studies, Degrowth

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The war against the imagination is the only one the capitalists have actually managed to win (Graeber 2011, 113)

Introduction: Storying Food System Transformation

Despite decades of warnings from scientists, international treaties, and both institutional and grassroots awareness-raising, urgently needed sustainability transformations have largely failed to materialise across industry and government around the world. In sustainability and climate research, policy and expert recommendations are often framed in terms of consumer behavioural change (Köhler, Geels, Kern, Markard, Onsongo et al. 2019; Sahakian & Wilhite 2014; Shove 2010; Spurling, McMeekin, Southerton, Shove, and Welch 2013). In policy initiatives related to food system change, health, and sustainability, research also tends to focus on individual and cognised 'demand-side' issues, such as consumer's dietary choices, without giving critical attention to the systemic realities within which human behaviour unfolds (c.f. Creutzig, Roy, Lamb, Azevedo, Bruine de Bruin et al. 2019; Schill, Anderies, Lindahl, Folke, Polasky et al. 2019)[1]. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, agriculture-related emissions and the global obesity epidemic continue unabated (FAO 2020a; WHO 2021), suggesting that behaviour change campaigns are either misguided or insufficient for solving the crises at hand.

In this article I identify and situate two broad types of agricultural modalities and use ethnographic material to open an alternative route to conceptualising, researching, and imagining sustainable food system change in two interrelated ways. First, I attend to the sensory experiences of place, emplacement, and the atmospheres — *sensuous atmospheres* (Pink 2011, 2015; Sumartojo & Pink 2019) — of agricultural foodways formations; the myriad stories that compose them, and the horizons of imagination and possibility they might unfold as prospects for intervention, design, and activism. This approach emphasises the socio-ecological, economic, and political power relations of food systems that are sensuously and viscerally experienced as part of everyday life. Second, I develop a transformational approach that aims to go beyond mere critique by revealing "the historical, ecological, and civilisational capacities and experiences of human emancipation" (Hosseini & Gills 2020, 15). In striving for this transformational orientation, I employ the idea that knowledge is not "classificatory", as modern science might have it, "it is

1 For example, Shove (2010) has described several U.K. policy initiatives that are primarily focused on incentivising behaviour change; meanwhile, peasant and Indigenous groups around the world have long been practicing and advocating for sustainable food system alternatives like agroecology (e.g. Altieri & Nicholls 2017), a term — and the practices the term represents — that is still disputed in international policy-making (IDS and IPES-Food 2022).

rather *storied*" (Ingold 2011a, 159; original italics). Storying, in the sense I use it here, is two-fold: it refers first to the idea that things "*are* their stories, identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations" (Ingold 2011, 162; original italics); and second, through 'sensuous scholarship' (Stoller 1997), storying aims to reveal possibilities of world-making which have become obscured or erased under the pressures of modernity, but nonetheless contain seeds of possible futures that might comprise more sustainable ways of making and organising the world.

Modern agricultural foodways are strongly configured by global agricultural power structures. I aim to make visible some ways that these global powers configure the sensuous and visceral structures of feeling in everyday life. Accordingly, I ask: what kinds of stories are the 'sensuous atmospheres' of techno-industrial and 'alternative' agricultural practices made of, what kinds of stories do they tell, and how might they help to imagine new horizons of possibility in the making of more sustainable food systems? Moving beyond normative orientations in the natural and social sciences, I seek to enact a 'sensory sustainability science' that better accounts for the indissoluble multi-sensorial and more-than-representational relationalities of everyday life. (Heinrichs 2019a; Heinrichs 2019b; Heinrichs & Kagan 2019; Vannini 2015). That is, rather than attempting to provide categorical answers to the questions asked, I opt to tell a story that reveals the ongoing, often overlooked or invisible sensory and visceral minutia of everyday life, and how these structures of feeling are produced by practices and ways of living that challenge, but are also shaped by and deeply entangled with, global and historical extractivist "onto-logics" and structures of power (Durante, Kröger & LaFleur 2021, 21; Chagnon, Durante, Gills, Hagolani-Albov, Hokkanen et al. 2022; Ye, van der Ploeg, Schneider & Shanin 2020).

I begin the article with a critical discussion of global food system sustainability, and detail how policy interventions are often still formulated around idealised assumptions about rational, individual economic subjects. I then situate and define the notion of 'agricultural foodways formations' before discussing the methodology and/as theory: sensory ethnography, sensuous atmospheres, and the storying of sensuous atmospheres as a political praxis of 'living well'. In this, the imagination is a key site of political struggle, "understood as the radical capacity to envisage things differently and construct alternative political projects" (Bottici and Challand 2011, 1). Drawing from sensory ethnographic fieldwork undertaken at a biodynamic farm and Ecovillage[2] in northern Italy, I use sensu-

2 The Global Ecovillage Network defines an Ecovillage as: "an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned participatory processes in all four dimensions of sustainability (social, culture, ecology, and economy) to regenerate social and natural environments" (GEN n.d.).

ous scholarship to build this radical capacity, situating, historicising, and speculating on the sensuous atmospheres of working in peach orchards and wheat fields. I conclude the article by discussing its limitations, speculating future areas of study, and finish with a series of provocative, future-oriented questions aimed at precipitating imaginative work that asks the reader to seriously consider the implications — sensory, visceral, socio-ecological, economic, and political — that might flow from a world that practices agriculture in an 'alternative' mode.

Food System Problems, or Human Nature?

Global agricultural and environmental authorities such as the FAO (2020b) and IPBES (2018) demonstrate that agriculture is a major contributor to destructive land-use change, biodiversity loss, aquatic pollution, depletion of surface water, and emitter of greenhouse gases — particularly methane and nitrous oxide (Lynch, Cain, Frame & Pierrehumbert 2021). Yet, agriculture is not a monolith, and there is nothing inevitable about the negative ecological and health effects that might flow from it. Three separate reports, published between 2009 and 2017 by the corporate watchdog ETC Group (Emerging Technology and Corporate Monitoring)[3], identify two types of foodways globally: the "Industrial Food Chain" (Chain) and "Peasant Food Web" (Web) (ETC 2017)[4]. The ETC Group's findings show that although agriculture as a whole accounts for up to 50% of habitable land use globally, the Chain alone accounts for around 75% of that total but provides only around 30% of food meant for human consumption. When transportation and storage are accounted for, the Chain is estimated to emit between 85%-90% of all agricultural emissions. The Web, however, accounts for only around 25% of agricultural land use globally but produces 70% of the world's food for human consump-

3 Using FAO measurement parameters.

4 ETC Group, an independent organisation founded by author and activist Pat Mooney, defines the Peasant Food Web as: "small-scale producers, usually family- or women-led, that include farmers, livestock-keepers, pastoralists, hunters, gatherers, fishers and urban and peri-urban producers" (2017, 8), and who work land that is 5 hectares or less. ETC Group stresses that the Web is not a synonym for agroecology, organic, permaculture or other production systems, but acknowledge that most of what is produced in the Web is de facto 'organic'. Further, the Web includes those who own/control their own land, those who work for others and/or have been dispossessed of their land (see work on 'land grabbing' by Chain-affiliated organisations (see Borras & Franco 2012, for an overview). On the other hand, ETC Group defines the Industrial Food Chain" as: "a linear sequence of links running from production inputs to consumption outcomes. The first links in the Chain are crop and livestock genomics, followed by pesticides, veterinary medicines, fertilisers, and farm machinery. From there, the Chain moves on to transportation and storage, and then milling, processing, and packaging. The final links in the Chain are wholesaling, retailing, and ultimately delivery to homes or restaurants" (2017, 10).

tion, or about 50% when off-farm production, such as foraging and fishing, is discounted (ETC 2017)[5]. The numbers associated with the Web and the Chain suggest that very different agricultural and food-procuring practices are occurring simultaneously, but the Chain often comes to stand for 'agriculture' as a monolith. The numbers also suggest that the Chain, despite the many arguments from its proponents that call for its continuation in the name of food security (e.g Reynolds & Braun, 2022), is not living up to its long-touted promise of 'feeding the world'.

A view of agriculture based on the ETC Group's numbers does not seem, however, to have had much impact toward restructuring the way agriculture and food systems are organised. Instead, international bodies reporting on climate and biodiversity, such as the U.N., FAO, or UNEP, as well as many national initiatives, persist in policy that is ostensibly geared to 'feeding the world'. Food and sustainability initiatives might revolve around the imperatives of dietary change. For example, reports often highlight cultural or territorial food knowledges and traditions like the so-called Mediterranean Diet or New Nordic Diets, and urge people to *choose* more plant-based diets (see e.g. Our World in Data 2019; FAO 2020c; IPBES 2018). The things that humans and others eat (i.e. diets) are undoubtedly a critical factor in transitioning to living more sustainably. However, with a narrow demand-side focus that urges individuals to change their diet, the blame and burden of sustainability comes to rest with individuals, and is apparently predicated on the idea that sustainable societies are possible *if only* consumers would change their behaviour in response to having "better information" (Shove 2010, 1275).

Is it plausible that people around the world are simply *choosing* to ignore the advice of experts? The close correlations with trade policies and increases in non-communicable diseases would appear to undercut this possibility (Zuryak 2020). In addition, much behaviour change theory still relies on deep-seated assumptions about human behaviour (Schill et al. 2019). As Ingold (2000, 27–39) has unequivocally shown, neoclassical economics, rational choice theory, and behavioural psychology — to name only a few schools of such thought — are exemplars par excellence of these assumptions, namely that individual choice is an extension of evolved human nature: *homo economicus*. When recommendations from the FAO, national or international governmental bod-

5 Despite a recent controversy over of these data sets, in which some FAO-affiliated researchers (Lowder, Sánchez & Bertini. 2021; see also, Ricciardi, Ramankutty, Mehrabi Jarvis, and Chookolingo 2018) inexplicably alter the measurement parameters that the FAO itself uses, the numbers presented by ETC Group have been reproduced consistently since 2009 and remain widely recognised as a legitimate proxy, including officially by the FAO (see GRAIN 2022, for a collective response from ETC Group, GRAIN, IPES-food, among other food-focused organisations).

ies show a clear investment in pursuing behaviour change as policy, they also reveal their dependence on such assumptions. Broadening the examination of this issue, I look beyond behaviour change to focus on the systemic relations set up by the agricultural foodways categories that form the basis of this analysis, and which set the possibilities and limitations for the atmosphereric configurations and the sensous and visceral experiences they might afford.

Agricultural Foodways Formations

I use two lcategories of agricultural foodways formations to orient my analysis and help contextualise this story. I refer to these categories — loosely inspired by the ETC Group's Chain and Web formulations — as 'techno-industrial' and 'alternative'[6]. These referents are not meant to be tightly defined categories. Even loosely defined, however, each one can afford a widely differing range of possibilities for sensuous experience. Both techno-industrial and alternative agricultural foodways comprise policies, practices, knowledges, financial, and material infrastructures that configure distinct, even overlapping structures of feeling (Anderson 2016), including everyday sensory and visceral experience (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2015). This is not only the case for those working in a particular agricultural formation, but also for those eating from them or living in their proximity. Indeed, in alternative formations, as I will show, one is probably more likely to encounter sensory difference, such as the visual and gustatory differences experienced in encounters with spherical red, orange, and green coloured eggplants (Figure 1).

I conceptualise *techno-industrial agricultural formations* as those which: favour mono-cropping; depend on 'Green Revolution' technologies such as external, synthetic inputs of fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides; are primarily concerned with increased yields as the main driver of continuing operation; tend to be associated with reduced biodiversity; orient sales toward export markets; do not rely exclusively on soil but also hydroponic and aeroponic warehouse agriculture; and rely heavily on cheap and often imported and exploited labour. In addition, a significant portion of techno-industrial agriculture is set up not to produce food, but rather to produce animal feed,

6 I use the term 'techno-industrial' in favour of the more common term 'conventional' to denote 1) a form of agriculture that has emerged with and through industrial capitalist-driven technological innovation (Mintz 1986), and 2) that this type of agriculture is a historically recent phenomenon that began to develop its current formation only around 150 years ago (Marchesi 2020; Melillo 2012; Patel 2013). A consideration of the history of agriculture then, suggests that techno-industrial agriculture is rather unconventional. 'Alternative' is used with the recognition that there are not only 'alternatives to' techno-industrial agriculture, but that globally, agricultural foodways formations have existed in various 'alternative' guises for millennia (Graeber & Wengrow 2021).

Figure 1. Purple-less Eggplants in September, northern Italy. Photo Credit: Author.

fibre, and biomass/fuel. Techno-industrial agriculture is formed by and embedded in a socio-politico-economic system that, through abstraction and alienation, requires endless capacities for scalability: standardisation, control, and predictability (Tsing 2012). It has strongly shaped technologies, ways of knowing and knowledges, legal regulations, financial and labour flows, non/human, sensuous, and visceral relationships with food in profound and fundamental ways. Techno-industrial formations have clearly become the dominant agricultural mode, having an outsized impact on the making and maintenance of globalised society while being implicated in myriad environmental and health ills. Consequently, and although my case study is based on agricultural foodways formations in the Global North, resistance to techno-industrial foodways formations is undoubtedly a global phenomenon[7] that is playing out in myriad ways, and is often far more coercive and violent outside of the Global North (see e.g. Borras & Franco 2012; Cáceres 2014; Svampa 2019).

In contrast, a*lternative agricultural formations* comprise distinct (but also overlapping) kinds of technologies, regulations and standards, flows (or lack) of finance, labour, ways of knowing and knowledge, non/human, sensuous, and visceral relations with food. I conceptualise alternative formations as those which: operate under labels such as agroecology, regenerative agriculture, permaculture, market gardening, natural farming, biodynamic, organic, I/indigenous, or other forms of agriculture that have been practiced before the advent of techno-industrial, or else arose in contradistinction to it. Common practices in these alternatives consist of: favouring polycultures over monocultures; zero or significantly reduced pesticide, herbicide and fungicide use; the use of 'green' manure from biomass created on farm, or the use of animal (including human) manure from on-farm or more local sources such as local municipalities or other nearby farms; an absence of uniform concern with yield as the ultimate driver of operation; orientation of sales toward local markets; and less reliance on imported labour[8]. These alternative formations are often, but not only (e.g. market gardening), organised as risk-sharing and community-supported organisations and are primarily focused on growing food for human consumption. From these delineations, and based on my own ethnographic and anthropological experience, I define agricultural foodways formations as: *emplaced formations that may be distinguished by their differing (and often overlapping) sets of knowledges, skilled practices, organisational features, political and economic power relations, and the material, sensuous, and visceral atmospheres of experience — the structures of feeling — that ongoingly make and are made by these relations.*

Theoretical Correspondences: Sensory Ethnography, Sensuous Atmospheres, and the Imagination

Sensory ethnography is defined by Pink (2015, 4–5) as "a critical methodology which…departs from the classic observational approach to insist that

7 For example, in an article on the transnational peasant movement, La Vía Campesina, Martinez-Torres and Rosset (2010) note that "rural organisations and peasantries around the world share the same global problems even though they confront different local and national realities". The "global problems" they refer to are the same that I have identified here regarding techno-industrial agriculture and the socio-ecological, economic, and political power relations it inheres.

8 Instead, many alternative formations rely on volunteer labour, or else frame this essentially unpaid labour as 'educational'. This current state of labour relations can indeed be problematic, and more research is needed in this area.

ethnography is a reflexive and experiential process through which academic and applied understanding, knowing and knowledge are produced". As such, it is simultaneously methodology and theory. Methodologically, sensory ethnography attends closely to the ways that people (and the researchers themselves) apprehend the world in both movement and action beyond language, but also through linguistic and other forms of representation. Conceptually, it builds on the anthropology of the senses/sensory anthropology literature (Stoller 1989; Classen 1993; Seremetakis 1996; Howes 1991; Howes 2005a; Ingold 2000) to presuppose that all experience is always multi-sensorial[9] and imbued with sociocultural meanings and values that are mutually constituted through historical, cultural, socio-ecological, political and economic flows, designs, structures, and customs. Further, sensory ethnography relies on a theory of emplacement, "the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment" (Howes 2005b, 7), in which place is understood as an event, an occurrence, or a meshwork rather than a static point in time and space, and that one's body, as part of the environment "provides us not simply with embodied knowing and skills that we use to act on or in that environment, but that the body itself is simultaneously physically transformed as part of this process" (Pink 2011, 347). The sensuousness of being emplaced, along with the socio-ecological, economic, and political affects that infuse place, invites us into thinking through *atmospheres* (Pink 2011, 2015; Sumartojo & Pink 2019). Finally, sensory ethnography extends beyond the field site to conceptualise also writing and representation as part of the "ethnographic place". This is defined as "the combining, connecting and interweaving of theory, experience, reflection, discourse, memory and imagination" (2015, 48) that occurs during the analytic and writing phases of research, and which is employed here through sensuous scholarship (Stoller 1997).

Into the Atmosphere(s)

When speaking of atmosphere, people may do so as a kind of shorthand to refer to sensory experience — indeed, what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt meshes with and configures atmosphere (Sumartojo & Pink 2019). As such, atmospheres are indissolubly sensuous and thus I use the term 'sensuous atmospheres' to emphasise this point. Thinking with, through, and in atmospheres (Sumartojo & Pink 2019) extends the conceptual and analytical power of sensory ethnography in three important ways. First, Sumartojo and Pink (2019, 4) suggest that atmosphere is "a question of attunement and attention to what has to configure for [atmospheres] to exist". This leads us to

9 It is "*neither* dominated by *nor* reducible to a visual [or other sensory] mode of understanding" (Pink 2015, 96, original italics)

consider that both techno-industrial and alternative agricultural foodways comprise policies, practices, knowledges, and financial and material infrastructures related to agriculture that configure its experiential world. Second, Anderson (2016, 746) draws attention to the diffusion of structures of feeling as "an experience of the present that both extends beyond particular sites/occasions and is shared across otherwise separate sites/occasions", which suggests that atmospheres are not place-bound: that global economic and political formations obtain in all kinds of locales regardless of cultural differences. This helps me to focus the present article on a farm in northern Italy, but also to read the sensuous atmospheres that configure the farm as also configuring other, seemingly unrelated places and communities around the globe. Third, thinking atmospherically is also about breaking the boundaries of imagination and possibility when atmospheres are understood as:

> "…emergent and continuously configured [allowing] us to see not only what meanings they might carry and what work they might do in people's lives, but also what they make possible into the future and what they enable us to imagine and know in ways that were not possible before. This provides signposts to the relationship between atmospheres and design, points of potential intervention and the futures that thinking atmospherically might bring into view." (Sumartojo & Pink 2019, 4)

In short, the concept of atmosphere helps in thinking with and through uncertainty and possibility by attending to the primacy of movement and becoming, as well as variations in skill and sensory experience (as opposed to 'culture', see Ingold, 2000) that are entangled with socio-ecological, economic, and political power relations, the weather, climate, and myriad other more-than-human materialities. If thinking in, with, and through atmospheres is an attempt to deal with uncertainty and possibility, then practices of care, following Annemarie Mol's study of the 'logic of care' (2008), are critically important relations. Thinking through uncertainty and possibility, and striving for care-full relations, I contend, can open new horizons for imagining and intervening on behalf of a future that is both liveable and just for all.

Storying Sensuous Atmospheres as a Political Praxis for 'Living Well'

The strategy of storying sensuous atmospheres is intended as a form of praxis for 'living well'. This begins with a mediation on the notion that things are their stories (see page 2), and concludes with the notion that stories themselves are critical tools in provoking the imagination of the possible, which is considered here as a key site of political struggle:

> "…the properties of materials, regarded as constituents of an environment, cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced. In that sense, every property [of a material] is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate." (Ingold 2011a, 30)

Sensuous storying flows from this logic: describing the practical experiences encountered in the sensuous atmospheres of material things is to tell stories of how the constituents of these atmospheres change, mix, or mutate. In doing so, I aim to convey how agricultural atmospheres occur in erratic accordance with their historical and ongoing relationalities, and their future-orientations. This historical-relational view attempts to make visible nuanced qualities and components of agricultural work, its products, and constituents, as a strategy of provoking the imagination of the possible. Making such aspects of life visible, I argue, is essential for birthing new ways of imagining how food systems might be both approached in research and made in practice. This emphasis on imagination is intended to resonate with a long tradition of those committed, in David Graeber's words (2011, 47), "to the idea that the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and, could just as easily make differently".

But how then, is imagination to be excited, provoked, expanded, opened, made rhizomatic, revolutionary? One way, with both Graeber (2011) and Ingold (2022), is to consider the imagination as an immanent principle constituting social reality and lived, sensuous and visceral experience. In a hyper mediated world, popular imagination appears captured primarily by representations of (im)possibility that take the modern world (e.g. neoliberal, capitalist, etc.) as 'natural', while positioning imagination as an abstract, immaterial object. The task of interrupting such representations requires, in part, shedding light on the material, sensuous everyday realities in which imagination is rooted. Academic writing that is committed to sensuous description is one strategy of the imagination and its expansion that is aimed at showing a different world is possible, one in which conviviality and the material well-being of all is the highest priority. Indeed, common among many alternative foodways practitioners and activists around the globe is the endeavour of 'living well', or putting 'well-being' at the centre of society. Greater attention to the sensuous experiences that enfold this world can be a key way to pursue this. Stoller (1997) suggests that fuller attention to sensuousness of experience is necessary to live well, while Porteous (1991) has suggested that a more balanced approach to multi-sensoriality encourages deeper involvement with the world, and that such involvement leads to care.

Drawing from these and other sensory-oriented writers on food, architecture, geography and more (Pallassama 2012; Tuan 1993; Petrini 2001), Pink (2015, 69) suggests that "sensory ethnography has certain congruences with the ethics of those who hope to make the world a better place, seeing greater sensorial awareness as a route to achieving this".

The idea of 'living well', 'making the world a better place', seeking 'well-being for all', or arguing 'another world is possible', may easily be derided as too subjective, arbitrary, or detached wishful thinking. Yet, drawing from the emerging body of literature and activism advancing the Degrowth movement, Schmelzer, Vetter and Vansintjan (2022, 29) explicitly contrast a Degrowth notion of well-being with the normative, capitalist notion of well-being: "degrowth aims at a society in which well-being is mediated less by capitalist market transactions, exchange values, or material consumption, and more by collective forms of provisioning, use values, and fulfilling, meaningful, and convivial relationships". It is in these collective forms of provisioning and convivial relations, and not capitalist relations dominated by exchange value, that a more sensuous, care-full, and sustainable existence may be found. It is therefore one of the tasks of academic research to make visible the sensuousness and care-fullness of such relations so that they might break through the current "horizons of possibility" (Graeber 2011, 62) that are produced through the structures of feeling that radiate from food systems organised toward capitalist growth. It is this Degrowth sense of 'living well' that this article advances.

Storying the Rupture Town Ecovillage: Sensuous Atmospheres in Entangled Agricultures

In the analysis that follows I am primarily concerned to draw attention to the distinct differences in the sensuous atmospheres of the 'techno-industrial' and 'alternative' categories outlined above. These categories, like atmospheres (and indeed 'cultures'), leak, stray, and overlap even as they reveal difference. Although culture can be a useful analytical starting point in some cases, the analysis I make in this article is inspired by Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) critique of the concept of culture as a bounded and static object of study, and aligns with Ingold's critiques of the traditional cultural foci of the anthropology of the senses (see Ingold 2000, 243–287, Ingold 2011b, 2011c), and of course classical approaches to culture in anthropological disciplines broadly speaking. Instead, this analysis reorients attention to questions of power (i.e. historical relationalities), the processes and practices of place-making (i.e. enskillment in, through, and with sensuous atmospheres) and resistance (i.e. sensuous and visceral politics) (Gupta & Ferguson 1997); all of which are better suited than the category of culture for the aims of this article. Nonetheless, I take localised sensuous atmospheres and visceral experience — mutually constituted by global agricultural foodways formations — as my basis for analysis, understanding the senses as processual forms of knowing and knowledge in their own right (Maslen 2015). Together, these conceptual positions move us toward a more-than-representational approach[10] and the transdisciplinary project of critical sensory ethnography (Pink 2015, 15).

The sensory ethnography presented here was undertaken at an Ecovillage and biodynamic-certified farm called 'Rupture Town' over a two-month period in the summer of 2018. It consisted of everyday sensuous participant-observation as a farm labourer on a certified biodynamic farm and Ecovillage community in northern Italy. Two follow-up visits were taken in the autumn of 2018 and the winter of 2019. Although the fieldwork was originally planned as being carried out in an alternative agriculture formation, the biodynamic farm was immersed in a wider landscape dominated by techno-industrial formations, precipitating a significant degree of entanglement between them. Fieldwork activities consisted of classic participant observation, field notes, drawings, spontaneous conversations, and interviews, as well as photographs, video, and sound recordings. A small part of this analysis uses 3rd party documents as supplemental materials. The names, pronouns, and places referenced in what follows have been intentionally changed or obscured to maintain participants' privacy and anonymity. I present the (auto)ethnographic material through a sensuous scholarship (Stoller 1997) centered around a series of photographs, bringing evocative force to academic insight and inviting the reader to sensuously attune with the ethnography. This style is meant to move, entice, surprise, and incite imagination and possibility.

A Rupture in Place

Rupture Town, a radical social project connected with the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and Slow Food International, was founded in 2011 following the purchase of an old farmhouse in a small hilltop village in northern Italy. The aim was to create a space for informal peer-to-peer participatory community activism and convivial living. From its very inception, Rupture Town's orientation contrasts with the dominant ways of organising social relations and agriculture under capitalism, seeking instead to create a route to sustainable and harmonious lifestyles that centre the historical roots of the local area through the promotion of social activities. An essential social element at the core of Rupture Town is the notion of food sovereignty, pursued through agricultural cultivation and various food processing and distribution practices.

10 For a sample of more-than-representational theories, see Vannini 2015.

In 2014, the agricultural component of Rupture Town began in earnest when the Ecovillage began renting 8 hectares of farmland to cultivate vegetables, cereals, and fruits. In 2016, Rupture Town co-purchased the farmland — including the attached buildings and old farm equipment — they had been renting, and began the process of bringing the farm more fully under biodynamic production and stabilising the foundation of the Ecovillage.

During the nearly 2.5 months of fieldwork I undertook in 2018, Rupture Town was run by three families (six adults and four children) and at least six associated persons, including two full-time farming apprentices who regularly assisted in the organisation of events, activities, and planning new projects. Volunteers — drawn from online spaces such as WorkAway and WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) — came to help from around the world. They were a constant, essential part of Rupture Town's operations. Rupture Town's activities had, up to the time of fieldwork, primarily been concerned with the restoration of the old farmhouses they had purchased, using natural and salvaged materials. The core members had permanently moved into the Main house (on the hilltop) only a few months before I arrived for fieldwork. In this sense the project was early into a new stage of becoming. Despite the primary focus on building renovation, Rupture Town had already begun running several activities, including engaging in activist work with an anti-mafia organisation, hosting pasta-making workshops, Boy Scout farm camps, farming and gardening school courses, and open-farm days to promote their presence and activism in the region. They also had begun baking large batches of sourdough bread both for sale and gifting, and collaborating with local artisans to turn their heirloom cereals into beer, pasta, and flour products. Wine had also begun production, grown from vines at a Rupture Town member's family farm in the adjoining wine region. These products were sold in local farmer's markets, online platforms, local retail shops, and, along with their fresh produce, were purchased by several high-end restaurants in the area.

After finishing fieldwork, Rupture Town's activities have increased in frequency and their number of collaborators has expanded. Rupture Town's agricultural and food production, events, and other projects are of course meant to support the day-to-day running of the Ecovillage, yet these activities should not be seen merely as a means to financial stability. Indeed, such activities comprise the constellation of everyday, socio-ecological relations that can easily be read — as I do here, following Chatterton (2010) — as anti- and post-capitalist modes of making and organising life, even while being subject to capitalist structures in many ways. The production of this alternative space in a rural setting, surrounded by and partly infused with landscapes shaped by capitalist modes of production, produced a strikinlgy divergent

Figure 2. The primary fields of the biodynamic farm: To the far left (north) is an heirloom mixed wheat crop almost ready for harvest. The horizon is seen in the east. Photo credit: Author.

sensuous-atmospheric space, contrasting sharply against, amongst, and despite the dominant organising principles of techno-industrial agriculture in the surrounding landscapes.

Alter-Native Farming

Rupture Town's agricultural director, Jesus, refers to the biodynamic farm in various ways: an organism (*organismo*), as permaculture, agroecology, natural, indigenous (*agricoltura indigena*)[11]. Jesus's family had farmed in the area for some generations. His university studies in comparative religion — a field saturated in ancient agricultural knowledges — combined with his life-long agricultural experience to inform his philosophy. The farm sits at the bottom of a long, gently sloping hill dotted with techno-industrial wheat fields and hazelnut orchards. The northward hill leads to a small creek before the land rises up abruptly to the north and east into a forested hilltop, where the Main house is located (Figure 2). To the east, the boundary is marked by a techno-industrial hazelnut orchard, with forest beyond that. The farm provides most of the food eaten by Rupture Town members, associates, and volunteers. At the time of fieldwork in 2018, nearly every crop being grown consisted of multiple varieties: 28 types of tomato, two types of tomatillo, four types of zucchini, three

11 Where the Latin indigĕna→gignĕre, means "to generate", while also being suggestive of the revival of ancient agricultural knowledge.

Figure 3. A series of contrasts: An alternative peach orchard (foreground), a barren techno-industrial wheat field, a hazelnut orchard (far left), and a forested hill. The primary fields of Rupture Town's farm are out of frame to the left. Photo credit: Author.

types of eggplant, up to five types wheat, plus multiple varieties of many other crops: legumes, peaches, squash, and more.

At the time of fieldwork there were plans for building a cafe on the ground floor of the Main house, and the construction of dormitories was underway for the housing of additional volunteers. Rupture Town's members saw their project and farm as something much bigger than their own members, and thus were engaged in reviving a rural area whose population had dwindled in the decades following World War II, as has been the case in many so-called 'developed' and 'developing' regions around the world. The results of this phenomenon are felt in atmospheres that are composed of an aging populace, run-down buildings, the relative absences of human social activity, and the rise of monoculture agricultural landscapes owned by large national and multi-national companies.

What's in the Teaches of Peaches? Or, Multi-sensory Enskillment

The sensuous experience of Rupture Town's farm contrasted often with the techno-industrial formations that permeated the area. This can be *seen* rather starkly in Figure 3: a woman harvests peaches at the end of a shabby, messy-looking orchard row belonging to the biodynamic farm. A filter has been applied to the photo to accent the feel of that mid-July day — brilliant blue skies and a blazing hot sun. A variety of grasses, weeds, and herbs are growing all over the peach orchard, trampled under-foot by volunteers sent

Figure 4. Three 'white' peaches, plucked from the tree at the peak of ripeness. Photo credit: Author.

to pluck the ripe peaches for immediate delivery. The bulk of the small orchard grows out of frame to the right, where the bigger peach trees' shadows are only just showing a presence. The unkempt mess of the orchard contrasts sharply with the barren field beyond, now bone-dry under the glaring sun. A few weeks before the photo was taken, the field was host to a monoculture of wheat, all growing about the same height. The field had recently been cleared of all the leftover cuttings, leaving it naked to the sun. The former wheat field not only *looks* desertified, it *feels* desertified: when I walk on it, the ground is extremely hard, impenetrable but for the dry cracks running like a meshwork over the surface. The dry, hot air is especially palpable as the heat radiates back from the surface. With the soil exposed and nothing growing, it was becoming 'dirt' (Montgomery 2012). The feeling is one of desolation, all the more ironic because of the rich agricultural history that is so integral to this land. There is little life to be observed — few insects seen or heard, none jumping about or biting legs and arms. Only a dry air enters your nose, vaguely dusty and hot even in the relative humidity of the day. When a thunderstorm comes through — and several did — the rain does not penetrate into the earth but simply runs off its surface, carrying away top soil with it — erosion.

Picking peaches in the orchard next to the naked field, we feel relatively cool, even when standing in direct sun. The green spongey grass is soft underfoot, a nostril-filling herbaceousness and a hint of moisture hangs in the air and life is positively — and quite literally — buzzing. There are a seemingly infinite number of habitable places and temptations for all manner of insects, lizards, birds, probably snakes too, though we didn't see any. A thunderstorm coming through has a profoundly different effect in the peach orchard compared to the barren field next door. Here, the matted grasses will hold rainwater in, giving a chance for it to penetrate the soil underfoot. The mouth-watering prospect of sinking one's teeth into a juicy peach always loomed large (Figure 4). Jesus encourages us to taste the peaches to learn what a ripe peach looks, feels, tastes, and smells like. This is because the peaches are harvested at peak ripeness for immediate distribution — picked-to-order. A tree-ripened peach has a significant positive effect on the taste, texture, and aroma of a peach, as it does with many other fruiting crops. This became abundantly clear the first time I ate a peach from the supermarket after leaving Rupture Town: the taste was so bland and disappointing I haven't had another peach since. Atmospheres of taste of course extended beyond the peach orchard as well. Upon returning from a short trip to his home in Brussels, one volunteer I worked with responded to my inquiry about what he ate while back home: "I mostly ate meat when I was in Belgium. Here at the farm when I eat vegetables, it feels like I'm eating *something*. In Belgium, the vegetables just taste like water" (Field Notes, 2018a). The Belgian volunteer points directly to the sensuous experience of an eater tasting vegetables in both kinds of foodways formations: one where meat is preferable because vegetables are tasteless, and another where meat becomes less important because the vegetables are so flavourful. Indeed, my first bite into one the 28 tomatoes being grown made me furious to know that growing up in the Southwestern U.S. — the ancestral home of tomatoes — I had been so ceaselessly subjected to tasteless red spheres of water mass, that I never much cared for the taste of a fresh tomato. Five years after having worked in Rupture town, I still dream about eating fresh tomatoes for 'dessert' with olive oil and a pinch of salt. This was bliss (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Four boxes of freshly picked tomatoes. Six different types of tomatoes can be seen. Can you tell which tomatoes were picked by a new volunteer with 'unskilled vision' (c.f. Grasseni 2010)?

Back in the orchard we pick countless boxes of peaches. In order to pick the ripest peaches, one needs to become skilled at identification (or become a bird, since the birds seemed invariably to get to the ripest peaches first!). This multi-sensory process required gripping the peach to check for firmness, examining its colour, holding it to your nose to check for that fresh, juicy aroma it should emit, and finally biting into it to confirm if the other sensory aspects equate to that perfectly sweet flavour with a firm but forgiving texture. If a peach that looked ripe was in fact not, you would know it almost immediately after trying to bite into it. The texture would be closer to that of an apple, and the fuzz would give and unbearable acidic feeling that would make you pull away, shivering. Tasting the peach and attending closely to all these sensory cues helped to situate all its sensory qualities in relation to each other, so that when you had become skilled — a two-month process in my case — you finally had a sense that a peach was ripe just by looking at it.

Eating peaches directly from the tree was something we could do, as no toxic sprays of any kind were used on them. The application of pesticides would likely have made it dangerous to taste a peach directly from the tree, rendering the ways of knowing generated through tasting a peach impossible to realise. (One wonders what becomes of birds that eat peaches from pesticide-coated peaches.) Yet the absence of the taste of peaches in the techno-industrial formation is apparently normal, confirmed by a Penn State University agricultural extension[12] guide, which states: "Most peaches are harvested based on firmness and colour" (Crassweller, Kime, Harper 2017, Para. 27). This would indicate that techno-industrial peach orchards specify touch and vision, but not aroma or taste in determining ripeness, effectively eliminating this sensory knowledge from the work. Picking peaches in a techno-industrial formation will depend also on how long the peach is going to be stored. Thus, the colour and firmness will be different to what I learned as the 'correct' colour and firmness at Rupture Town, since peaches in techno-industrial operations are primarily picked while still green, most commonly so that they won't be bruised during long transport.

What other differences in sensuous atmospheres might be found between orchards in alternative and techno-industrial operations? The Penn State University extension is helpful again in regard to peach orchards: "During the summer months, the orchard will require mowing, multiple pesticide applications, and fruit thinning" (Crassweller et al. 2017: Para. 2). One can begin

12 Speaking at a Slow Food International conference entitled "Just Profit, or Sustainability? Comparing Models for the Economy of Tomorrow", one journalist accused U.S. agricultural universities (so-called "land-grant" universities) such as Penn State as having "been thoroughly co-opted by corporate agriculture" (Field Notes 2018b).

to imagine the differences. The peach orchards at the alternative farm were covered in grasses and weeds which had several kinds of ecological benefits and afforded particular kinds of sensuous experiences, as I described above. In fact, Jesus only rarely mowed his orchards. He told me that he wanted grass because it kept the ground covered so that water could be retained and also kept grasshoppers away from the field crops. This was a major contrast to the hazelnut orchards and many vineyards in the area, most of which were neat and tidy, being mowed nearly every week. Commenting on the farmers who kept such places, especially those running vineyards, Jesus routinely remarked "They're crazy". Having too much grass growing is said to compete with the fruit, reducing yield. Not only was there much less grass in the techno-industrial orchards, but pesticides were also sprayed. Pesticides, according to Jesus, became necessary for those who regularly cut their grass because there wouldn't be enough biodiversity to keep the worst pests at bay. For example, the hazelnut orchard closest to Rupture Town's farm (seen in the left of the frame in Figure 3) shows a relative barrenness when compared to the peach orchard. The hazelnut trees are planted in neat rows, which appear neat in part because the grass underneath them is cut down weekly by the tanned and shirtless gentleman on the old mower, cigarette dangling from his mouth, and a broad grin stretched across his weather-beaten face.

The hazelnut orchard did not yield a similar sensory experience to that of the peach orchard, and not only because hazelnuts were growing instead of peaches, but rather because of the atmosphere that was sometimes produced in the hazelnut orchard. Although not a part of the farm, walking through the hazelnut orchard was a regular occurrence, because it was located on the walk between the Main house and the farm. Walking through the hazelnut orchards, one saw groupings of other plants and bushes, but also lots of exposed earth, and it often felt dusty there. Pesticides were sprayed at least twice during my fieldwork. One Ecovillage volunteer alerted me to this, having walked through the orchard and telling me "They sprayed pesticides over there, it's terrible". Later in the day when I walked through, I became keenly aware of it: the presence of the pesticide felt somehow 'sticky', a synthetic, even toxic feeling that permeated the air and imposed a general ill feeling. I could feel it in my teeth for some reason. I recall inhaling only very slowly, and through my nose, pushing out a long extended exhale as I picked up my pace, trying to get as quickly as possible to the shady forest.

What were the forces that helped to configure the sensuous atmospheres of my field experience? In a techno-industrial operation, nearly every action taken is toward the maximisation of yield (see e.g. Crassweller et al. 2017): regularly cutting the grass and spraying pesticides are done in the name of yield, even if that means more inhospitable habitats for other species in the short, toxic grass; few, if any flowers can be seen, smelled, or used by pollinators; the definition of 'ripeness' (i.e. the best time to pick) will yield a peach that is still inedible—or at least unenjoyable—for the sake of being transported long distances intact; and the ways of knowing peaches occurs through mediated or explicitly reduced sensuous experience. This impoverished, if speculative, sensuous atmosphere would be the result of particular kinds of practices that are enacted for certain ends — to keep labour costs low, to produce food for export, or producing large amounts of peaches[13].

Rupture Town of course hoped to produce enough peaches to earn money from them, even though the peaches don't generate significant income since the scale is small, and only for local markets. Yet the agricultural practices Jesus employs to grow peaches configure, as I have shown, starkly different sensuous and atmospheric qualities compared to techno-industrial ones, while also being associated with more beneficial ecological functioning (e.g. water retention, robust soil biome, biodiversity, etc.). In an alternative formation that is not solely focused on yield, but also on the care and health of more-than-human ecologies, *not* mowing the grass between trees has significant advantages, even if the size of individual peaches might be smaller. In the techno-industrial case we are more likely to find a logic of growth and maximisation of yield and profit—a productionist orientation. In the alternative case something else is happening, a logic of care (Mol 2008) for more-than-human ecologies comes to bear, where peaches (or indeed anything else being grown) are approached in a way that foregrounds longevity, maintenance, or pleasure rather than maximising yield, peach size, or profits in a marketplace competing for the consumers's *choice*.

Atmospheres of wheat

When I first arrived at Rupture Town's farm in early June we had driven by several large monocultures of golden wheat. The barren field in Figure 3 (and many other farms in the area) had been growing wheat, and that classic golden hue revealed its readiness to be harvested. The wheat in these surrounding fields grew just above my own knees, about 65cm high. When I looked

13 Considering that in the case of Rupture Town, as on many other alternative farms, most people work on a volunteer basis in exchange for room and board, meals, or else under the pretence of an education; and that historically, agriculture is infamous for labour exploitation and low (or no) pay, it is clear that any future sustainable food systems must address the significant issue of how to organise labour in non-exploitative ways. An examination of labour conditions in alternative farms, their problems and potentials is sorely needed if alternative agricultural formations hope to be anything more than just 'alternative', as the current agricultural labour regime is thoroughly unsustainable—economically and socially—in the long-term.

Figure 6. A woman stands, leaning over only slightly to examine waist-high wheat ears in a crop of mixed heirloom varietals that are ready for harvest, mid-July. Photo credit: Author.

out over the biodynamic fields for the first time, I didn't recognise any wheat being grown at all. However, what appeared to me at first as a forgotten field of tall, pale green grass was in fact a plot growing several heirloom wheat varietals. It was not a golden field of short grass, but a multi-hued mixture of grasses of different sizes and colours: pale whites, yellows, greens, reds, and even purple flowers. It was a field intercropped with under and cover crops like clover, millet, and other 'weeds' that were flowering. The time difference in the techno-industrial and alternative wheat fields was because heirloom wheat is slower-growing than the techno-industrial type. The short, fast-growing golden wheat is in fact a legacy of Green Revolution wheat breeding technology, so-called 'dwarf' or 'semi-dwarf' wheat. This wheat varietal was developed by U.S. crop scientist Norman Borlaug (who later won a Nobel Prize for his efforts) through field experiments in Mexico in the 1940's and 50's, kick-starting the so-called Green Revolution (Patel 2013). At that time, in a world ravaged by the aftermath of war, and a powerful United States eager to help capitalism appear as a superior system to communism, this wheat was developed ostensibly to 'feed the world'. The ear of this new wheat gave a higher yield without 'lodging' (falling over) and becoming susceptible to yield loss via disease, or making it impossible for harvesting combine tractors to collect it.

Some of the sensory and temporal features of the techno-industrial dwarf wheat, such as its uniform height and the timing at which it ripens, contrast greatly with the ready-to-harvest wheat shown growing in Figure 6. The photo was taken at the height of the taller wheat ears, and the woman is only slightly bent to examine an ear of wheat in her hand, which stands at about 110cm. This angle shows that the ears of wheat are growing to various heights, some taller than the camera position and some shorter. Accents of intercropped green plants and purple flowers can also be seen amongst the wheat crop. The purpose of intercropping and growing wheat varieties of varying height, Jesus tells me, is to develop a robust root system in the field. The intercropped plants and varied wheat heights also act as structural reinforcement against any would-be lodging due to strong wind, rain, or top-heavy ears. The plant biodiversity of the field is also meant to promote biodiversity (more insects and birds), thus making it less susceptible to pests and disease. One drawback, however, is that heirloom varieties are lower yielding than (semi)dwarf wheat, so that compared to a similar sized techno-industrial plot of modern wheat, the heirloom yield will likely be lower. Indeed, the goal of maximal yield was a key driver in the development of dwarf wheat and other crops of the Green Revolution. Considering that wheat has become something of an oversupplied commodity of productionist agricultural proclivities, this is no trivial matter[14].

Not all techno-industrial agriculture grows only modern (dwarf) wheat, and not all alternative agriculture grows heirloom varietals. Nonetheless, the analysis here is based on an ethnographic experience in which modern wheat was being grown in the techno-industrial fields, while heirloom wheat was grown in the alternative ones. Modern dwarf wheat is the most ubiquitous type of wheat grown in the world today. It is known to contain lower levels of minerals and higher levels of the proteins responsible for celiac diseases as compared to heirloom varieties (van den Broeck, de Jong, Salentijn, Dekking, Bosch et al. 2010; Fan, Zhao, Fairweather-Tait, Poulton, Dunham et al. 2008). According to Jesus modern wheat was bred, in part, with a higher gluten content to be able to withstand the intensity of industrial dough mixing machines. In any case, one of the visceral outcomes of the development of modern wheat can be found not only in the increasing number of people with celiacs disease, but also the rise of gluten intolerance. Although scientists had long maintained there is no (or not enough) evidence to categorise gluten intolerance as a medical issue, there does now appear to be recognition that it is legitimate (Biesiekierski, Newnham, Irving, Barrett, Haines et al. 2011). It moreover seems rather odd that humans have been making wheat-based products for at least 20,000 years (Rubel 2011), but only since the mid-20th century have the number of celiacs and those complaining of gluten sensitivity increased, and rapidly, from the Americas and Europe to the Middle-East and even Asia (Rubio-Tapia, Kyle, Kaplan, Johnson, Page et al. 2009, as cited in van den Broeck et al. 2010).

Viscerally speaking, symptoms of gluten intolerance are reported to include irritable bowel syndrome, bloating, anaemia, abdominal pain, and headaches. These vicissitudes change the nature of relations in something

14 For a mainstream food security take on the global necessity of wheat, see e.g. Reynolds and Braun (2022); c.f. González-Esteban (2017) on why this mainstream take suffers from path dependency. See also Belay and Mugambe (2021) for resistance to the encroachment of modern wheat and maize in Africa led by funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

as mundane as sharing food with friends, and have given rise to a multi-billion dollar gluten-free industry. Visually speaking, techno-industrial agricultural formations are largely responsible for the sight of wheat-filled landscapes that appear neat, orderly, and golden-hued in certain times of year. No doubt, this visual helps to configure a particular atmospheric, what a tourist might refer to as 'the idyllic Italian countryside'. The sight of wheat that contributes to the structures of feeling in the countryside is not made present by some self-contained culture that lives in that place, however. It is made present through the meshwork of historical scientific, socio-cultural, political, and economic developments that gather agricultural practices in knots of globe-spanning knowledges, technologies, flows of capital, and regulations that dictate which seeds are allowed to be purchased, grown, sold, reproduced, or shared for commercial production.

Techno-industrial wheat comprises only a single varietal, and this will be evident in the uniformity of flavour that results. For example, the flavour of a slice of white toast made from modern wheat will be comparable whether you live in the U.S., Finland, or Japan — all countries where I have anthropologically experienced this phenomenon. Such uniformity is of course desirable for any global company for whom, after wheat is crushed into flour and baked, is provided with a consistent, unvarying flavour that can be sold under a certain brand, earning customer loyalty by virtue of being, indeed, consistent. Certainly, other factors can, and will, influence the experience of taste and the haptic qualities of a dough made from modern wheat flour. The famous soft and fluffy 'milk-bread' (*shoku-pan)* that's popular in Japan is one example. And certainly, the techniques used in milling the grain will determine whether it will be 'healthy' whole grain, pasta, bread, pizza or some other flour type. But no matter what steps are taken in the processing of the grain and its outcome, the fact of its unvarying 'wheatiness' will remain. One needs only to try a bread product (or read the tasting notes on any accomplished baker's blog) made from another wheat varietal such as spelt, emmer, einkorn, or kamut, to learn that compared to standard wheat, breads made from these other grains *taste, smell, feel, and look different*. They also behave differently — less gluten means more delicate structuration — in a baker's hands, or in industrial mixing machines, literally shaping the kinds and varieties of breads available for purchase. A piece of bread made with white spelt flour is unquestionably different than a piece of bread made with modern white flour. Thus, decision-making and production involved in wheat-processing operations in techno-industrial spheres appears to lead to a relatively narrow sensuous experience of taste in relation to the world of *possible wheats*.

Figure 7. The combine harvester shoots out winnowed wheat berries into a trailer for drying. Photo credit: Author.

In the alternative agricultural scenario I find a different trajectory. After the wheat was harvested, the remaining straw was left to dry in the field. This leftover straw was used instead of black plastic sheeting (ubiquitous on both alternative and techno-industrial farms) to cover soil around the farm, helping soil to retain moisture. After the straw had dried it was no problem to remove it from the field, as the soil was completely covered in a clover under-crop. The straw was also used to cover up the smelly business of making a soil amendment from manure, ground stone, and fermented 'bokashi' — a Korean-derived liquid ferment thought to be beneficial for soil microbial life, and that is commonly used in alternative farming practices (Kinnunen 2021). The wheat was harvested by a large combine harvester that cuts it from the field, leaving behind the straw. It then threshes and winnows the grain, shooting it out, in this case, into a large open trailer (Figure 7). Just before this process happened, Jesus said to me "Want to see our future beer?" Indeed, future flour and pasta, too. The wheat crop was being used to make a large number of Rupture Town's products: four different types of dried pasta, two different types of flour and their beer, a 'white' India Pale Ale (IPA).

After the wheat was shot into the trailer, I recall Jesus picking up a kernel and biting into, checking the texture with his teeth. In that moment I considered that just like eating peaches directly from the tree, doing such a thing would be potentially hazardous to one's health on a techno-industrial farm in which pesticides or other toxins are present. Jesus says that

Figure 8. The beer. Photo Credit: Author.

when the grain becomes "hard" it will be ready for processing. I put a kernel of wheat in my own mouth and bite down. It's quite firm, but it can still be chewed. Biting into the kernel just after harvest, then, is a sensuous way to 'measure'. It becomes a way of knowing and a practice that is not likely taking place, nor even possible or necessary, in a techno-industrial formation. Indeed, as Jesus tells me, techno-industrial operations use high-tech machines to not only dry wheat berries quickly, but also to sort the wheat and determine its level of dryness. Thus 'chewing the grain' would appear to be a lost way of knowing wheat, certainly in techno-industrial formations, and possibly even many alternative ones. The reduction of such sensuous moments of experience through the increased use of mediating technologies resonates with a long history of critique about technology as a tool of alienation — a sensuous rift that denotes the emergence of new configurations of experience, knowing, and knowledge. As the grain dries over the next couple of weeks — a process that I help along by raking the grains around and turning the bottom layers to the top of the pile — I continue to sample the kernels of grain, feeling each time that they are indeed becoming harder. When Jesus determines they are dry enough, the kernels are removed and taken to Rupture Town's local milling partner. While this way of measuring the grain surely would stand in contrast to a techno-industrial operation, Jesus's method is indeed indicative of a small operation that practices certain ways of knowing that were perhaps once ubiquitous.

Last Call

I recall the garden party at Rupture Town's farm. It was an 'open-farm' day with a big meal cooked by an anti-fascist vegan chef from the city, and the debut Rupture Town's new (first ever, at that time) beer, a 'white' wheat IPA made from Rupture Town's mix of ancient varieties (Figure 8). Having myself come of age just as the IPA beer trend began to take off in the United States, I genuinely love it — or at least a particular kind of IPA. I have long preferred the west coast style: piney hop aromas that complement a light, tightly bitter beer that is simultaneously refreshing and hearty, and stubbornly *not* sweet or fruity. But I also never really enjoyed white beers. I had always felt bloated from drinking them, finding them to be, viscerally, rather uncomfortable, and sensuously rather sweet. Suffice it to say, I was skeptical of this 'white IPA' when the party began. However, I was quickly won over. I immediately found my partner to tell them how good it was, then found the Rupture Town members to tell them how amazing the beer was — I simply could not believe this beer wasn't sweet, or that it didn't make me feel bloated. My taste for wheat beer had been changed forever.

Why was the beer so much better tasting than any wheat beers I had tasted growing up in the U.S., and why didn't this one make me feel bloated? I don't know, exactly. Perhaps it was simply due to the way it was made? No matter, these are not the questions being pursued here. What is being pursued is simply the revelation of sensory and visceral experiences that are due, according to a sensuous theory of emplacement and atmosphere, to particular socio-ecological, economic, and political factors that bring places into being, form structures of feeling, and are shaped by the trajectories of certain histories of power, politics, legal regimes, flows of finance, seeds, knowledges, cultural practices, and more. I am not concerned to 'prove' that I enjoyed this beer 'because' it was from alternative agriculture. I am rather concerned to tell a story, with the consideration that stories can reveal things that only quantifying them cannot, and that the phenomenal experience of being alive is *also* valuable knowledge.

Conclusion: Imagining for a Different World

I began the article with a critique of narrow demand-side solutions for sustainable food systems and the underlying assumptions that continue to maintain them. Instead, I sought to attend to the sensuous and visceral experiences of place, emplacement, and atmosphere "to invite [the audience] to imagine themselves into the places of others, while simultaneously invoking theoretical and practical points of meaning and learning, and to be self-conscious about [my] own learning" (Pink 2015, 49). To do so I began by asking: what kinds of stories are the 'sensuous atmospheres' of techno-industrial and alternative agricultural practices made of, what kinds of stories do they tell, and how might they help to imagine new horizons of possibility in the making of more sustainable food systems? Answering these questions is a decidedly more messy task than making neat categorisations that policy makers can fit into bureaucratic administrative structures. Yet this messiness forms part of the transformative approach I have tried to develop here, and is ultimately aimed at the creation of a world that doesn't require everything to fit neatly into one-size-fits-all policy prescriptions. Indeed, to do so would be to develop an analysis that follows in the footsteps of the "project of control by classification" (Ingold 2011a: 174) that has been the mode of organising under colonial regimes and continues under the coloniality of global food systems (Figueroa-Helland & Aguilera 2018).

Taking the imagination as a key political participant in the struggle for a more just and sustainable world, I have attempted to bring the reader with me in following the flows, attending to fluxes of materials in their medium, their historical trajectories, and the sensations and visceralities they afford, even and especially in their mundaneness. Principally, I sought to make the sensuous atmospheres of the wheat fields and peach orchards visible as the immanent substance that socio-ecological, political, and economic formations take; to intervene in the imagination by crafting a story that reveals the heretofore unnoticed or unseen; to highlight entanglement, messiness, and contradiction; and to push the horizons of imagination and possibility that might unfold as prospects for intervention, design, and activism. Through this process I hope to have told a story that might move the reader, even in the smallest way, to imagine new horizons of possibility for a world not yet realised.

In recognising the indissolubility of atmosphere and sensation — by tying or 'grounding' atmosphere to sensation through a theory of emplacement — it was possible to engage with sensuous experience *as knowledge* in its own right, approaching sensation in terms of its "contexts, acquisition processes, and applications, like any other knowledge source" (Maslen 2015, 53). This conceptual move, I suggest, forms part of a 'sensory sustainability science', one that is perhaps better suited to understanding this anthropogenic era (Heinrichs 2019a; Heinrichs 2019b; Heinrichs & Kagan 2019). The hope is that such a science might move us toward designing research, economic, political and socio-ecological interventions that can properly account for the skilled practices of care that more-than-human ecologies require, instead of continuing to incentivise individual behavioural change while keeping the status quo intact.

I have described instances in which particular kinds of atmospheres are configured through historical, economic, political, and socio-ecological relations at a farm in northern Italy, and how these relations can alter sensuous experiences of working in and eating from alternative agriculture and techno-industrial agricultures. However, the agricultural foodways formations I refer to are found not only in northern Italy, but all around the world, configured by very similar — if not *the* same — political, economic, and institutional flows of power that shape global food systems. So although I have drawn from fieldwork experience in northern Italy, and precisely because of the standardisation and control required by a globalising techno-industrial regime, the sensuous atmospheres they configure (e.g. the sight of monoculture wheat fields) necessarily disperses the analysis beyond any specific or static place. This is why, for example, I have discussed the history of modern wheat in terms of the Green Revolution, rather than the particular circumstances, for example, of why *this* wheat has become prevalent in *those* northern Italian landscapes.

Limitations and Futures

There are of course many limitations to the work presented, perhaps especially from a more traditional social scientific lens. Indeed, this article is not meant to offer concrete solutions or fix for the problems it deals with, but is rather intended as a way of intervening in how one might (re)think about the problems it deals with. The ethnographic materials were 'cherry-picked' because they spoke the loudest in memory and feeling and offered fruitful possibilities for the analysis that I found to be important, but I did not carry out a systematic analysis and develop categories for explication of a particular problem in a particular place. As an article which purports to intervene in the imagination of making the world a better, and very different place, I have attempted to stay true to this purpose, even if it may yet be unusual. Certainly there is a need for more sensory ethnographic research in both techno-industrial and alternative agricultural formations. There is also a need for more sensory ethnographic work in various other parts of the foodways associated with these formations, for example, the labour question in alternative foodways. Such work would also help to expand the story that I have picked up here, crafting a bigger and more complex understanding of how the phenomenal experience of (un)sustainable foodways intersects and changes along with wider socio-ecological, technological, or geopolitical processes and events.

Another World is Possible/Questions for Another World

The story above is itself meant to be a form of political praxis aimed at expanding the horizons of possibility and imagination. I propose that the stories generated from the encounters described — at once theoretically engaged and sensuously communicated — could contribute to more nuanced understandings of how more sustainable foodways might become part of the fabric of everyday life, and what that fabric might look, feel, smell, or taste like, or how slowly the fabric gets woven into the future. To drive this point, I leave the reader with a series of speculative questions meant to incite serious consideration of a very different world than the one currently unfolding.

I ask the reader to take out a pencil and paper. Below, you will see a set of speculative conditions and questions to ponder. Please spend one moment to consider seriously the implications — sensuous, visceral, socio-ecological, economic, political — of a world in which alternative agricultural formations predominate. For now, simply write down one idea in response to each of the questions. After writing out your initial answers, leave the task and carry on about your life. Let the questions and your answers stay with you for a while before coming back to your pencil and paper. Update the answers as you please, or let them filter into your thoughts as you go about your day.

First, some speculative conditions under which to ponder the questions. In this world, skilled agricultural labour, food processing (cooking, fermentation, etc.), and distribution are the largest, most important, and most valuable fields of work globally; 70% of all the food you consume comes from within a 500km radius; no food is produced solely or even primarily for profit. Now, considering such conditions, what kinds of answers might you give to the following questions: How might education be organised differently under such conditions? How might your relations with food, landscapes, your work, and your time, be different than compared to now, and in what ways? Please, let your imagination run wild.

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Karin Sandell

Enough Fish in the Sea?
Fish Farming Debate and Affective Practices

Abstract
Fish farming is a hot topic in the local press of the Jakobstad region on the west coast of Finland. In 2017, a local fisher established an open sea fish farming company to produce locally farmed fish with the aim of meeting the increasing demand for domestically produced fish. Open sea fish farming is debated due to its environmental impact. The establishment of the fish farm has been challenged and defended in several readers' letters from local politicians and officials, local activists, researchers, and the company's founder himself. The debate letters are filled with data on the environmental impact from nutrient emissions, and other measurable factors. However, the debate is not just about feed pellets, fish faeces, and the organic enrichment of bottom sediments—it is about the emotional relationship to the sea in a region forged by the Gulf of Bothnia. With affect theory as a starting point, I aim to analyse how notions of sustainability and sustainable foodways are expressed in a local newspaper debate about fish farming. How do the two sides of the debate present their views of sustainability?

Keywords: Affect, Affective Tools, Cultural Sustainability, Newspaper Debate, Emotions, Fish Farming, Sustainability, Sustainable Foodways

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Introduction

Open sea fish farming is up for debate in the Jakobstad region, an area in Ostrobothnia on the west coast of Finland. In 2017, a local fisher founded an open sea fish farming company to produce locally farmed fish in the sea off the coasts of Jakobstad and Larsmo. The company aims to meet the increasing demand for domestically produced fish (Ekofish n.d.).

Previous research has shown that open sea fish farming is questionable due to its environmental impact (Holmer 2010). The establishment of the fish farm in Jakobstad has raised a lot of debate in the local newspaper.[1] The letters to the editor are filled with data on the environmental impact from nutrient emissions and other measurable factors. At the same time, the debate is not just about feed pellets, fish faeces, and the organic enrichment of bottom sediments—it is an affectively charged debate revealing an emotional relationship to the sea in a region forged by the Gulf of Bothnia.

The region is described as “a viable agricultural region with strong traditions in food production and processing … known for its clean nature and local, healthy produce and food from forests, fields, and the sea” (Finholm 2021, 6). The clean nature and locally produced food are mentioned in the debate as something to be proud of and worthy of preserving. Those who oppose the fish farm express a fear of losing these things (Fäldén, Ekstrand U., Ekstrand K., Karlström and Wiklund et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT; Kronholm 27.10.2019 ÖT; Malinen 12.7.2021 ÖT; Palovuori 15.5.2021 ÖT).

There are two sides to the debate: one arguing for the need of increased fish production, the other arguing against fish farming because of its impact on the marine environment. The company owner wants to make a living for himself, and the Finnish Government Programme declares that domestic fish farming needs to be increased to meet the growing demand (Finnish Government 2020). The alternative to farming fish in the sea is land-based fish farming, where fish production takes place in large water tanks.

While the debate evolves around nutrient emissions and the problems they may cause, the debaters turn to affective argumentation to get their point through. These expressions of affect show what engages the writers and what is important to them. I consider affect to be a combination of emotions, corporeality, and cultural context. Affect is relational and is shaped between individuals and their contexts. I use Margaret Wetherell’s concept of affective

1 Fish farming is debated in other regions as well as internationally, for example, a highly publicised land-based farm in Åland, a denied farm establishment in Pargas, the Norwegian salmon industry, and the now shutdown farms in the High Coast area of Sweden (Pettersson 18.7.2021 HBL; Vehmanen 2.8.2022 TS; Yle 7.11.2022; Löv 12.11.2018 Svenska Yle).

practice to underline the relationality of affect (Wetherell 2012, 10–12; 2015, 155–160). In line with Sara Ahmed, I view emotions as social or cultural practices. She does not separate emotion from affect; instead, she considers them adjacent (Ahmed 2004, 8–9; 2010, 32–33).

In this paper, with affect theory as a point of departure, I analyse how notions of sustainability and sustainable foodways are expressed in the local newspaper debate on fish farming. I explore how the two sides of the fish farming debate present their views of sustainability. The analysis is applied through the lens a self-developed affective tool model for qualitative content analysis of text. The four affective tools in the model are emotion words, emotive expressions, metaphors, and orthographic practices (Sandell 2022, 64–67). As material for this article, I refer to letters to the editor, or readers' letters, a genre in which someone writes to a newspaper with the intention of expressing their opinion and taking part in a public debate.

The fish farm started its production in the summer of 2021 with one net cage situated near the unpopulated island Kallan, in the sea off the coasts of Jakobstad and Larsmo. Most of the material analysed in this article was written between September 2018 and December 2021 and comprises 123 letters to the editor. The debate remains ongoing, even after the regional administrative court decided (in March 2022) to reject all of the objections against the fish farming company made by 13 individuals, associations, land and water area owners, the regional Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY centre), the community of Larsmo, and the environmental protection authority in Jakobstad (Vaasa Administrative Court 2022; Jansson 17.3.2022 ÖT).[2]

This fish farming debate, centred in a local community, is connected to a global debate on sustainability and on sustainable foodways. Decisions about the establishment of the fish farm are made at the local or regional level, while the practice of fish farming on the whole is promoted at the European level by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (Fisheries in Finland n.d.). As Matilda Marshall (2016, 13) shows in her thesis, the question of what food is served is related to the use of natural resources and land areas on a global level. In line with Marshall, I argue that this also applies to how food is produced.

2 According to the verdict, the fish farm is allowed to produce more fish than the previously licensed 700 000 kilograms of salmon per year. The production is limited by the volume of fish feed and its emission of phosphorus (6 880 kilograms per year) and nitrogen (60 800 kilograms per year), which according to ÖT allows for a production of nearly 950 000 kilograms of fish per year (Vaasa Administrative Court 2022; Jansson 17.3.2022 ÖT).

Marshall (2016, 17) presents the well-established three pillar conception of sustainability, which includes ecological, economic, and social elements.[3] Ecological sustainability entails the earth's ecosystem and its reproductive capacity; social sustainability implies social and individual needs and objectives; and economic sustainability may denote economic growth only, as well as financial growth regarding both social and ecological sustainability. All three of these are often interconnected and seldom possible to keep separate. (Cf. Ren, O'Dell and Budeanu 2014). Referring to Chiu (2004), Hawkes (2001), Birkeland (2008), Soini and Birkeland (2014), and Dessein et al. (2015), Marshall (2016, 17–20) suggests cultural sustainability as a fourth pillar, with emphasis on the ethnologic definition of culture, to include the shared norms and values, traditions, practices, and beliefs among a group of people as well as the connection between past, present, and future. She proposes a view of cultural sustainability as the glue that keeps people together, for example, their common understanding, values, and actions, all of which also change over time (cf. Soini and Birkeland 2014, 214). This goes well with Ren et al.'s (2014, 909–910) critique of the sustainability concept as a meaningless term if the personal and emotional are overlooked.

Katriina Soini and Inger Birkeland (2014, 213–219) analysed the scientific discourse on cultural sustainability and found seven categories, or "story lines", related to heritage, vitality, economic viability, diversity, locality, eco-cultural resilience, and eco-cultural civilisation. According to them, the categories that combined stand out like a possible fourth pillar of sustainability are the heritage and cultural vitality story lines. These themes underline the importance of heritage and cultural life for social unity and local identity. The other story lines indicate that culture is merely an instrument to achieve economic, social, and ecological sustainability – instead of considering culture in itself as something that needs to be sustained (Soini and Birkeland 2014, 220). Marshall's (2016, 17–19) definition of cultural sustainability is similar to the heritage and vitality part of the sustainability discourse analysed by Soini and Birkeland (2014, 216–217). The emphasis is on passing down culture from previous generations to future generations to protect the local culture, as well as developing it to fit current and future needs.

Carina Ren, Tom O'Dell, and Adriana Budeanu (2014, 907) suggest that the conversation be about multiple "sustainabilit*ies*". They argue that there are several difficulties in defining sustainability as a uniform concept; it is widely used merely as a rubber stamp and as a marketing strategy by, for example,

3 The three pillars of sustainability are mentioned in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the origin is unknown (UN General Assembly 2015; Purvis, Mao and Robinson 2019; cf. Sonck-Rautio 2019b, 9; Hawkes 2001).

tourism agencies and the retail industry. Claims of sustainability are hard to follow up on and confirm. Ren et al. (ibid.) ask whether the lack of coherent policies shows the malleability of the concept, or if it is a sign of its failure. Therefore, they seek a notion of sustainability with culture as a starting point.

> [S]ustainability as a subject needs to be focused much more on a personal, emotional and thereby cultural plane. If we can't save the world … maybe it's time to sink the bar, and reflect upon the cultural economy of sustainability and personal relations. That would imply shifting the focus of discussions of sustainability from the political and economic plane to the personal and social plane. (Ren et al. 2014, 910)

This entails rethinking sustainability by focusing on the emotional or personal instead of on political strategy or rational choice. The authors express a worry over the lack of personal and emotional angles of approach when sustainability is researched (ibid. 909–910). I examine the emotional part of the sustainability debate, how people argue using affective tools to express their views of sustainability. The basis for this article is understanding how different views of sustainability are expressed in the readers' letters. I analyse the letters as expressions of cultural sustainability, as they are a part of a local debate, drawing on arguments based in local culture, and presenting diverse views on how to prepare or preserve for the future (cf. Soini and Birkeland 2014, 216–217, 220). The article sheds light on the problem with agreeing on methods of sustainable foodways, due to conflicting views on what is even considered sustainable. The analysis is based on the local debate about the establishment of an open sea fish farm but includes arguments on how sustainability is perceived more generally. Sustainability as a concept is discussed from a cultural point of view as cultural sustainability (Marshall 2016, 17–19, 113–115; Soini and Birkeland 2014; Sonck-Rautio 2019a, 9–10; 2019b, 42 – 45). Focusing on the emotional and personal aspects of the debate on sustainable foodways contributes to an area of sustainability research that is still mostly uncharted (cf. Ren et al. 2014, 909–910).

Research material: Letters to the editor

The material for this paper consists of 123 letters to the editor published in the daily newspaper *Österbottens Tidning*, the local Swedish language newspaper in the Jakobstad region.[4] I have chosen to focus on the readers' letters because they represent a genre of their own, apart from news articles and editorials written by journalists. The letters are more direct and written with

4 I translated the letters, originally written in Swedish, into English for this article. I used the original Swedish versions for the analysis, before translating them.

the expectation of being answered. Letters to the editor are a part of vernacular literacy, a non-institutional and colloquial writing and reading practice in which people read and write for their own purposes (Barton 2010, 109–111).

The letters were collected from a digital archive open to subscribers on the ÖT webpage, using the search words: "fiskodling" [fish farming], "ekofish" [name of the company in question], and "ecofish" [the company name was misspelled in some letters]. In addition to the letters, ÖT had also published about 60 articles, editorials, and columns on fish farm-related matters. These are not included in the analysis per se but are used as background material.

Surprisingly, the ÖT archive search results did not go back any further than 2020. To find the letters to the editor dating back to 2018, I made use of a public Facebook group "Fiskodlingsfritt Jakobstad" [Fish farm-free Jakobstad], which contained posts related to resisting the establishment of the fish farm. The group turned out to be useful since the administrators had published links related to the current media discussion. I was able to find direct links to readers' letters published in ÖT dating back to 2018.[5] The group had linked letters and articles arguing against the establishment of the fish farm, as well as letters and articles arguing for its establishment. Considering the title of the group, there was a probable bias towards the anti-fish farming content. I was a member of the group during my research period to keep myself updated on the subject, but I was not active in any of the discussions. I did not announce myself as a researcher in the group, nor did I collect any data about the members, such as their comments or likes.

The first article about the establishment of the fish farm was published in June 2018. It is an interview with the owner of the fish farming company in which he talks about fishing for wild salmon in the sea off the coast of Jakobstad, and how hard it is to make a living out of it because of all the rules and regulations. With his newly established company, he wanted to farm high-quality fish for human consumption, in the open sea using net cages. The article concluded with information about open sea fish farming being recommended in Ostrobothnia by The Finnish Operational Program for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (Wisén 17.6.2018 ÖT; Fisheries in Finland n.d.). A couple of days later this article was followed by the publishing of an article about a lease agreement between the company and the town of Jakobstad (Wisén 20.6.2018 ÖT). Summer passed, and ÖT published two articles critical of fish farming. One was about open sea fish farms in Sweden being shut down due to environmental issues, and the other was about the high levels of

5 It is possible I have missed some letters, but the aim of this article is not to collect and compare them all. Furthermore, the content is repetitive, and a few more letters would not have had a considerable impact on the analysis or its results.

emissions from fish farms. This second article also pointed out that an environmental impact assessment is not demanded by the regional ELY centre to establish an open sea fish farm, even though the local head of environmental protection advocated for such an assessment (Jansson 19.9.2018ab ÖT). Editor Henrik Othman followed up on the issue in an editorial: he criticised the ELY centre for not demanding an assessment (Othman 21.9.2018 ÖT).

The debate started in September 2018 when the CEO of the company wrote a letter to the editor as a reply to the paper's previously published articles about fish farming. In total, the material comprises 101 letters taking a stand against the fish farm, while 16 of them are in favour of the establishment. Six of the readers' letters do not take a stand on the topic. The letters were published between September 2018 and December 2021, but the debate is ongoing as of November 2022. For the scope of this article, I do not go into detail on every single one of the letters, but I use direct quotes in my analysis to show examples of how the debaters use affective tools to get their point through.

All the texts include the writers' names and sometimes their affiliations. The affiliations were added by the writers themselves, for example, if they wrote as representatives of an organisation, a company, or a political party. I have analysed the texts as they are; I have not considered the writers' affiliations at any deeper level than what is written in their texts. A short presentation of the writers is included in the analysis chapter. Although the analysis is not about who the writers are, the presentation offers an idea of who is engaged enough to write a reader's letter, and what their different outsets are when discussing the topic of sustainability and/or fish farming.

Since the letters are signed with the writers' own names and published in a public forum, a newspaper, they are not anonymised. The material does not contain any sensitive information. The letters to the editor are openly accessible online for anyone who is subscribed to the newspaper, or for free via a legal deposit library (National Library of Finland n.d.). According to the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK 2019 guidelines, no ethical review is needed for research based only on public information or archive data (2019, 20).

Affect Theory and Affective Tool Method

I use the term affect to grasp the emotional charge expressed in the material. The debate is heated, and the affective expressions contribute to an intense atmosphere around the topic. Affect and emotion are closely related; in research, they have been used as two different terms as well as synonyms (Rinne, Kajander and Haanpää 2020, 8–11). Laurajane Smith, Margaret Wetherell and Gary Campbell (2018) consider affect and emotion to be concurrently embodied and semiotic. "Affect and emotion are flowing, dynamic, recursive and profoundly contextual, challenging static and neat formulations" (Smith, Wetherell and Campbell 2018, 5). Affect has been defined as a reaction that appears before emotion, while emotion is an interpretation of the affective reaction. Affect has been attributed to bodily reactions like blushing and sweating. Explained in emotional terms, they indicate embarrassment, fear or nervousness (Frykman and Povrzanović Frykman 2016, 14; Thrift 2008, 221; Wetherell 2012, 2–3).

I do not consider affect to be something separable from emotion. Emotions are not "afterthoughts" to affect (Ahmed 2010, 32). I do not consider affect to be something separable from emotion. Emotions are not "afterthoughts" to affect (Ahmed 2010, 32). Ahmed (2004, 13) writes that emotions are performative, and through expressing them, they become real. Emotion is created in the contact between objects, but the kind of created emotion depends on the cultural predisposition held towards an object (ibid. 7). Ahmed (2004, 7–13) views emotions as social and cultural practices, instead of psychological states. She describes emotions as circulating and moving, as well as sticky. This implies different effects: "emotions may involve 'being moved' for some precisely by fixing others as 'having' certain characteristics" (Ahmed 2004, 11). Wetherell (2015, 155) is critical of Ahmed's (2004) description of emotion as freely circulating between objects but agrees that it is not possible to separate emotion and affect.

The chronological order of affect before emotion, in which affect is seen as an embodied state and emotions are the process of naming these states and placing them in an understandable cultural context, is criticised by Wetherell (2012; 2015; Cf. Massumi 1995; Thrift 2008). She defines affect as "embodied meaning-making" and "human emotion" (Wetherell 2012, 4). Wetherell suggests talking about affective practice instead of attributing affect to bodily sensations and biological or psychological reactions (Wetherell 2015, 141). Affect is distributed and is a relational phenomenon. I agree with Wetherell (2015, 158) when she writes "subjects cannot be disentangled from objects, or individuals from their situations. Therefore, a concept like social practice has such power and persuasive force". Affect does not reside inside an object; an object without context does not cause an affective reaction. The affective response occurs in the encounter with an object (ibid. 157–158). Ahmed (2010, 33) also argues that one must have a preunderstanding and context to be affected by something. For someone to be affected in a similar way as someone else, they must identify with or look up to that someone (Wetherell 2015, 154).

My analysis of the material is based on affective tools. This method for a qualitative content analysis of published text is developed in my thesis (Sandell 2022), using Ahmed's and Wetherell's definitions of affect as the theoretical outset. The method also takes inspiration from Lena Marander-Eklund's (2009) utilisation of Ahmed's emotion analysis in her article on post-war memories, Gry Heggli's (2002) thesis on schoolgirls' writing practices, and Tuija Saresma's (2020) analysis of the performative capacity of texts in men's rights activist forums. Ahmed (2004, 4) argues that emotions are understood through analysing what they do instead of asking what they are. Saresma, influenced by Ahmed (2004) and Judith Butler's (1997) performative theory, shows how affective language produces and preserves ideologies and the sense of community (Saresma 2020, 217–224). Heggli (2002, 73–85, 95–100) analysed diaries by looking for the use of metalinguistic tools, such as orthographic practices and choice of words that give a text its special character. She categorised the texts depending on the feeling they express.

The affective tools are also influenced by performance theory. According to Richard Bauman (1971), performance is an organising principle which includes "artistic act, expressive form, and esthetic response, and that does so in terms of locally defined, culture-specific categories and contexts" (Bauman 1971: V). Performance is distinguished by being something else and follows different rules than what is considered ordinary, everyday behaviour (Hymes 1981, 81–84). By considering the letters as performances, I view them as occasions in which the writer knowingly and willingly stands in front of an audience with their text (cf. Hymes 1981, 84). My focus is on the text, but I am aware of the frames set by the genre of "letter to the editor". The text must be moulded into the generic frame to be published after passing an editorial assessment. According to ÖT, each letter must be signed with the writer's first and last name. Pseudonyms are accepted in exceptional cases (ÖT n.d.).

To analyse affect in text, I look for ways of expressing affect through the affective tools used by the writers. These affective tools are emotion words, emotive expressions, metaphors, and orthographic practices. They serve as four different means of conveying and mediating affect through text. (Sandell 2022, 66). Emotion words are named emotions, like "hate" or "love". Emotive expressions, on the other hand, are not named emotions, but are emotionally charged words that express affect. They can be positively charged, such as for example "amazing", or negatively charged such as "terrible". Emotive expressions are the opposite of matter-of-fact statements (Marander-Eklund 2009, 25; Melin and Lange 2000, 38; Sandell 2022, 66; cf. Sandell 2018, 42–43). Metaphors are figures of speech. For example, the phrase "time is money" is a metaphoric concept used to illustrate our way of thinking about time as a valuable and limited resource (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 7–9). According to

Ahmed (2004, 12) metaphors may be used to convey emotions. Orthographic practices are various writing practices such as using capital letters and punctuation. They are used to communicate meaning or to emphasise an opinion in text (Heggli 2002, 96; cf. Palmgren 2014, 71–79). In the material analysed for this article, I particularly consider the use of exclamation marks, reiterations, and listings as orthographic practices. Affective tools are used by writers as a way of catching the reader's attention. They are a part of a textual performance and are markers for what message the writer wants to mediate.

The debate featured in this article is between two opposing sides arguing over one issue. Although I have refrained from personally partaking in the debate, I have a deeper understanding of the context than a complete outsider might have. I live in Jakobstad, and my family owns a summer cottage by the sea, a few kilometres from the area where the fish farm is located. However, I am not taking a stand either for or against the fish farm, this paper is a qualitative content analysis of the debate.

The analysis is concentrated around a selection of the readers' letters. The amount and length of the letters make it impractical to analyse the details of every single letter; therefore, I focus on only a selection of texts. All the published texts are included in the analysis, but only a few of them have been assessed in detail and are used to present the analysis in this article. In reading through the letters, I have paid attention to who has been for the establishment, who has been against it, how they have argued their case, and what words they have used. I have organised the material in three categories: for, against, and neutral. The selected letters have themes that are representative on a general level in the debate, with content that recurs in other letters, and is mainly about the establishment of the fish farm. Additionally, I concentrate the analysis around recurring themes. I have paid extra attention to how the debaters have argued their views of sustainability, by taking note of their use of the words sustainable and sustainability, and in what contexts sustainability has been mentioned. The analysis is divided into two chapters: the first one analyses the letters to the editor with a focus on the use of affective tools and includes three sub-chapters. The second analysis chapter pays extra attention to the mentioning of the word sustainability and in what context it is framed.

Affective Tools in Letters to the Editor

The first letter to the editor about the fish farm was written by Sebastian Höglund, the CEO of the fish farming company *Ekofish*. Höglund wrote that he wanted to answer the critique directed at the company's plans to establish an open sea fish farm. He wrote that, because of regulations made by government authorities, professional fishers are "endangered" (22.9.2018 ÖT). He presented numbers on estimated emissions of phosphorus and nitrogen from the farm.

According to him, the input from the farm was "literally a drop in the ocean" compared to current emissions from other local industries (ibid.). Höglund brought up the phosphorus and nitrogen emitted by "cormorants and seals" and wrote "when these populations are to be increased and protected no one is demanding environmental impact assessments of their emissions" (ibid.). He also wanted to take the chance to give the local environmental board a "little kick" for asking for an environmental impact assessment, which "forced us to pay for expensive additional inquiries unnecessarily" (ibid.). According to Höglund, the local authorities seemed more interested in "putting obstacles in the way" of new companies, and he described the request for an environmental impact assessment as a "cold shower" (ibid.).

Höglund's text is rich in metaphors and emotive expressions. He started out by describing a disappearing profession burdened by rules and regulations. The word endangered becomes a metaphor for the decline of a traditional profession, close to the nature and dependent on what the sea has to offer. Endangered is usually a word referring to endangered species, which includes every life form on this planet that is facing a risk of extinction in the wild (World Wildlife Fund n.d.). Here, it is used to describe the state of a profession, and the metaphor becomes extra powerful with its connection to the local culture. Fishery is a part of the cultural heritage in the Swedish-speaking community in Finland. The majority of Swedish-speaking Finns live in areas along the coast, and fish has traditionally been an important part of the local diet. Nowadays, professional fishers are few, the fish population is decreasing, and there are reports on the risks of eating salmon and herring from the Baltic Sea due to high levels of dioxins (Lindqvist 2018, 94–97; Nevalainen, Tuomisto, Haapasaari and Lehikoinen 2021: 2–3; Sonck-Rautio 2019a, 6–7).

To save the fishers from extinction, Höglund has found a way to make a living for himself by farming fish. He is irritated by the obstacles put in the way of his establishment. I interpret his mentioning of the protection of seals and cormorants as a metaphorical reference to the challenges and risks that the fisheries must deal with to make a profit. Seals damaging nets and cormorants eating all the fish are recurring topics when it comes to fishery in the Baltic Sea, especially in the Kvarken area, which includes the Jakobstad region (Höglund, J. 2015, 2, 13; Sonck-Rautio 2019a, 12–18; Varjopuro 2011, 450–451). In Höglund's letter, their emissions are compared to the impact of fish farming, which in turn is said to be nothing but a drop in the ocean. This is a way of diminishing the impact of the fish farm. Simultaneously, Höglund describes the establishment of his company as a battle against the authorities, authorities "forcing" him to "unnecessarily" pay for "expensive additional inquiries" (22.9.2018 ÖT).

The letter “Fish farming a threat to Fäbodaviken and Ådöfjärden” is written by Anders Kronholm, chair of the co-owners of a water area off the coast of Jakobstad (17.10.2018 ÖT).[6] He wrote that it is his job as chair to care for good water quality and “of course it should be safe for children to swim” (ibid.). According to Kronholm, the water quality has gotten better during the past years thanks to improved water purification from the nearby industries. Now the planned fish farm “threatens to make matters worse” (ibid.). He claimed the permit procedure went through at a “record pace” (ibid.).

> In the permit application the ELY centre experts (?) deem the annual input of 3200 kilograms of phosphorus straight into the sea as “insignificant”! … Effectively it amounts to 40 000 litres of cow piss into the sea every day during the summer months, is that to be considered “insignificant”? (Kronholm 17.10.2018 ÖT)

Above is an example of how orthographic practices such as question marks and exclamation marks are used, as well as emotive expressions. The question mark within brackets is a way of questioning the expertise of the officials at ELY, which simultaneously distributes the writer’s affect regarding the matter to the reader (cf. Wetherell 2015, 158). The word insignificant within quotation marks followed by an explanation mark works as a questioning interjection. The emotive expression here used to express and generate affect relates nutrient emissions to cow urine. This is a highly effective way of putting abstract numbers, such as calculations of different nutrients, into an understandable context. As a comprehensible substance, it is easier to understand the amount of 40 000 litres of urine, than it is to grasp the significance of “3200 kilograms of phosphorus”.

In a letter titled “Food culture led astray” Maria Ehrnström-Fuentes and Ann-Christin Furu[7] commented on the news about the farm and the lack of environmental impact assessment (29.9.2018 ÖT). They used the metaphor “from earth (or in this case sea) to table” (ibid.), a saying used by the European Commission,[8] as well as in cookbooks and television shows. The metaphor sheds light on the food chain, from primary production, to processing, to retail, to the dinner plate. In an ideal world, this would be a short and energy

6 Further into the debate, he signs his letter as a representative for the political party The Greens (Kronholm 18.5.2021 ÖT).

7 Postdoctoral researcher, Hanken School of Economics, and assistant professor, University of Helsinki.

8 In Swedish, the saying is usually “från jord till bord”, which translates directly to “from earth to table”. In English “farm to fork” is used, for example, by the European Commission in the “Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system” (European Commission 2020).

sufficient process where nothing goes to waste. According to these writers, climate change has had a negative impact on the Gulf of Bothnia; algal bloom will be a part of the "summer everyday" along the Ostrobothnian coast due to eutrophication and rising temperatures (ibid.). I interpret the "summer everyday" as a metaphor for an almost sacred time in the Nordic region, when the weather is warm, and people want to enjoy their summer holiday (ibid.).

The ideal summer everyday along the Finnish west coast is carefree and spent somewhere close to water. Under the headline "Ekofish is an eco-disaster" 20 cottage owners (individuals, families, and couples) signed a letter (Fäldén et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT). The text is structured around the question "[d]o we want this" followed by claims about what will happen if the fish farm starts its production (ibid.). It is concluded with a numbered list of "[w]hat we want" (ibid.). I consider these to be examples of orthographic practices that structure the text around affective claims. The question "[d]o we want this?" is followed by emotive expressions like "massive fish farming", "slimy fishing gear", "bloody water" and "[t]he company name is gravely misleading" (ibid.). The word massive works as an emotive expression that conveys the writers' emotions regarding the fish farm. Using the word massive instead of numbers is an affective interpretation of the scale of the establishment. Massive is something that becomes almost overwhelming. Slimy and bloody are emotive expressions that underline the foreseen awfulness caused by fish farming.

The debaters also claimed the name of the company, Ekofish, is gravely misleading (ibid.). They indirectly question the use of the Swedish word "eko", short for *ekologisk*, meaning ecological and/or organic in English. The Finnish Food Authority controls the organic food production in Finland. Using the European Union organic logo is mandatory on organic foods (Finnish Food Authority 2022). Ekofish does not use this logo on the company webpage, but Höglund himself wrote in his letter that the EU declared that "farmed fish is the most ecologically sustainable way of producing protein" (Ekofish n.d.; Höglund 22.9.2018 ÖT).

The list of "[w]hat we [the cottage owners] want" includes "keeping our fantastic sand beaches and beach cliffs without stinking, poisonous algae", "preserving the value of our summer cottages", "preserving the sea and nature for us, our children and generations to come" (Fäldén et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT). Poisonous is an emotive expression and refers to cyanobacteria, called blue-green algae. It is a recurring problem during the summer in Finland. Cyanobacteria, caused by eutrophication, contaminate the water with toxins (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2022; Cf. Merkel, Säwe and Fredriksson 2021, 398). Along with emotive expressions from a previous letter in which the writer wrote that the water should be "safe for children to swim", the texts produce and mediate affect (ibid.; Kronholm 17.10.2018 ÖT). The reader may imagine what a summer day would be without the possibility to take a dip in the sea, especially if you are the owner of a holiday home by the water. In Finland, almost half of the population has access to a holiday home, with between 500 000 to just over 600 000 cottages (Voutilainen, Korhonen, Ovaska and Vihinen 2021). "Preserving the value of our summer cottages" is an emotive expression suggesting that an open sea fish farm would have a negative impact on the surroundings, and therefore is a risk to the value of the nearby holiday homes (Fäldén et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT).

Pontus Blomqvist and Teija Löfholm, initiators of a petition against the establishment of the fish farm,[9] wrote a letter about following the chain of events "with deep concern" regarding the farm and the lack of environmental impact assessment (16.11.2018 ÖT). They stated they were "proud" of the investments in effective water purification centres that the regional municipalities and companies had made (ibid.). Concerned and proud are emotion words that mediate affect. The letter continues with a numbered list of 17 "facts and problems", an orthographic practice that brings structure to the text, and points to many concerns (ibid.). Amongst the 17 points, there are emotive expressions like "[t]his is not a coincidence" regarding the planned production amount of 950 000 kilograms of fish, which according to Blomqvist and Löfholm is just under the limit for avoiding an environmental impact assessment (ibid.). Stating that the planned production amount is no coincidence is an emotive expression that can make the reader suspicious of the plans. This shows how affective practice, such as using affective tools, may have influenced public opinion regarding the establishment.

The writers compared the estimated amount of nitrogen emissions of 35 000 kilograms per year to "dumping the manure from 3000 pigs straight into the sea" and claimed eutrophication of the waters would have "unforeseeable consequences for the fish population in the area" and "unforeseeable consequences for the occurrence of algae" (ibid.). "Unforeseeable consequences" is also an emotive expression that can evoke insecurity.

Just as in Kronholm's letter (17.10.2018 ÖT) mentioning cow urine, using pig manure as an example is an effective way of concretising more abstract numbers. Manure and piss work as emotive expressions, strengthening the affect conveyed in the texts. Pig manure can also be read as a metaphor. Pigs as metaphors are mostly used in a negative sense, even if feelings about pigs are not universally negative. While pork is one of the most important protein sources in western society, expressions calling someone as dirty as a pig or a

9 Further into the debate, Blomqvist wrote a letter signed as a candidate for the Swedish People's Party (SFP) in the local election (Blomqvist 12.5.2021 ÖT)

chauvinist pig are common (Sahlberg 2012: 128–129). In this context of comparing the nutrient emissions from a fish farm to pig manure or cow urine, using highly charged metaphors or emotive expressions conveys affect. There is no doubt about the standpoint of the debaters regarding the issue. Likening the establishment of a fish farm to dumping thousands of kilograms of urine and faecal matter into the sea is an affectively charged way of describing what they think the establishment of a fish farm would entail.

Point 17 by Blomqvist and Löfholm concludes with information about a petition demanding an environmental impact assessment or else stopping the establishment of the fish farm. "[W]e urge every resident in the region to participate!" (16.11.2018 ÖT). This is a combination of orthographic practices (numbered list and exclamation mark) and an emotive expression, urging the locals to act.

Our Children

An apparent emotive expression appealing to the reader is "our children" and their safety (Fäldén et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT; Kronholm 17.10.2018 ÖT). Kari Ranta-aho, a fishery advisor,[10] also referred to the future of children, asking what the first graders eat at school today, and what they will be eating when they graduate. "What do children born in 2020 and adults in 2040 eat and drink?" (11.12.2020 ÖT). Note that Ranta-aho spoke in support of open sea fish farming and saw it as a solution for sustainable food production, while Fäldén and Kronholm were against the establishment.

Kyrre Kverndokk has examined the use of "our children" in climate change discourse, in which this phrase "represents a future to be saved" (2020, 145). He points out that the timespan used for climate modelling includes seemingly random dates such as 2030, 2050, or 2100, while the use of "our children" as a reference scales down time to a graspable future encompassing two generations, the present for "the parent" and the future for "our children". Trimming the time frame of the climate-changed future brings the potential climate catastrophe closer (2020, 155).

In the fish farming debate, I interpret the reference to "our children" as a way of mediating affect and influencing the reader. At the same time referring to "our children" and what they eat now in comparison to what they will eat when they grow up is a part of the climate change discourse, due to the connections between sustainable food production and the climate (Rockström, Edenhofer, Gaertner and DeClerck 2020, 3–5). Andreas Backa has researched self-sufficient farming, and his informants claim they grow their own crops for the sake of their children. Yet his analysis shows the main reason is their

10 Public official at the Direction of the Agriculture.

own peace of mind and the sense of doing something to prevent the environmental crisis (Backa 2018, 122, 131). The use of children as a metaphor for the next generation and their challenges is a way of highlighting the urgency of the situation—for both those who see fish farming as a solution to future problems and those who see fish farming a cause of problems in the future.

Madness or Common sense?

After the publication of the readers' letter from the summer cottage owners (Fäldén et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT) a letter by Veijo Hukkanen was published. Hukkanen signed his letter with "CEO, fisheries counsellor, Kalaneuvos Oy, fish processing, chair of Nordic Trout Ab board of directors, fish farming" (27.3.2019 ÖT). He argued that open sea fish farming could be used to increase the number of local fish on "the plates of Finns" (ibid.). "We are a land of a thousand lakes edged by the vast Baltic Sea, and still, we are eating imported fish. That is madness." (ibid.). Referring to the Finnish national brand as a Land of a Thousand Lakes[11] paired with "the vast Baltic Sea" is a metaphor that highlights a great potential for a flourishing fishing industry (ibid.). Madness is an emotive expression pointing out how foolish "we" (I interpret this "we" as people living in Finland in general) are by eating imported fish, and even more ridiculous we will be if we do not take the opportunity to change our behaviour (ibid.).

Maj-Len Enlund, on the other hand, stated that it is "common sense" to not allow the establishment of a fish farm in the open sea (20.6.2021 ÖT; 7.9.2021 ÖT), an emotive expression declaring her standpoint is the most reasonable. In the material, she stands out as the person most engaged in hindering the establishment. According to my search results, she wrote a total of 43 letters on the subject between 2018 and 2021. She did not sign her letters with any affiliation, other than as a local and a landowner in Larsmo, and in one letter as a "former SFP supporter" (16.2.2021 ÖT). Her first letter to the editor, written together with Johan Enlund, was rather short and straight forward. They expressed their surprise over the fact that very few residents in Larsmo had reacted to the fish farming plans (14.3.2019 ÖT). In the letter signed "former SFP supporter" she repeatedly asks questions like "Who knew? Nobody acted?", "Who knew or did not want to know? Forgot or repressed?" indicating something was off in the process of granting the farm's license agreements (16.2.2021 ÖT). She also mentions research on corruption, and how it can come in the form of networks that favour some and exclude others (ibid.). The debate goes on, and with the local election approaching, the politicians want to have their say about the fish farm. Enlund comments on this in one letter.

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> The fish farm debate is getting heated—and rightly so. Now is the time to examine what went wrong and why, and which politicians are hiding behind the cliffs in the archipelago. The north wind tends to wash clean. /…/ We cannot afford destroying our lives, our open landscapes by the sea. /…/ Proud residents of Larsmo and Jakobstad will not give up their sea and their archipelago. /…/ May the north wind blow up to storm! (Enlund 22.5.2021 ÖT)

Enlund frequently uses metaphors and emotive expressions in her letters. There is no doubt she was affected by the plans and wanted the readers to be affected and then act accordingly. She called upon "the north wind" to expose the "politicians hiding behind the cliffs" (ibid.). It is a strong metaphor for policymakers not taking responsibility for their actions. The establishment of the fish farm became a topic for political debate before the local elections in 2021. However, the final decision about the permits for the fish farm was made by the Regional State Administrative Agency for Western and Inland Finland (2020), and not by politicians in Jakobstad and Larsmo.

Muddy Waters or Fish to Feed the Children

In the letters to the editor those opposing the establishment of the fish farm used affective tools to paint a grim picture of what would happen if the farm was realised. The water would be muddy with faeces, and toxic from algal blooms. Children and future generations would not be able to swim in the sea, and the cottage owners would see their investments go down in value. The writers arguing for the establishment claimed that open sea fish farming is the best alternative to importing fish, that there would be enough food to feed the children, and that there would be no actual negative consequences.

For the reader who is not an environmental expert, marine biologist and has no deeper insight into nutrient emissions and their impact, the debate easily becomes abstract. Therefore, the comparisons with manure and other discharge are so powerful in comparison. They bring the debate down to a more comprehensive level, and in this way, the debate reads as affectively charged. People are assumably more likely to react if they read that their children will be swimming in a sea of animal urine than they would with the mentioning of heightened levels of phosphorus and nitrogen in the water. On the other hand, the pro-fish farmers indicated that there might not be enough food to feed the children in the future if open sea fish farming is not sanctioned.

Arguing for sustainability

It is hard to see how the debate regarding sustainability can move forward when the two sides of this debate are so far apart. Those opposing open sea fish farming did not offer any actual solutions to the increasing demand for fish, except for taking a positive stance on land-based fish farming. The writers who were in favour of establishing an open sea fish farm denied the possible harmful side effects. They argued for fish as a sustainable protein, and even as an "ecological" or "organic" product (Höglund 22.9.2018 ÖT). According to Soini and Birkeland, the heritage and vitality story lines of cultural sustainability discourse lack a critical discussion of what sustainability entails; rather it is taken for granted (2014, 220). At first glance, sustainability is not the most central topic of the debate, yet it is central to the debate in a broader perspective. A word search for sustainability[12] showed that it is mentioned in 22 of the letters. Ostrobothnia is seen as a region with clean nature and a long tradition of producing food from forests, fields, and the sea (Finholm 2021, 6). This appears vital to the understanding of the debaters' sustainability view.

The first reader's letter to mention sustainability was the initial one by Höglund, in which he claims farmed fish is the most "ecologically sustainable way of producing protein", and that the establishment would "meet the demands of sustainable aquaculture" (22.9.2018 ÖT). This is contested in the following letter, in which Ehrnström-Fuentes and Furu, validating their argument with their profession as researchers, present their view of the fish farm establishment as an example of "how sustainability and food culture are constructed in Ostrobothnia at the moment" (29.9.2018 ÖT). They mention economic, social, and cultural dimensions as important to maintaining long-term sustainability within the bounds of our planet. They describe a sustainable food culture that maintains a healthy environment and includes energy sufficient production and transport. Their argument that food is the hub of the sustainability issue", is a metaphor that puts food at the very centre of what is at stake in this debate, and in the sustainability debate at large (29.9.2018 ÖT; Cf. Rockström et al. 2020, 3–5; Ren et al. 2014).

Jonas Harald is a representative for the fishery action group within a regional cooperation organisation in Ostrobothnia (*Aktion Österbotten*) that is developing a programme for supporting fishery, aquaculture, and the marine environment (26.8.2021 ÖT). He has been interviewed about the matter on several occasions in ÖT and has written two letters to the editor. Harald responded to a letter that characterised him as an advocate for farmed fish. "I am a warm advocate of sustainable and local food production, where fish is an important part that deserves attention" (ibid.). He rhetorically asked if the import of farmed fish should be increased or if it should be produced nationally if it could be done in a sustainable manner. According to Harald, land-based fish farming is still unprofitable, and from "a principle of sustainability and climate impact", open sea fish farms are a better alternative (ibid.).

12 Using "hållbar" as a keyword.

Despite the apparent divide between the two opposing views regarding open sea fish farming, the issue is not that black and white after all. Two of the debaters, Ehrnström-Fuentes and Harald have played an active role in establishing a direct sales system for agricultural products named REKO.[13] In the debate about the farm, they presented different views on sustainability in relation to food. Harald argued for the benefits of fish farming, while Ehrnström-Fuentes took a stand against the establishment. In the debate, both sides expressed a will to make the right choice for the future. However, in reading the letters arguing in favour of the fish farm, it seems like these writers are more interested in meeting the current need of more domestically produced fish. While those opposing the establishment are afraid of how the farm will damage the environment. What is perceived as sustainability by one might not be considered sustainable by another. As mentioned previously, it might be more adequate to talk about sustainabilities in plural (cf. Ren et al. 2014, 907).

At the core of sustainability is the idea that we make sure that “the future generations inherit a world at least as bountiful as the one we inhabit” (Hawkes 2001, 11). The debate is about how to reach that goal. The debate circulates around values, what is important in the local culture (cf. ibid.; Marshall 2016, 17–20). In arguing for or against fish farming in a local context, the participants are taking a stand for what is important to them. In sharing these arguments, they seek support from their community. This became extra prominent in the debate when people were asked to sign a petition against the establishment of the fish farm, when the cottage owners wrote a joint letter, and when the residents were urged to act for their community, their environment, and the future.

I consider the sustainability view presented by the locals in Jakobstad and Larsmo arguing against the establishment of the fish farm to be a view of cultural sustainability. These debaters have taken a stand for their local community and its values. These values include preserving the environment and culture for the ones living in the region today and for future generations (Cf. Soini and Birkeland 2014, 216–217, 220).

The farm opponents use of affective tools to express opinions are a sign of an emotional relationship to the sea in their region. It shows what the locals consider important to them and how they view their environment and culture. The letters opposing the fish farm represent a sustainability view based

13 From Swedish Rejäl Konsumtion, meaning fair consumption. Introduced in 2013 by Thomas Snellman who was inspired by the French Associations pour le Maintien d’une Agriculture Paysanne, a system where customers can subscribe to a certain number of products directly from the producers. The Finnish version was launched in Jakobstad under the name REKO ring. There are over 600 rings in 14 different countries (Finholm 2021, 5, 13).

in culture. It is connected to their personal feelings, expectations, and desires. They are putting words on the kind of sustainability that Ren et al. (2014, 910) mention as “emotional orientation and cultural disposition”. Hanna Palovuori, a representative of the Greens in Jakobstad, explains her standpoint against the fish farm like this:

> The sea is portrayed in the Jakobstad coat of arms, the town is emptied during summer because the people move to their summer cottages by the sea, the beaches in Fäboda … our identity is connected to a small maritime town. (Palovuori 15.5.2021 ÖT)

Palovuori’s text uses affective tools in a subtle manner; it contains emotive expressions painting a nostalgic and romantic picture of life in a small town by the sea. Affect is also apparent in the arguments made by Höglund, the fisher who wants to begin farming fish and make a living for himself. He debates using environmental claims, but he also expresses personal frustration as a company owner and fisher.

For the fishery representatives arguing for open sea fish farming, the debate is not as emotionally charged. Their contribution to the debate also stands out since they are writing in the capacity of business professionals (cf. Barton 2010: 109–111). They argue for a sustainability in which financial and environmental goals meet. Fish as a sustainable food is a central argument in the fish farm debate. Farmed fish, according to the letters by Harald, Ranta-aho, and others, is a sustainable protein (26.8.2021 ÖT; 11.12.2020 ÖT).

Cultural sustainability shines a light on what is important in a shared culture. The local production of food is considered important in the region. This is shown through the example of how REKO became a success (Ehrnström-Fuentes and Leipämaa-Leskinen 2019; Finholm 2021). The significance of locally produced food is also visible on a larger scale through large food industry actors in Jakobstad. Because of the proximity to the sea, fish is and has been an important part of the local diet (cf. Lindqvist 2018, 94–97). The cottage owners stated they want to preserve the naturally occurring fish stock to make sure it is possible henceforth to buy fresh fish from local fishers (Fäldén et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT). The writers arguing for the establishment of the fish farm also used cultural arguments. Fish is considered an important animal protein for many; fishery is a part of the local culture, and a fish farm would help preserve that profession.

Conclusions: Local Cultural Sustainabilities

The question this article aims to answer is how the two sides in the fish farming debate present their view of sustainability. By focusing on affective tools in the material, the analysis shows what is considered important among the debaters. It displays what norms and values they share in relation to the environment, food, and culture. Cultural sustainability is a useful term for describing how they expressed their views on sustainability. The things that the debaters considered sustainable were things related to their shared culture. In this point, those opposing the establishment of the fish farm and those arguing for the farm share some arguments. They all want to prepare for a better future. However, they disagree on how to get there. According to the writers in favour of the establishment, it is necessary to prepare for the increasing need of more domestically produced fish. The ones resisting the establishment argue that an open sea fish farm will pollute the water and therefore should be prevented.

One's view of cultural sustainability is expressed through the choices they make, such as the food they eat. It is evident that fish is important in the Jakobstad region. Marshall describes how people balance between different sustainability ideals when shopping for food. For example, the choice between organic or local becomes a negotiation (Marshall 2016, 103–113). To the debaters opposing the farm, it is also important that the fish is caught wild and not farmed in the open sea—at least not in their "own sea". The notion of sustainability in the debate is focused on local concerns, only a few of the letters connect the issue to a larger, global debate about sustainability. According to Marshall, the notion of a sustainable society is not only based on preservation of the environment and its resources, the local economy and social relations are also considered important (Marshall 2016, 113). In the debate, concerns for the local environment and foodways combine cultural and ecological values, resulting in a local cultural sustainability view (cf. Soini and Birkeland 2014, 216–217, 220).

Choosing locally produced food is seen as a sustainable choice charged with ideas of tradition, identity, environment, and nostalgia. This surfaces in the letters when the debaters write they want to buy fresh fish from a local fisherman, when they describe the sea portrayed in the town's coat of arms, and so forth (Fäldén et al. 24.3.2019 ÖT; Palovuori 15.5.2021 ÖT). The fisherman, on the other hand, describes how he is struggling to continue his profession (Höglund 22.9.2018 ÖT). He too expresses a cultural view of sustainability in which he can continue a traditional profession in a new way—and keep selling local fish to the locals. Conflict arises due to differing views on sustainability.

There is potential in continuing to analyse the debate to reach a deeper understanding of the debaters' sentiments. Another possible approach would be widening the perspective to the global debate on sustainable foodways. The method for analysing expressions of affect in text through affective tools could be useful when studying emotional aspects of debates regarding, for example, wind farming and mining for battery component minerals. Additionally, I hope this paper contributes to further research on the importance of understanding cultural sustainability and the value of considering emotional aspects in sustainability research.

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Inés Matres

"Ha! Suck on that Corona, I Found Something to Do"
Capturing Adolescent Experiences during Lockdown in Finland

Abstract

In the spring of 2020 young people were living in an exceptional period of isolation, messiness and emotional turmoil. The pandemic situation in Finland serves as the background of this study, which focuses on participation and the voice of adolescents in times of crisis. My inquiry is based on 75 diaries collected by diverse museums and archives and originally created by 11- to 18-year-olds during remote schooling, and my aim is to ascertain how they were invited in and responded to making the stuff of history. Combining oral history and media ethnographic methods, I provide an analysis of the diaries focusing on the emotional resilience attached to hobbies, the echo that the narrators' information habits generate, and the media ecologies that resulted from the crafting and writing of diaries. My main argument is that although the diaries capture the narrators' reactions to the crisis, the strong presence of their ordinary lives exposes shared generational traits that are worth preserving beyond this strange time. The students were writing in and about the immediate environment in which they lived their lives, which resulted in an uncommon and rich form of oral history that raised new questions about young people's experiences during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, remote schooling, children and youth, cultural participation, oral history, emotions, hobbies, digital lives

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Introduction

What came to be known world-wide as the COVID-19, or coronavirus pandemic had an effect on people's everyday lives. The drastic changes of routines that children and youth had to make from one day to the next and the length of the pandemic has generated research and public concern about their experiences during remote schooling. Even if the lockdown measures in Finland did not entail strict home confinement as imposed in other countries, schools closed, and pupils had to organise their schoolwork from home[1]. This turned what used to be a source of structure and routine into a factor of messiness in life (Ahtiainen, Asikainen, Heikonen, Hienonen, Hotulainen, Lindfors, Lindgren, Lintuvuori, Kinnunen, Koivuhovi, Oinas, Rimpelä and Vainikainen 2021, 44–46). It has been recognised that factors related to family, personal situations, gender or geographical locality made experiences of remote schooling heterogeneous among pupils (Lahtinen and Kauppinen 2021; Helfer and Myllyniemi 2022; Tuuva-Hongisto, Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Armila and Haverinen 2022). Ethnography is an interesting starting point from which to approach this exceptional time as the pandemic destabilised the taken-for-granted of everyday life, which is at the core of this article. It was pointed out in a recent issue of this journal (48.1) that more attention should be given to "daily life findings" in efforts to understand the complex social, place-based and technological relations that intertwine in and around going to school (Hämeenaho and Sainio 2021, 86). Although these relations have always existed, they became problematic when school, family and leisure collided at home on March 16th, 2020.

As Tine Damsholt (2020;2021) pointed out, the pandemic offered a unique opportunity to examine the complex work of emotions, objects and routinised practices in shaping experiences. The idea of seeing the familiar and routinised as a black box in which "neighbouring and unexpected elements cohabit in the setting of a situation" (Lofgren 2014, 81) is of great interest to me, in this article and related to my previous research, as I ponder on questions about agency and mediated practices of pupils in the contexts of everyday schooling (Matres 2018; 2020). This article follows the day-to-day lives of 75 adolescents[2] through the diaries they produced for diverse classes as assignments during lockdown, which were later collected in diverse mu-

1 Basic education and secondary schools closed from March 16 to May 12 in 2020 (Valtioneuvosto 2020) and on diverse dates depending on the area in the Fall/Winter 2020–21 (Yle 2021).

2 The term adolescence is conventionally used to emphasize the changes that occur in transitioning from childhood to adulthood, I do not mean to emphasize this but use it because it describes the age-group of narrators more accurately than "youth" (ages 10–24). (Csikszentmihalyi n.d.)

seums and archives. Even if the exceptional situation provoked the production and collection of these diaries, the pandemic became the background and not the driving force of their everyday lives. The following statement that inspired the title of this article transmits the effect that reading these diaries provoked in me:

> HA! Suck on that corona I found something to do, I found in my closet some old paintings and I am doing them over. Actually, now that I got time to think, I came up with a bunch of things to do, I can bake, paint, find out the real reasons Titanic sank and all about other sunk ships. (23.3.2020 Veva, 9th grade)

Even if some diaries were entitled “quarantine diary”, the accumulation of daily entries conveyed much more than experiences of lockdown. The diaries convey also the entanglements (Ingold 2008), or the intertwined and complex relations among the personal and curricular achievements, in and out of school activities, familiar environments and routinised practices, none of which disappeared during the pandemic. The strong presence of their ordinary lives in the diaries and the fact that they were created as schoolwork shed light on how youth was *invited* in and *responded to* documenting this historical moment, which is the underlying question I pose in this article. It is pertinent to pose this question and to recognise their voices at a time when adolescents were perceived as being deprived of cultural and public life. Present-day cultural participation means more than participating in free-time activities. When it comes to children and youth, cultural institutions focus their efforts on providing experiences, but rarely consider the outcomes in terms of what young people want and can contribute (Simon 2010, 211; Meijer- van Mensch and Tietmeyer 2013, 10). Given that diverse cultural institutions were responsible for collecting these diaries, my aim in this article is to consider their contribution, which as Kaitavuori and Miller (2007, 29) observe requires looking at them supporting adolescents’ autonomous initiatives and remaining close to their cultures.

After giving an overview of the diaries, methodological and ethical considerations, I analyse the material closely, focusing on the emotional responses that the narrators connected with hobbies, the echo that their information habits generated, and the media ecologies that resulted from the crafting and the writing of the diaries. In my concluding discussion I reflect on how documenting (in) the immediate environments in which they lived their lives allowed the adolescents not only to document their pandemic experiences but also to share "generational" traits worth preserving and reflecting upon beyond this strange time.

Oral history in contemporary times, a method for exploring quaranteen diaries

Collecting people's reactions to present-day phenomena is a contemporary form of oral history that originates in the tradition of writing "from below". It involves actively seeking life stories of people in the margins of history (Sheridan 1993; Latvala and Laurén 2013; Hovi, Mäki, and Sonck-Rautio 2022). Oral history projects rely on the participation of ordinary people, and many emerge during exceptional times (Cave 2014; Kelly 2020; Sloan 2020). Four of the many initiatives of museums and archives in Finland that documented the COVID-19 pandemic[3] involved the collection of 75 diaries[4]. The projects that collected these diaries could be considered part of this tradition, although school assignments are an unusual form of personal testimony. Having interviewed the curators, I learned that their projects did not align with a coordinated strategy to document the pandemic (Bounia 2020), and they did not know initially what they would acquire. It was rather upon the initiative of a few teachers and their students that the diaries were collected. The ethos behind the collection reflects what Jenkins and Carpentier (2013, 282) describe as true participation: adults 'letting go of control' and young people experiencing 'being taken seriously'. Unlike responses to questionnaires or interviews that normally constitute oral history, these diaries do not respond to a pre-existing research intent: they belong to the ordinary lives of adolescents, thereby appropriately approaching this historical moment "from below".

Diaries are artefacts that are often encountered in oral history archives. Some research based on life-writings during lockdown has been published recently (Damsholt 2020; Kurvet-Käosaar and Hollo 2021; Mountfield, Gronow, and Trentmann 2022), and although the focus is not on adolescents, one common theme has emerged from the studies that is also common to research based personal narratives, namely emotions. The diary "is a genre that facilitates self-reflection and analysis of change" (Kur-

3 Finnish museums coordinate contemporary documentation projects through the TAKO network. Information about all corona documentation projects can be found here: .The Finnish Literature Society's Traditional and Contemporary Culture collections launched two questionnaires to collect reactions: "Corona Spring" (March-June 2020) and "All year Corona" (March-October 2021). Information about these can be found here: https://www.finlit.fi/en/node/1626.

4 Hämeenlina City Musuem (15 diaries), Hamina City Museum (27 diaries), Kymenlaakso Museum (30 diaries), Finnish Literature Society (3 diaries).

vet-Käosaar and Hollo 2021, 58): in other words, diaries reveal less about the facts of the crisis and its broader effects, rather emphasising personal experiences and the emotional impact. Focusing on emotions in personal narratives may enhance understanding of historical phenomena from marginalised perspectives (Latvala and Laurén 2013, 255). My aim in the first analytical section is to focus on emotions connected to hobbies that are mentioned recurrently in the diaries as a reminder of what is important to the narrators.

In close reading these diaries I also turned to media ethnography, which could be described as sensitivity towards the links and interdependences among artefacts, practices and social arrangements around the use of media (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2006), and particularly the digital media that mediates daily routines (Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis and Tacchi 2015). I explore these interdependences in two analytical sections based on adolescents’ reactions to news about the pandemic, and their practices of crafting and writing the diaries. The diaries consist of born-digital materials and paper artworks, which make them particularly interesting with regard to the media literacies of present-day youth.

This brings me to the 75 diaries. I focused on diaries because they offer similarities: all were assignments, they started on March 16 and ended on May 14. This allowed me to consider them as one corpus of material produced by adolescents between 11 and 18 years of age[5]. The diaries originated from six classes altogether, donated by three teachers to their regional or city museums, and in the case of the archive they were submitted directly by students. Informed consent to conduct research was given by each pupil, and also by parents when minors were involved. Given their ages and the recency of the materials I anonymised all the quotations, and I do not establish connections between the material and the institution to avoid compromising personal information about their place of residence (Kohonen, Kuula-Luumi, and Spoof 2019).

Hobbies and shared emotional resilience

> Soon Easter holiday will start, which means, no need to go to meets on Friday or Monday. Up to now no one has created a medicine or vaccine for corona. I have focused on better things to do than watching news about corona, I bake and I’ve really baked a lot, so I might as well say it, I’m going to become a confectioner when I grow up

5 Ages were inferred from the grades. Although all the diaries were marked with the class or grade of the pupils, not all gave their ages.

> and that’s dead certain (I have been dreaming of a pastry chef career for the past 4 years). (9.4.2020, Veva, 9th grader)

Hobbies, when mentioned in diaries, often provoke an emotional or motivational reaction (Strauss and Quinn 1997). My focus in this section is on the reactions triggered by the mention of hobbies. Veva’s diary contrasts with the diaries of most of her classmates as she gives prominent space to her many hobbies. This is not the rule: most of the diaries do not focus on hobbies, although the narrators mention regularly doing something for fun, or reveal at some point what they are passionate about. Practicing hobbies triggered expressions of fulfilment, passion, joy, fun, pleasure and even addiction in the diaries, which projected adolescents as the active emotional community they comprise, sharing experiences and expressions of emotion (Rosenwein 2002, 842). Even if the pandemic inspired complex emotions, it was only the oldest narrators who voiced them. When emotions appear in diaries, as Nancy Chodorow (1999, 6) posits, “the psychological meets the cultural and the self meets the world”. In other words, through feelings we make sense of the world, and when feelings are voiced others make sense of us. Indeed, the emotional tone connected to hobbies allowed me to know Veva and other narrators more intimately. It revealed how important it is to have hobbies alongside family responsibilities, chores and schoolwork, the reporting of which frequently implied a sense of duty.

Hobbies can be understood in terms of emotional resilience during the months of lockdown. Resilience has been defined as the process by which one adapts to difficult circumstances, which usually originates in the ordinary (Masten 2015; Hytönen and Malinen 2018). For some, such as Veva, hobbies offered a way of coping and a shield against the flood of pandemic news, thoughts and conversations which, as Darmsholt (2021, 255) found, conferred a layer of anxiety in the diaries of many as a “sticky basic mood”. Hobbies, for others, intensified or added to the anxiety felt during this period:

> I have survived being within these four walls surprisingly well, but I realise that without training regularly I am more tired. Then, at night I am wide awake and cannot sleep. I am used to swimming an hour and a half each day, and now I that I don’t, I cannot burn my energy properly. Sure, I train otherwise and walk many kilometres each day, but the amount of exercise has reduced at least to a half because of this virus. I don’t remember when I last went swimming and I miss the pool (7.4.2020 Koni, 12th grade).

Koni’s emotional reaction is not isolated: narrators who could not engage in their hobbies experienced disappointment, frustration and sadness. Koni’s disarrangement of biorhythms that resulted from not training properly serves as a reminder that emotions are just part of a complex chain of bodily reactions triggered when habits are broken. Other athletes and sport spectators shared a sense of frustration over cancelled tournaments or closed facilities. Team training or orchestra rehearsals were replaced by exercises done in one’s own room, definitely less enjoyable. In some diaries, hobbies drove adolescents to consume news, hoping that restrictions might be lifted soon. While the pandemic generated an emotional and possibly a resilience divide, the strong emotional response holds.

> Spring is coming, slowly. Many are really sad about cancelling all their summer plans. Festivals and other events will not be held (27.4.2020, Lopo, 9th grade).

Emotions are salient when narrators write from a personal and subjective position but are equally reported on in less personal statements. Dorothy Sheridan (1993, 32) pointed out that some narrators willingly take a less personal position of “observer rather than being observed” and this is the case for the majority of diaries. Even in these instances, such as Lopo’s statement above, the reader is given the impression that the narrator participates in the collective sorrow. Pauliina Latvala and Kirsi Laurén (2013, 250) observed that “even if experiences and emotions are personal, different people may experience the same general pattern”. This general pattern is reflected in the repertoire of activities, which I collected from narrators who could engage in hobbies: Cosplay, watching Anime all day, driving dad’s car, *mopo* (slang: moped), dance a choreography, orienteering, baking, milkshakes, Saturday candy-day!, *pleikka* (slang: PlayStation), Netflix, audiobooks, customising clothes, playing an instrument, Fornite, Audacity, planning the first road-trip, go fishing… The reader can easily imagine not one but a plethora of teenagers behind each of them. This echoes Harriet Nielsen’s (2003) notion of the historicity of self-constructions, meaning that the way people present themselves is common or shared among age-cohorts. In other words, it is socially constructed, but equally it results from sharing a cultural and historical period. These hobbies and the emotional response to them reveal both the age of these narrators but also the time in which they were living.

To sum up, I have showed here how hobbies became a strong source of emotional resilience for adolescents during the pandemic, even if this was unevenly distributed. However, this did not diminish their power. The narrators who found refuge in them instead of reporting on school progress or commenting on pandemic-related news (which were clear objectives of some of these diaries), indicate that they exercised the freedom to pursue their own documentary agendas. In so doing, they captured one important piece of their shared teenage experience and time beyond the specific of the pandemic.

Digital continuity in the messiness of new routines

It is surprisingly difficult to recognise the students’ own school rhythms even if various diaries accumulate lists of things done day after day. It has been shown that the lack of lesson plans was a major cause of stress among school pupils during lockdown (Lahtinen, Laine, and Pitkänen 2021; Ahtiainen et al. 2021). The diaries confirm that they dedicated different amounts of time to school each day (Ahtiainen et al. 2021, 44–46). Many students evoked the “messiness” through complaints, forgetting ‘live’ lessons, or mentioning that homework was piling up. The fact that a few students discontinued keeping their diaries made it clear that some of them were not coping with the new situation. Even those who meticulously kept them up to date admitted to having problems following their plans:

> The first time I wrote in this diary, I had planned to follow a daily rhythm. Now it has taken a back seat, I no longer take decent breaks and I really don’t have time to go outside between school hours (8.5.2020, Susa, 9th grade).

Tine Damsholt (2021; 2020) poignantly described chaotic pandemic routines using Sarah Ahmed’s notion of being attuned to or out of synch with public life (in Damsholt 2020, 144). This lack of stability and an incapacity to follow plans aligns with a general pattern of being out of synch with the world. However, it has been recognised that homes constitute “a setting for choreographies that make life run smoothly or an arena of conflicting rhythms” (Ehn & Löfgren as cited in Damsholt 2020, 139). Similarly, school may always have been a place of conflicting rhythms for some of these students. This raises the question of what, if anything, provided them with continuity.

It is undeniable that laptops and learning environments turned into essential facilitators of daily routines, such as returning homework, attending lessons or taking exams. Simultaneously, they became problematic as aspects of life had to be transferred from present to online environments, thereby increasing screentime. But the pandemic has presented opportunities to focus on “how” rather than on “how much” young people engage with their devices (Fetcher-Watson in Thomson et al 2018, 3; Hämeenaho and Sainio 2021).

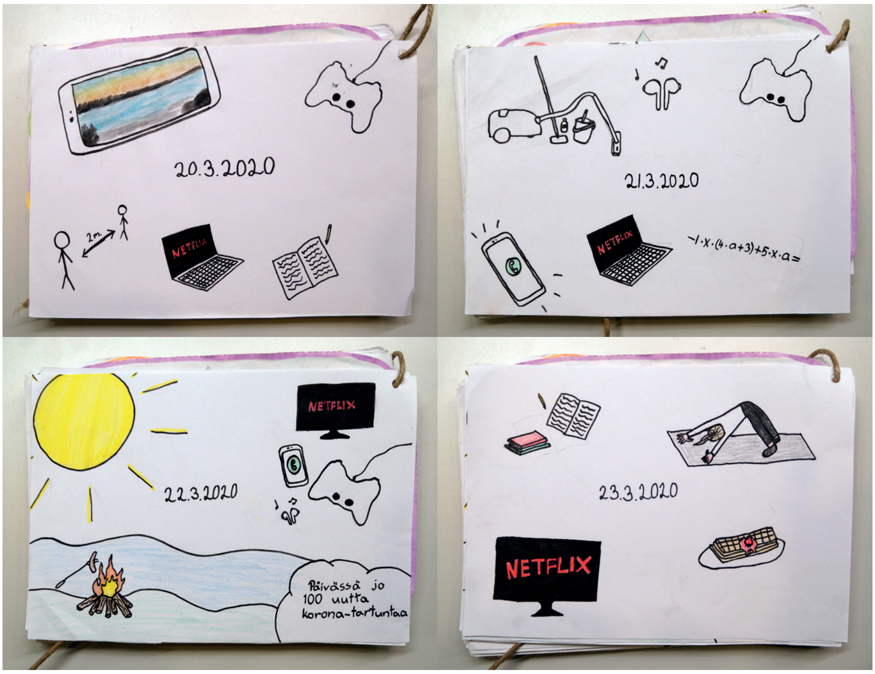

Figure 1 Nina, 7th grade.

The idea of "digital continuity" emerged when I was examining the art diaries which were, ironically, the only non-born-digital material. The presence of devices in many of them drove me to collect signs of their digital lives. Nina's way to record her daily activities (see Figure 1 above), show the extent to which framed objects and framing devices were entangled in her daily routines. These entanglements show that the "digital cannot be dealt as a separate substrate but as constitutive part of what makes us human" (Horst and Miller 2012, 4).

An aspect in which digital lives flowed in the diaries was through the references to news on which the writers commented or reproduced. A 9th grade history class collected and provided commentary on news read each day. Many diaries made by two art classes of 7th to 9th grades were collages done with newspaper clippings. Both sets of diaries are well-stocked catalogues of references to news coverage and online content that were in the social-media feeds of many during the first months of the pandemic. The diaries contain a network of connections to diverse digital objects that leave a trace (Cocq 2019; Uimonen 2020). It would be possible to collect these objects, but many narrators embedded fragments of online news conspicuously in their narratives and these do not stand out as much as paper clippings. Identifying these links

Figure 2 Clem, 7th grade.

would be equivalent to reconstructing the students’ messy routines. However, this replicates a typical trait of the present-day networked communicative milieu.

A song composed by several pop artists in the spirit of solidarity, was praised among some narrators, whereas the attempt to crush the largest school virtual platform circulated on TikTok was criticised. While some welcomed the idea to see friends face-to-face at the end of lockdown, one student’s entire diary consisted in a single entry making the stronger his position against the Government´s decision to return to school for only two weeks. Some became trapped in “a liminal space trying to gather as much information as possible” (Yong 2020), and others welcomed the *infodemic* of conspiracies and humour that spread with the virus as a way to “lighten the mood”. While many commented restrictions and news from polarized positions in support or opposition, others created humorous meme-like commentaries, or replicated content in diaries as if they were bookmarking or retweeting it. However, a few reacted to them in a more personal and elaborated tone which I would like to illustrate with Clem’s collage (see Figure 2 above). The manifold reactions to the pandemic situation bear remarkable similarities with the online media discourse. The variety of positions and opinions also reflect the cultural aspect of the “historicity of self-presentations” (Nielsen 2003). By this I mean that the diverse positions narrators occupy were culturally mediated by the informational environments that surrounds them. With this, a specific trait of their time was captured by adolescents that should be considered as a continuation and reflection of their pre-pandemic lives.

Wood, paper, phone… the mediated voice of adolescents

The focus in this section is on the multimedia and multimodal content of the diaries. In terms of materiality, I examine here the complex media ecologies they assemble and how they facilitate and constrain adolescents in documenting experiences. Media ecologies have been defined as the interdependence and layering of modes of being online and offline in the world (Ito, Baumer, Bittanti, boyd, Cody, Stephenson, Horst, Lange, Mahendran, Martínez, Pascoe, Robinson, Sims and Tripp 2009, 31). It is also interesting to observe how media ecologies can unite or divide curricular and vernacular practices (Kupiainen 2013b; Matres 2020).

Woodwork, Easter decorations, collages and drawings present in the diaries contrast starkly to the videogames, films and other media practices also mentioned in them, but these analogue media also transmit the narrators' voices. When I was reading the material, I focused on listening to the adolescents' voices, my intention being to consider them the makers and shapers in documenting this experience. With "voice" I understand what Charmaz and Mitchell describe as *animus* in storytelling (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996, 285), that is, to consider not the content of a story but the way authors make their will and intent visible.

The elementary school pupils embedded photographs in their diaries. Their class teacher[6] wanted to be kept informed about their overall school progress, and to offer support[7], and the diaries include his weekly feedback. Many photos depict projects realised outdoors (see Figure 3 above), which indicates that some teachers actively promoted maintaining a balance with increased screentime, and it also reflects that this was a rural area. Apart from things that could be photographed, some students mentioned video works and school projects that did not fit the format or scope of the diary and as result, these were merely referenced, not captured in the material. Lasse's video, described in his diary entry above (Figure 3), is one example. Many other students mentioned the water mill, but he was the only one to photograph it, even if the video showing that it works was sent through another channel. It is also worth pointing out here that some narrators only reported on things that they thought were aligned with the

Figure 3 Lasse, elementary school. Excerpts from diary: 15.4.2020 I built the water wheel and sent you a video […] – Friday 16.4. I saw the video, was there a bearing in the water wheel? It swirls so fast. J. No, I did not use a bearing, I put a separate tube in the middle.

6 Classroom teachers in Finland work in the lower grades of elementary school (grades 1-6), they oversee one or several groups and teach diverse subjects (Opetusministeriö 2007).

7 Clarified in interview with curator 20.10.2021

Figure 4 Ujo, 9th grade.

assignment. Even if keeping a diary allows for self-reflection, and as previously examined some students reported on their hobbies or adopted a more personal tone, others kept a strictly “curricular” diary. It thus seems that the curricular context of these diaries (rather than their nature as diaries) inspired many to maintain the in-and-out-of-school divide (Kupiainen 2013b).

Another set of diaries were artworks done by two classes and were exhibited outdoors near the school later that year, after which, they were sent to the museum[8]. They also comprise a variety of materials which indicates that they were encouraged to experiment with diverse techniques. However, a few students produced diaries that followed a coherent body of work. This confirms what Latvala(2016, 409) observed, that oral history writers “adopt and combine established narrative tools to achieve their communicative goals”. Among the oldest pupils, Ujo used only postcard-sized cardboard and through a similar technique he gave visual continuity to his diary (see Figure 4 above). Developing his personal style Ujo advanced in his art class. Like his and Lasse’s, the storytelling animus of many was to show curricular progress and achievement. Even if in some instances, developing a personal narrative or artistic style blended with the curricular task and the reason they were collected: to document and reflect about the pandemic.

Another aspect that derives from the materiality of the diaries and makes visible the voice of narrators relates to the aforementioned digital entanglements in the lives of narrators. With entanglement I refer here to the intervention of new writing originally defined as the “language of digital texts seen in messaging and online communication” (Merchant 2005). One way digital materiality can be understood, refers to how digital technologies impact the way people communicate (Horst and Miller 2012, 30). This has remained unexplored in oral history but is of great interest for semioticians and digital

8 Clarified in interview with curator 8.12.2021

ethnographers, who often rely on youth to explore this phenomenon. New writing accentuates visual aspects of language, extend the meaning of text and the range of writing practices. So-called iconographetic communication (Siever, Siever, and Stöckl 2019), namely emoticons, emojis, hashtags and stickers, have become common as devices through which adolescents nowadays express emotions and reactions (Miller 2015; 2016), and they are present in the diaries. The presence of emojis in homework is a sign that young people's media ecologies combine the vernacular in curricular contexts. This reflects Reijo Kupiainen's (2013b, 42) notion of the "third space", meaning the rare moments when the "out of school media practices of students are met halfway by their teachers". It is visible in diaries such as Alma's, whose reports on her anime film carry an emotional tone indicating that it is a hobby, which is met with curiosity by the teacher (and the reader). Although most narrators refrained from using emojis, and kept a curricular tone, those writing in their own informal language[9] actively and serendipitously kept record of it:

> 6.5. […] Oh, and I downloaded Kinemaster yesterday in my tablet and I started making an anime film 😃😁🎥 […]
> Saturday 7.5. Wow, what an update… PS. the film sounds interesting, is it a crime film? J. Yep, of course, it's a crime film 😊💎 (Alma, elementary school)

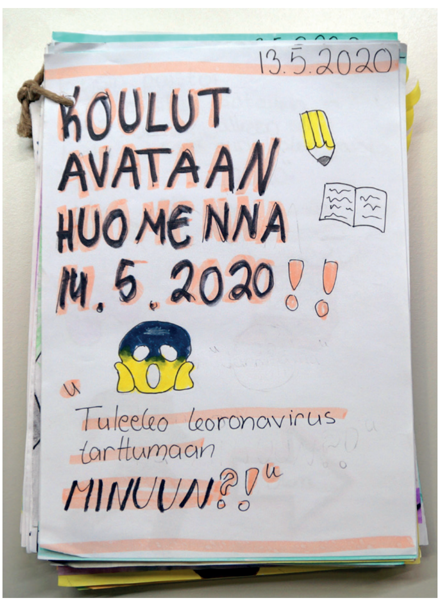

Figure 5: Schools open tomorrow 14.5.2020!! 'Will I catch coronavirus?!' Kopi, 7th grade

Emojis, stickers and hashtags are also drawn in the paper diaries, similarly as shown in Figure 5. This indicates that contexts of new writing are not exclusively digital. All this reflects what Miller audaciously suggested while observing youth's polymedia practices: "feelings have migrated from textual to visual communication"(Miller 2015, 11). The presence of visual

9 Here it is worth pointing out that spoken Finnish (*puhekieli*) does not derive from texting, but the use of iconographs was often accompanied by shortened words and vernacular language.

punctuation and references to media practices reinforce the need to consider the visual as valid a constitutive part of how adolescents communicate as "the digital".

One last aspect I find interesting about the materiality of the born-digital diaries is that the act of writing is tied to the digital device where the diaries where composed. This allows to speculate about the physical contexts and situations in which narrators wrote their diaries. Laptops and word processors are not particularly open to the insertion of emojis in text, therefore their presence points to the use of a mobile device, in which a catalogue of visual punctuations is available at the tap of a finger. The implication here is that some diaries were conducted using the app or environment used to communicate with the teacher. This is emphasized by the presence of replies to the teacher's feedback, as it is shown in Lasse's and Alma's examples earlier. Even if the diaries were written upon reflexion at the end of the day, snapshots of school projects, food, walks, or "data" such as the exact length and average speed of the daily bike ride, made the act of keeping diary a practice entangled in the course of the day, accompanying the many experiences they chose to share.

To conclude, there is a similarity between research-driven oral history narratives and these diaries, in that they provide a way of acknowledging and making visible the literacies and writing practices of these students (Sheridan, Street, and Bloome 2013, 348). What these diaries reveal is that writing is nowadays entangled in a range of achievements, activities, spaces and emotions that are accumulated in phones in the course of the day and are recalled in aid of memory, or are captured and communicated in more spontaneous ways.

Concluding discussion: Adolescents' participatory intensities

The diaries and the way they were collected reveal how, when adolescents were given the chance to contribute, it was productive to refrain from giving them directives or fixing objectives. It is clear that they only needed "an external prompt to write their autobiographies" (Sheridan 1993, 33). My main argument in this article is that documenting (in) the immediate environment in which narrators live their lives results in a life-like portrait of their generation. The diaries offer rich material to be used in future research on youth cultures and experiences during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is not to say that the narrators' experiences were documented (or indeed reported here) in a free or unmediated manner. The accumulation of daily entries revealed instructions and a reason for being other than to document lockdown lives, such as reporting on homework and reflecting upon news read each day. Moreover, as the point of a diary is to record something every day, students adopted diverse diary styles and habits which flow in diverse points of my analysis. Some conveyed a personal, intimate or informal tone whereas others were more distanced, or remained on the curricular while a few pursued their own documentary agendas. The fact that entire classes were given this task does not necessarily contradict the voluntary nature of participation, but it is necessary to acknowledge the minority who discontinued writing the diaries completely or partially. The variety of styles and the absences enhance accuracy when portraying adolescent experiences and manifest the diverse range of participatory intensities that "distinguish participation from access and interaction in cultural life" (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 241). The point here, I believe, is that the intensity was defined by the narrators and the way they engaged with their diaries, and it was neither constrained nor influenced by the teachers or the intention of museums and archives to document a phenomenon. Given the active way in which the adolescents responded to being invited to become involved in the making of the stuff of history, one could describe assignments as a fruitful genre of oral history. Nevertheless, as I made clear in my analysis, the curricular contexts, which were only partially documented, might have prevented some from expressing their vernacular selves.

Focusing on aspects of life that continued despite the pandemic instead of those that became strange and messy might not reflect what was expected, but adolescents' autonomous and active practices frequently defy expectations (Kupiainen 2013a). This is echoed in the statement that gives the article its title and in the themes I selected. Returning to Veva, she metaphorically defeats the pandemic after a week of feeling lonely, imprisoned and bored. After this, the pandemic is rarely mentioned in her diary. Most narrators were not so blunt, but when entries are recorded every day the accumulation of ordinary experiences eclipses what is exceptional and unique in the situation. The narrators challenged my expectations and influenced my analysis such that, although the pandemic is still present, it remains in the background in their everyday experiences.

I have presented these diaries with due consideration of the voice of the adolescents, in other words their will, intent and feelings (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996). This guided my approach to the pandemic, and to remote schooling as historic phenomena "from below". Combining oral history with media ethnography allowed me to recognise and make an inventory of certain aspects of the students' everyday lives that, although affected by the pandemic, evoked shared "generational" traits. Generational here means that their personalities and experiences are revealed subjectively as well as socially, and that this is also historically and culturally constructed (Nielsen 2003). First, I showed the strong emotional response and resilience connected to hobbies despite the pandemic-imposed inequalities. Second, although the narrators reacted to news about the pandemic from diverse positions and revealing heterogenous informational habits, on the whole they faithfully reproduced their networked communicational milieu. Third, I examined the way they constructed their diaries and made use of a range of digital and non-digital media both enabling and constraining in the same degree their curricular and vernacular expressions. Finally, the digital lives that flow in diverse moments of my analysis require considering the act of “writing” as a complex documentary practice entangled in a range of emotions, artefacts, achievements, places and material contexts that accumulate in the course of the day or are shared spontaneously.

These diaries were created and collected at a time when life was increasingly being lived online. Hence, it is opportune to capture and reflect upon the impact of having learned to being attuned with one’s online life. Adolescence remains a trope in research on digital culture (Ito et al. 2009; Miller 2016) because having lived with digital devices all their lives, adolescents in 2020 express their digital cultures as bluntly as they can describe their emotions. I believe it is pertinent to consider it as their historical contribution. This focus on their hobbies and digital lives may have eclipsed other topics that could be further investigated. The understated emotion related to schoolwork and gender inequalities in expressing emotion bring to mind similar or more interventional research approaches. Additionally, the narrators’ diverse reactions to social isolation, and to the effects of this and other crises, could be combined with other material and examined further. The presence of these reactions indicates that they too shape the everyday experiences of adolescents beyond this particular crisis. Given that these materials are public history records, makes me hopeful for further investigation.

AUTHOR

Inés Matres is a doctoral candidate at the Department of ethnology, Faculty of Arts, University of Helsinki, Finland. This is the last article of her doctoral thesis that examines cultural heritage practices, spaces and encounters in school education in the digital age.

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Students of an International Degree Programme Go Local

Exploring the Interactions as Reflected by Friendship Families

Abstract

This study examines the interactions and communication between a group of African university students and a local Finnish community, as discussed by local friendship family members. Studies show that ensuring the well-being of international students and their study success is challenging in a foreign country. Students tend to remain in their own groups, and interaction with native students and local society may be minimal. To support international students' adjustment, the university unit in question organised volunteer family support. The data consist of interviews with eleven participants. Interpretation of the data is based on the applied theoretical framework of cultural communication and various types of social and emotional support. The findings reveal that the local friendship families and adult friends had international backgrounds and were interested in international issues. The interaction was an evolving process with some difficulties in communication. The process included three main approaches: accepting the students as family members, introducing them to Finnish culture and providing them with emotional and instrumental support. When asked about communication with members of the local community, most participants described the students' encounters with local residents as friendly and beneficial, but some also used the words 'racism' or 'racist' when describing certain situations. A local network is a flexible and versatile resource for supporting international students. The results indicate that friendship families could be used more effectively and better organised as part of the support programme for international students.

Keywords: International students, higher education, friendship family, local society, emotional and social support

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Introduction

A group of students from the southern part of Africa pursued their first bachelor's degree at a Finnish university beginning in 2017. This was a novel situation for the study environment and local society since the students represented the first large group (n=24) of foreign students from a single country. Also, introducing the model of friendship families to support the students' well-being was a novel endeavour. When the programme ended and the students returned to their home country, almost all of them having obtained a BA degree in education, questions arose about the local friendship families' experiences interacting with the students. The students were reportedly happy to return home, and likewise, a sigh of relief was noticeable among the friendship families. Nevertheless, the programme director (the first author of this article) presumed that the friendship families had played a crucial role in the adjustment and well-being of the African students. This was based on several encounters by the programme director with the Finnish student tutors, friendship families and students themselves at the time.

At the strategic level, Finnish universities emphasise internationalisation as an essential part of studies in the field of education and teaching. To all appearances, the significance of inter- or multicultural competence will grow in the future. Its connection with marketing and efforts at being more competitive is part of a growing agenda (Kauko & Medvedeva 2016). The number of international students has increased in Finland during the last few decades. Whereas approximately 500 international students enrolled for first-year studies at Finnish universities in the year 2000, the number of new students had increased to more than 2 000 in 2019 (Education Statistics Finland 2020). Student mobility is one of the most important ways to achieve the internationalisation of universities. At the same time, the mobility of students has changed and developed from that of individual student choices to participating in exchanges and mobility within specific programmes (Nilsson 2015).

In a situation where universities are increasingly emphasising internationalisation for economic, cultural and educational reasons, discussions about the importance of emotional and social support on the part of the host nation raise the issue of the need for more evaluation and development initiatives. Studies show that making the transition to a foreign country is demanding and that students face numerous challenges. Achieving successful learning outcomes depends on the overall well-being of students (Rienties & Nolan 2014). As Bennett (2009) points out, there is currently a general ongoing discussion among policy makers, researchers and potential sponsors about how to create a supportive environment for such programmes.

Only a few existing studies focus on the experiences or reflections of the members in a local community, including families (Wiedemann & Bluml 2009). The data collected from international students mostly reflect interactions from their perspective and not that of the host community (Chai, Van, Wang, Lee & Wang 2020; Grieve 2015; Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart 2010; Pappa, Elomaa & Perälä-Littunen 2020; Nilsson 2015). Since relationships with locals are a crucial component of international students' ability to cope with the new situation (Chuah & Singh 2016; Marangell, Arkoudis, & Baik 2018; Rohmann, Florack, Samochowiec & Simonett 2014), it is also important to listen to the lived experiences of the locals when trying to understand the communication process as a whole. Cultural adjustment is the ability to operate effectively within a new cultural environment, and as Woods et al. (2013) recognise, it is a mutual process.

Local friendship families' reflections on their interactions with the African students staying with them and with the local Finnish community as a whole will provide new and important insights for the university unit in question. Hence, the research question is as follows: What kind of support did the families reportedly provide, and how did the families themselves experience their role as friendship families? Further, what does this tell us about these particular intercultural relations? When assessing the participants' experiences with respect to the social and emotional support offered to the students, we used the frameworks proposed by Chuah and Singh (2016) for assessing intercultural relations. Van Bakel, Gerritsen and Van Oudenhoven (2015) studied the impact of a local host in the intercultural competence of expatriates and found several benefits of contact with a local host. In this study, we applied the concept of intercultural competence, whereby interculturality is always ideological and involves an instability in power relations (Dervin 2016, 58; see Hylland Eriksen 2015, 7–8). In addition to the main purpose of this article, there is a need to stimulate discussion about how to develop and improve the support programme for international students at the campus in question.

Local arrangements

To support student learning, Finnish universities provide several services for international students. The students are entitled to the same educational, social, cultural and student health services as the national students. In addition, international students are offered support and help from English-speaking student tutors, tutor teachers and, occasionally, friendship families.

In this case, the goals of the local Finnish university campus are clear: to produce bachelors' degrees, balance the budget of the programme and increase internationalisation. The international students are provided with accommodation by the municipal housing organisation and regular assistance from the university. As an example, they are given the opportunity to be provided with a friendship family. An e-mail was sent to campus personnel (about 120 persons) with the request to pass on information to potential friendship families or friends. Three weeks after the arrival of the students, a student tutor organised a meeting with six initial families who introduced themselves to the students, and the students then had an opportunity to introduce themselves and their backgrounds. The students were active in contacting the persons they found most suitable for them. The entire group of students accepted the offer of spending time with one or more local families. From the university's perspective, there were no prior expectations regarding the amount of communication and depth of relationships between the partners. Four current or previous university staff members initially volunteered their own families as support families for the international students. Before the African students arrived on campus, the university provided staff members with brief training about the culture of the country in question. The training included a presentation and discussions conducted by a leader of the campus's well-being and crisis team and a native expert studying in Finland. Later, the number of friendship families increased as a result of the social networks of the first families. When the students left, they said goodbye to ten families. The first author of this article was an unofficial contact person for the families.

All of the participants, with only one exception, had an international background. They had studied or worked outside of Finland, and they spoke good English and had or had had several international contacts in their everyday lives. It was natural for them to continue their international way of living and to continue to use or want to practise the English language. They wanted to support students facing a challenging new situation. They found the project interesting and their life situations were suitable to the nature of the study; some of the families were experiencing empty nest syndrome at the time, as their own children had left the family home.

The individuals and families who took part in the educational project were invited to do so using two words, *friendship family* or, in Finnish, *tukiperhe*, which can be translated as either host family or friendship family. *Tuki* means mental support but also a concrete pillar or supporting structure. In that sense, the families could see themselves as a sturdy support to lean on, if needed, or as friends who freely and mutually shared their free time. A buddy programme concept is also used at Finnish universities to support exchange researchers (University of Turku 2020). We employ here a broad concept of family, although this idea is constantly evolving and being discussed in Finland (Statistics Finland 2020). In this article, the term *friendship family* is used to highlight the fact that the students lived by themselves in flats and only stayed with the families for a day or a weekend, although there were some exceptions, such as when a student lived in a family's home for several days or even weeks. The families also provided a home when relationships between students sharing a flat became challenging.

Theoretical framework

There is a significant relationship between community support and student adjustment. Marangell et al. (2018) and Chai et al. (2020) point out that the larger environment may have more influence on students' satisfaction than the university itself. When entering various types of communities, efforts by local families, student organisations and various religious and ethnic groups can also help support academic performance. Nevertheless, it is not easy for international students to find their place within the local community. Researchers suggest that more community-based approaches are needed to support students' well-rounded learning experiences. There are several reasons for examining interaction as a whole. For example, discrimination is one strongly negative experience that may be exposed by adopting a more holistic research approach. Walking home from a university campus and experiencing harassment because of one's appearance is a community issue (Marangell et al. 2018).

Observing the importance of interactions in the local community is a relatively new approach. The development programmes of the host culture can be divided into two main approaches: understanding the broader networks of the local community, including the host university's practices, and understanding the local community from a more limited perspective, by focusing on local host families. Studies are often conducted in English-speaking countries or in countries where the local language is globally spoken. In such situations, the hosts speak their native language while the international students speak several languages. The host culture dominates the power of language. In our study, both of the partners used English as a second or third language. The interactions were therefore complicated by the added risk of misunderstandings. At the same time, the language produced a balanced and equal power situation between the students and families. The extant literature suggests that the administrators of the educational unit could improve students' homestay outcomes by working with hosts and advising the families on how to help students understand and adapt to cultural differences; cultural learning increases when the families include the students more in activities (Van Bakel, Gerritsen & Van Oudenhoven 2014; Chai et al. 2020; Grieve 2015; Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart 2010; Rollie Rodrigues & Chornet-Roses 2014; Woods et al. 2013).

At Edinburgh Napier University, the friendship family programme is still in its piloting phase, but it follows the model of our Finnish case, where the university is active in pairing friendship families (13) with incoming students (22). The aim of the programme is to support the students' socio-cultural adjustment and to increase the university staff's awareness and understanding of socio-cultural differences (Ecochard & Wright 2017). Overall, the suggestions regarding best practices emphasise the importance of collaborating and having contact with the organisation, e.g. the university administration and the local community, whether as host families or as other participants (Bennet 2009; Marangell et al. 2018; Rollie Rodrigues & Chornet-Roses 2014).

Scholars have identified several predominant paradigms pertaining to culture and cross-cultural communication. In an increasingly global world, communication is as an important factor since culture is created through communication (Delanoy 2020). The set of institutional, political and historical circumstances is the context that emerges and is maintained by a group of people interacting with one another. In other words, this collective, evolving programming of the mind is called culture (Bennet 2009; Pritchad & Skinner 2012). The anthropologist Hylland Eriksen reminds us of a constant cultural flow when new technologies with virtual social network platforms allow people to remain connected in various places at the same time. Such cultural flow also entails a paradox: at the same time that people are increasingly on the move, cultural differences are diminishing and connections between people are increasing, even while an awareness of ethnic identities is becoming more important in social relations (Hylland Eriksen 2007). When the northern European Finnish family culture encounters the southern African student culture, there might be a temptation to highlight cultural differences. However, the aim of this study was not to classify the cultural differences of individuals, but to explore how Finnish family members employed various cultural concepts when describing and constructing their experiences with the group of students from southern Africa. For both parties, an awareness of people's mindsets, strategies and communication skills can either hamper or enhance interactions (Jackson 2020).

The existing literature broadly employs the term intercultural competence (IC) and focuses on the need to identify specific competence orientations along a developmental continuum when focusing on interactions between different cultures (Van Bakel et al. 2014; Bennet 1998; Hammar 2011; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova & DeJaeghere 2003). Nonetheless, several studies have criticised the notion of using intercultural competence stages or a developmental model that measures intercultural sensitivity (Bolten 2020; Deardorff 2015; Dervin 2016; Paige et al. 2003). Instead of the IC model, we apply Dervin's (2016) realistic approach to intercultural competences. After living in Finland for more than twenty years and working as a teacher and researcher in the field of teacher education, he has developed a unique approach to examining the intercultural competence process as it applies to the Finnish higher educational context. The realistic IC model stresses that interculturality is always ideological and involves an instability in power relations. In the educational context, Finland often provides lessons about equality, democracy and human rights to other countries. This philosophy can easily lead to a form of ethnocentrism with implicit and/or explicit feelings of superiority over others; it may also generate moments of self-congratulation (Dervin 2016, 58; see Hylland Eriksen 2015, 7–8). Dervin (2016) asserts that an acceptance of one's failures and successes should appear in any intercultural activity. In concrete terms, instability should be at the centre of intercultural activities, including an instability in terms of how each person feels about the other (Dervin 2016, 82–85).

To study what kind of support the families reportedly provided and how they saw their role as friendship families, we applied Chuah and Singh's (2016) categories of support when assessing intercultural relations. They observed that a lack of such support produces stress, loneliness and many other mental problems. Students pursuing studies in a foreign environment experience the loss of a familiar network. The new learning and teaching environment, where students strain to adjust to new cultural values and probably a new language environment, might also be quite challenging. Social support plays an important role in the well-being of students. Researchers have identified four, sometimes overlapping, categories of support: emotional, practical, informational and social companionship. The main findings show that international students' experiences regarding emotional support, including being accepted by fellow students, were the most important in terms of their well-being. Emotional support includes love, concern, sympathy, approval and encouragement (Chuah & Singh 2016; Summers & Volet 2008; see Van Bakel et al. 2015).

Finally, Chuah and Singh view the concept of support, as well as the concepts of communication, culture and intercultural competences, as processes constructed during friendship family student interactions. At the same time, their research data only revealed the processes that the local community experienced and reported in the interviews.

Method

Thematic interviews, with features derived from ethnographic interviews, were used as the data collection method. As a director of the educational programme, a teacher and a friendship family mother to five students, the first author of this article was a highly involved field researcher in the study. To some extent, she had her own experiences regarding the daily lives of the students. She followed closely the study's progress, engaged in pedagogical conversations with the teachers and kept in contact with the friendship families. She also worked closely with the academic tutor. As a programme director, she informed the embassy and the financial sector of the country in question about the students' progress and worked with the department administration. As an interpreter, she shared the experienced described in the discussions by those participating in the friendship family programme (see Denzin 2009). In that sense, her close relationship between the researcher and the study participants has its own rewards and pitfalls, as Hylland Eriksen (2015) has pointed out. It is crucial that the researcher maintain the ability to be self-reflexive during the entire research process. Several studies on qualitative research demonstrate how incorporating reflexivity can add authenticity and value to the data (Attia and Edge 2017; Fingerroos 2003; Fingerroos & Jouhki 2014; Pillow 2003).

The third author was responsible for one course unit introducing the Finnish educational system. As a leader of the campus's well-being and crisis team, she contacted the international students for a briefing after a racist attack targeting two African students in another Finnish university town. Nevertheless, the authors did not have easy access to the student network within the local community, and the stories that the researchers sometimes heard were more like gossip.

As is typical of an ethnographic approach, the daily observations and experiences of the researcher tended to raise questions regarding the participants. During such a process, researchers can review their own observations but can also be surprised (Mietola 2007). Qualitative research, which applies phenomenological and ethnographic approaches that enquire into the subjective feelings of participants, has been the most prevalent type of research used to study intercultural learning among students. The ethnographic interview may include references to the same people, places or incidents. The interviewer and the participant may share prior expectations, experiences, gossip, emotions and stories. The interpretation of the material demands exploring the context in more depth (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2014). A successful ethnographic interview yields interesting new data about the field and participants and produces new cultural information, both of which help the researcher organise the research in a new way (Tolonen & Palmu 2007). In this study, where the participants included friendship families and friends, Bennet's recommendations regarding clear content questions with examples were emphasised (2009). The open-ended interviews included the following questions: 'What was your motivation for joining the programme?', 'What activities did you perform together with the students?', 'What was remarkable or what did you notice when you were spending time together?', 'What did the students tell you about their encounters with local residents?' and 'What did the students tell you about their studies?' The questions illustrate that the focus was on the experiences and interpretations of the families, not the students. The interview procedure followed the guidelines of TENK (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity [TENK]).

The dataset consists of 11 open-ended and thematic interviews conducted by the field researcher. She contacted the friendship families by e-mail to decide upon the best time and place for the interview. She asked them to recall and relate their own interactive experiences with the African students. The responses were generally positive, although a couple of the participants noted that they had wondered if they would be able to recall everything. The interviewer's official position at the university might have impacted the positive attitudes shown in the responses. The interviewer's position might also have impacted the content of the interview.

After the first eight interviews, two members of two friendship families were interviewed during the writing process of this article. These interviews raised a couple of interesting questions about the attitudes of the local community that had not previously been discussed in enough depth. In addition, the field researcher contacted one person from the university network for a brief interview to hear about his experiences regarding a deer hunt with one of the students. Five of the original friendship families decided to take part in the interviews (the field researcher's family was not interviewed). Two of those interviewed were also teachers for one of the courses. In addition, two outsiders contacted the students independently and took on the role of a friendship family. One person from the campus network was interviewed since her family member became a temporary host for one student. Two of the families had children living at home, and five families had children in their twenties who occasionally visited their parents. Since we employed a broad concept of family, the participants had different kinds of family structures, such as a single-parent family. Two of the participants were males in their fifties, the daughter of one family was around 20 years old, seven participants were females ranging from 40 to approximately 6o years of age and one interviewed female participant was around 70 years of age. Although the participants mostly recalled their own experiences, they occasionally interpreted their partner's or children's experiences**.** The interviews each lasted between 12 and 54 minutes. As for location, two of the interviews took place at the participant's home and six at their workplace or school. Due to the COVID-19 situation, three of the interviews were conducted by phone, one of which constituted the shortest interview, lasting only about 12 minutes. The interviewer recorded, transcribed and saved the data on the university's secure cloud service. The interviews were coded during the interpretation phase (A–K) to make it impossible to identify any of the participants. The data collection process took place about eleven months after the African students departed and about one month after the graduation ceremony, which was organised in the home country. Three participants were present at the ceremony in Africa. The time lag between the lived experiences and the interviews might have both strengthened emotional memories and also presented difficulties in terms of recollecting them. It is also possible that the participants had built a coherent narrative of their memories during this period.

The field researcher made the initial observations and marked them in the transcriptions. In addition, the authors were open to themes that emerged from the data, following Marganell et al.'s (2018) suggestions regarding taking a more community-based approach to examining international students' environment. Dervin's (2016) realistic approach to intercultural competence was also applied to the data, which accepts instability, failures and expressions of emotion during intercultural activities. The authors performed a thematic analysis based on the content analysis method. The transcribed interviews were read and coded according to themes based on Chuah and Singh's categories of support.

The participants were all adults, and neither the names of the participants nor specific places are mentioned in the analysis. The participants gave their permission orally at the beginning of the recorded interview when the researcher notified them about the steps involved in anonymising, recording and transcribing the data and storing it on the university's secure cloud. The participants received copies of the transcriptions and had the opportunity to correct or add information. The African home country of the students is not mentioned, and the students were likewise anonymised. The students represent a vulnerable group of young people and might encounter difficulties in their personal or professional lives if their identities are exposed. The fear of having unfavourable information transmitted to their national organisation during their studies arose in discussions with the students. One limitation of this study is the relatively long period of time between the lived experiences of the students and families and the interviews. The subjectivity of the shared information is obvious. The secondary goal of the study, to develop the university's global educational marketing capabilities, could be viewed as an ethical problem.

The conducted interviews were based on common ground, shared memories and community. The interviewer (in this case, the field researcher) should recognise the otherness of self and the self of others by engaging in an ongoing conversation (Pillow 2003). Reflexivity is a process whereby researchers examine their own assumptions and preconceptions (Attia & Edge 2017). The field researcher faced uncomfortable situations and recognised dialogues where she 'knew more' than the participants. She had background information about the students' personal health and family situations that she could not disclose, even though it might have helped the friendship families better understand the students' reactions and behaviours. This background information was based on official documents from authorities in the country of origin as well as our study records and discussions with the university teachers and students themselves. The limited sharing was probably mutual: the friendship families had knowledge about the students' circumstances that they did not share with the field researcher. In some situations, she heard from the students negative stories about family members. As a researcher, her role in part followed a negotiated trust model. According to Loizos (1994), this model involves parties admitting that they may choose to keep certain secrets to themselves. In the interpretation phase, the field researcher reflects on the context of being a mother in one of the friendship families. Nevertheless, to disclose all of her own or her family's experiences would jeopardise the anonymity of the students in question.

Analysis

Conclusion of the interviews

Table 1 summarises the participants' main experiences with the support activities provided during the students' study period in Finland. Instrumental help consisted mainly of bikes and food supplies. A bike was made available for each student. The most common activities involved spending free time together, usually by way of meals or trips to nearby regions. These shared social activities provided families with an opportunity to support the social and emotional well-being of the students. Most participants reported racism in the form of hostile stares or tense situations. At the same time, they mentioned several beneficial and friendly interactions.

Table 1. Participants' experiences with the social and emotional support offered (frameworks by Chuah & Singh 2016; Van Bakel et al. 2015)

Partici-pant and number of students	Role de-fined by the par-ticipant	Instrumen-tal and in-formational support	Main practical activities = social and emotional support	Main reflections and experiences	Students' c ommunication with the local community
A A–C, same family: 4	mother*	lending bikes, giving some money	family life, holiday dinner, cultural activities, ballet, hobbies	interesting, humour	no reflections
B: 4	father	lending bikes	travelling, sauna, nature	spending positive time together	some racism
C: 4	sister*		family life	spending positive time together, fun	otherness, some racism, no Finnish friends
D: 2	adult*	work	working together, meeting family members, fishing, introducing them to your own network	spending positive time together	friendly
E: 2–3	mother	food supplies, coaching	meals, family life, nature, arts	spending positive time together	some racism
F: 4–8	mother	food supplies, coaching, shopping at the flea market	cultural activities, theatre, meals, work, health ser-vices, cooking, in-troducing them to your own network	interesting experiences, spending positive family time together	friendly social activities, some racism
G: 2–5	adult	coach-ing, giving raincoats and winter clothing	social activities, nature, meals, cooking, introduc-ing them to your own network	Interesting, concerns	friendly social activities, some racism
H: 1	adult	arranging mental support	professional sup-port, meals, staying at a family mem-ber's place, intro-ducing them to your own network	cultural differences, gender issues	otherness
I: 2–3	adult	coaching	meals, sauna, fam-ily life, holiday dinner	concerns	racism, fear, otherness
J: 5–15	mother*	lending bikes	family life, travel-ling, sauna, offer-ing work, holiday dinner	interesting	friendly social activities, racism
K: 1	adult	lending bikes	hunting, introduc-ing them to your own network	having fun	friendly social activities, some racism

The table seemingly suggests that the total number of students was 52 (including the two families not interviewed), whereas in point of fact the group consisted of 24 students. The numbers thus highlight the practice of 'family shopping'.
* Personal contact continues with one or several students two years after the programme ended.

Introducing the Finnish culture and way of life

The first evening when the students arrived was exciting. The university's volunteer student tutors helped by furnishing the accommodations. The field researcher's way of welcoming the students was to place a famous Finnish chocolate, *Fazer's Blue*, on the kitchen tables. She then explained the laundering and waste recycling systems.

According to Helkama's investigations (2015, 218–222), the Finnish values placed on nature, equality, hard work, honesty, education, health, kindness and forgiving and helping others have remained stable over the years. In the Nordic countries, people emphasise cooperation over competition; the countries are high trust societies with low levels of hierarchy and a focus on individualism. The participants often referred to the values directly: 'I'm a person who helps others' (J). On the other hand, they assumed that the Finnish values are good for everyone and supported others in acting according to these values. As Dervin (2016) argues, the common narrative of a culture is to understand it as coherent and shared by everyone.

The families noticed that the students found the dark and cold winter months challenging. The students felt tired and homesick. To help with their adjustment, the Finnish friends took the students to spend time in nature, something that Finns value highly in terms of their own well-being. Most families commonly visit cottages in the countryside in their free time throughout the year, and one family let a group of students stay at their cottage by themselves. The students showed the field researcher several photos and videos of their time socialising at the cottage. The sauna became quite important and an experience that was enjoyed regularly by several students. Fishing, swimming and berry picking were other common activities when spending time in nature. One participant took a male student deer hunting with a local hunting group: 'The student noted that he just cleaned it [the animal], pulled the guts out from the deer…' (K). The participant told a long story about the hunting experience.

Introducing the students to Finnish culture by offering them the chance to attend the theatre, ballet, musicals and concerts, participate in hobbies and read *Moomin* books was common. One mother did, though, make the following observation: 'The Finnish culture didn't raise [much] interest' (E). The families spent festivals together, for example Mother's Day in early May, by barbecuing in the chilly spring weather. Christmas is a time when Finnish families gather together. The families took care of the students so that all of them had a family to stay with during the Christmas holiday (A, B, C, E, F, I). Three families attended Christmas mass with the students. One of the families noted the following: 'They all invested in clothes and a formal appearance.

The boys had black suits, and the girls had fancy dresses, and our daughter went to the church wearing her *uggs*' (A). Another added: 'There were six of them at our Christmas dinner with our relatives' and 'we made gingerbread and Christmas decorations' (F). A mother who sang in a chamber choir welcomed a couple of students to join her. It did not go well: 'They participated [only] once, well, after being a half an hour late' (A). The families also introduced the students to other free-time activities, often without success. One father had a more relaxed opinion: 'Why press adults to participate in some local hobby, like ice hockey?' (B). In contrast, the family of the field researcher interpreted activities on the ice as an essential part of the Finnish way of life, taking one student out on an ice-fishing trip.

One participant introduced several students to Finnish society by taking them to visit her father and a disabled sister at a care facility. She wanted to show them how society manages health-related well-being and care: 'It is like a normal home; there are only six, seven people, and they were sitting in the rocking chairs. It was a great opportunity for the students to see how things are organised here' (D). While the students did not share their reflections, the older people reported being extremely happy to meet the Africans and continued to speak about the meeting a long time after the visit.

Communication and interaction experiences

The fact that the friendship families were expecting to meet an African group is clear from their comments. Several participants commented on the importance of their prior international experiences. One person had the following to say: 'We are used to having people from all over the world around us; it's nothing special' (E). Two of the participants reportedly kept in continuous contact with their foreign colleagues in that particular country. The participants were curious to meet the African students and experience a culture they did not know much about yet. Despite having numerous European, Asian and American friends and contacts, meeting the Africans was something new for the participating families. One family who had a son studying abroad pointed out that it was not about white people helping black people, but about supporting young students living in a foreign country (A, B).

The participants reported mixed experiences when communicating with the African students. Some interpreted the students' way of communicating with the families as 'open, free and direct, and really spontaneous', adding that 'if you compared them to Finns, they came closer and started the conversation' (A, B, H). Others, though, defined the communication as 'indirect and complicated' (G), noting that it took a long time to build enough trust for more open communication: ‘At first, there was a lot of energy and joy, but then, after a year, more honesty’ (I).

The students’ roles as family members were not always openly discussed, and that caused some conflicts. The students did not know if they were being treated as children of the family or as guests. The definition of a child may differ between cultures as well. To be called mother/mum, father/dad, sister or brother was perhaps misunderstood by the Finnish families. One family expected a student to behave and act as their own children did around the dinner table. The family could not understand why the student did not help with the dishes and reacted in an unfriendly manner when the mother asked her to help: ‘She didn’t tolerate it when I set boundaries for her behaviour’ (E). After that incident, the student contacted participant H, who organised a new family for her.

Communication problems often resulted in misunderstandings. In Finland, bikes can easily be stolen, especially if they are left without a bicycle lock. To admit the loss of a borrowed bike was difficult for the students, and it took a long time for them to talk about it. It was typical for them to start the story not by describing the end result, e.g. the stolen bike, but from further back in time (A). Participant G, with a long history of housing exchange students, said that she was used to a type of indirect communication in which it took time to identify and resolve an issue. The participant told the story of a student who wanted to find somebody to fix her dress. The student just dropped the dress on the chair without a word and waited for the mother to pay attention to it. Only later, when the mother had noticed the dress, had discussed it with the student and had seen her try it on, did G notice that it needed fixing.

The students were also at times unexpectedly straightforward when asking for a favour. They might ask the family for a birthday present or for them to call a coach, which the family interpreted as being too direct or as an order. They sometimes found the task of taking care of the students’ needs rather overwhelming. The Finnish family might have suggested taking a taxi or walking to the venue. Setting boundaries for how best to help the students became easier over time. The families evolved in their roles, from helpers to normal, sometimes irritated parents.

During the interactions, a couple of difficult issues emerged having to do especially with conflicts between the students based on racism or gender or else social or economic issues, personal relations and even aggressive incidents. The health issues of the students were difficult to observe, as some of the students did not want to discuss human bodily functions. The field researcher faced challenges in visiting the local hospital with students and collaborating with medical experts. It was difficult to listen to the students’ strong critiques of the Finnish health care system. How could an African complain about our medical services? For her, as the programme director, it was a surprise that the most difficult and time-consuming task was attending to health issues. Stories about the loss of close family members and violent childhoods were sad to hear (D, F, I). The more the trust grew, the more the students were able to ask for emotional support from the families.

The mothers of the friendship families reported feeling somewhat irritated by gender issues that they observed during interactions. They discussed the issue of traditional gender roles during the interviews (e.g. F). As one mother observed: 'X served portions to the boys at dinner. She was a mother and the boys were her children' (A). The family interpreted this as evidence of poor nutrition and food insecurity in Africa; a mother is responsible for the equal distribution of food. One participant compared the male students to young Finnish men: 'They are hungry to get the degree; that's something I would like to see here, too. In Finland, society supports people, especially young men; they do not need a degree to survive' (H). In that case, background inequalities were seen as a positive motivation to study harder.

The families also commented on the social and economic gaps between the students. One person put it as follows: 'A lack of basic skills, like vacuuming and changing the beds, was observed among those who came from the upper class. In Finland, academics can change their own bed linen and clean their homes' (H). It was difficult to see such inequality among the students: 'It was actually the worst thing, that there were strong, angry feelings among the students' (J). The friendship families were unaware of the history behind the tense relationships between the students, who represented different social groups.

Meeting the local community

The town has a refugee centre. According to participant H, the presence of the refugees caused two kinds of problems. First, some residents of the town confused the students with refugees and were suspicious of them. Moreover, female students reported that some refugees acted with hostility towards them. Participant H made the following point: 'At the same time, we had the refugee housing here … and there were challenges regarding people suffering from war traumas. Some (locals) probably associated the students with them (the refugees).'

When asking about having contact with and communicating with members of the local community, most of the participants used the words 'racism' or 'racist'. Racism was difficult to discuss and to interpret from the friendship families' perspective. This was because the families continued to feel a strong need to provide emotional support and to protect them. As a result, the interviewees tended to take on the role of speaking about the student's experiences rather than speaking about only their own. Some family members either refused to acknowledge racism or pointed out that they did not know about it because the students had not talked about it: 'They didn't complain, although there could have been reasons for them to do so, and they were quiet about the issue' (F). Only one of the participants was present during a hostile situation, when a passer-by shouted 'Go home!' When one student sang at a local karaoke club, the entire bar went silent, but then after the performance the singer received a big round of applause (J). The families often asked about them about racism, but the students did not seem eager to talk about it. Depending on the relationship, the students responded in different ways. Just before their departure, one of the participants heard some stories of racism. The students had experienced hostile stares and mentioned that sometimes cars had driven slowly by them as they walked between the university and home. Some locals crossed the pavement to avoid encountering them (see Marangell et al. 2018). One physically aggressive incident, i.e. shoving, occurred in a bar where the male students were spending a weekend evening (C, I). Most of the female students never left their apartments during the evenings. They were afraid to walk in the dark. One of the families advised them on how to deal with and communicate with Finnish people. They encouraged the students to be proud of themselves and be ambassadors for their home country, to tell people who they were and to avoid going out late in the town and getting provoked: 'To be accepted in Finland, you should just be brave, join a group and not care about the stares' (J).

Two participants reported having had contact with people they defined as racists. Those participants decided to spread ideas within their circles: it would not be a good idea to touch or harass 'our students' (J, K). Guarding the students from certain members of the surrounding community was also familiar to some of the mothers, who were especially worried about the female students' safety on weekend nights. One participant speculated about the appearance of the students, pointing out issues of ethnicity and gender: 'I was not at all worried about the young Finnish men, but I was thinking about those perverse older men with images from the porn industry in their heads.' She noted how the male students tried to go on dates with the Finnish girls, without success: 'Let's imagine they were black basketball players from the US instead of skinny Africans. The situation would be totally different' (I). The participant continued by reflecting more deeply on the situation: 'I noticed that we had a certain bias; for us, it was more exciting to receive students from Africa; the culture is so different. Of course, we had that perspective … And to see where I am in the process (of cultural understanding) … I mean, there are French people in the town, living by the seaside … and the local markets arrange fancy cheese for them … Would we place German or Swedish students in a suburb?' (I).

Three participants met people in the town who were curious about the students and had an opportunity to spread correct information about the students' backgrounds and their role as university students (G, F, K). One participant described the experience as follows: 'I used to tell people about this programme, which was a good way to get summer jobs for the boys. They were cutting the grass by N. One of the boys worked for a taxi driver, who then gave him a bike' (F). But the reactions were still not always positive. One shopkeeper asked if the students came from jungle huts. The participant was astonished to hear such an uneducated comment (G).

Conclusion

The results of the interpretative analysis make it clear that volunteering as a friendship family is tied to earlier international contacts and an open-hearted and open-minded interest in foreign cultures (see Van Bakel et al. 2015). The families built a social network through many common acquaintances. Their way of communicating and the relationships changed over the two years. At the beginning of the interaction, the families reportedly viewed the African students as a homogeneous group. The local families at the same time saw themselves as broad-minded individuals. The participants described the early communication efforts in stereotypical fashion: the students were joyful, loud and straightforward in their speech. The happy Africans had arrived in this dark and silent Finland. The families became more involved in the lives of the students as mutual trust grew. To be a part of their lives was a significant experience. Sometimes it turned out to be much more demanding than they had expected. Both the families and the students began to view each other more as individuals in their daily lives and communications. Humour was an essential part of this interaction. Also, in many cases the relationship changed from one of indirect communication and a relaxed attitude to a mutual and close friendship. As Dervin (2016, 105) summarises, it is not just 'culture' that guides interactions but the co-construction of various identities, such as gender, age, profession and social class.

Studies conducted among international students in an educational context show that positive interactions between students from different cultural backgrounds and local students is often minimal (Mendoza, Dervin, Yuan & Layne 2022). Students tend to remain within their own groups and only communicate with persons from a similar background. The lack of satisfactory contact between local and international students is a well-known phenomenon in all major English-speaking countries hosting international students. International students face challenges in understanding the host culture. The new situation may cause uncertainty in terms of behaviours and values and anxiety related to communication. Additionally, interactions with people from different cultures with members of a local community often involve high levels of uncertainty and heighten individuals' anxiety levels (Chuah & Singh 2016; Marangell et al. 2108; Pritchard & Skinner 2002; Rienties & Nolan 2014; Rui & Wang 2015; Shirazi 2018; Summer & Volet 2008; Woods et al. 2013).

For the students, the lack of local friends and limited connection with Finnish students were compensated for through their interactions with the families. It is obvious that the families were important to the students. The family members generally took three main approaches to the interactions and activities: accepting the students as family members, introducing them to Finnish culture and providing them with emotional and instrumental support. The goal of the education programme was not to integrate the African students into Finland, nor was that the goal of the families. Still, an ethos was present among the participants supporting the superior nature of Finnish education. In addition, they wanted the students to note how a 'well-being society' is an essential part of Finnish culture (see Dervin 2016). Participants constructed cultural values around an appreciation for nature, equality and cooperation with low levels of hierarchy (see Helkama 2015). The participants introduced students to literature, theatre, music and family festivals that they considered typically Finnish; to some extent, these activities represent high culture. Hunting and fishing experiences reflected the Finnish relationship with nature.

The interactions took the form of an evolving process, with participants encountering some difficulties in terms of interpreting indirect communication. There was an instability in terms of the feelings between families and students, a realistic process for intercultural activities (Dervin 2016). The intercultural competence of the friendship families grew over time, as a learning curve, with a focus on respect, openness, curiosity, discovery and cultural self-awareness and knowledge, while participants developed their skills at listening, observing and evaluating (see Bolten 2020; Deardorff 2015).

During the international study programme described in this article, the university staff maintained contact with the local community. Such efforts were not well organised or planned, despite the researchers' suggestions (Bennet 2009; Marangell et al. 2018; Rollie Rodrigues & Chornet-Roses 2014). Nevertheless, the social network was an active part of the project and included many organisations, such as an adult education centre, a library, sports and art clubs, a student theatre, charity organisations, the police, Finnish-African friendship societies, a Lutheran church, religious groups, schools and preschools. No training was provided for the contact person of the friendship families or for the families themselves. Based on the findings of the article, more and scheduled support should be offered for the families. Discussions regarding where to set the boundaries for the help provided, especially financial help, would be necessary. The local community, with regard to the participants' abilities to activate their networks, was an important resource, although threats in the form of racist harassment was also always present within the local community. The frameworks provided by Chuah and Singh (2016) and studies by Van Bakel et al. (2014, 2015) are based on the interactions between international students or expatriates and host nations, mostly from the viewpoint of the visitors. Our motivation, however, was to explore the experiences of the local friendship families. The results of this study indicate that local communities can be used more effectively and be better organised as a part of support programmes for international students.

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Fieldwork material

The fieldwork material is in the possession of the authors.

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Interview C. 2 December 2019. Female. 18 min. Interviewer XX.

Interview D. 26 November 2019. Female. 29 min. Interviewer XX.

Interview E. 12 November 2019. Female. 23 min. Interviewer XX.

Interview F. 26 November 2019. Female. 33 min. Interviewer XX.

Interview G. 11 November 2019. Female. 33 min. Interviewer XX.

Interview H. 16 December 2019. Female. 25 min. Interviewer XX.

Interview I. 26 October 2020. Female. 54 min. Interviewer XX.

Interview J. 29 October 2020. Female. 38 min. Interviewer XX.

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COMMENTARY

Culture as Rules – Putting People (Back) into Sustainability through Food

Eeva Berglund

I routinely deal with food and its infrastructures in my research and teaching, but they have never been the actual focus of my research. Since my doctoral research, carried out in Germany in the early 1990s, I have been interested in environmental social movements and sustainability policy. I now see, however, that food has a very important place at the core of academic, activist and professional engagements with (un)sustainability. With food comes culture, and culture in turn is crucial to understanding and addressing sustainability crises. I will make the point through tracing my own research experiences but also some personal anecdote, as I did at the closing discussion of SIEF 2021 on 'Baking the Rules'.

Environmental problems

Posed as a question – Breaking the Rules? – I took the SIEF conference title as an invitation to talk about what is new in social movements and, while sitting convivially around the online-mediated dining table, to explore promising pathways for meaningful research. The older and wider context of environmental politics is still the influential discourse of 'solving' shared problems through 'innovation' (using the quotation marks to signal that those terms have many, not always politically neutral, uses). However, exploring food and its multiple associations is putting culture and human ingenuity – the core subject matter of ethnology and anthropology after all – ever more explicitly into environmental politics.

The strong technoscientific bias in sustainability talk has been tempered somewhat by the now practically mainstream language of the Anthropocene. That does put the human into the planetary, but blind-spots remain, as countless critics argue (e.g. Barca 2020), when humanity is imagined through the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, Democratic) lenses that still dominate at the international level where consequential environmental governance is largely being worked out. Besides the Anthropocene, there are more esoteric or at least philosophically challenging intellectual vocabularies such as new materialism (MacGregor 2021) and its many vibrant relatives that work with concepts such as ontology and pluriverse (Escobar 2017, de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). Sometimes overlapping with these are pursuits more direct-

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ed at practical concerns, such as discard studies (see https://discardstudies.com/) or extractivism research (see https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/conferences/exalt-2022), both woven as much from academic as from activist labours. These languages and grammars are turning around definitions of the problems and crises that the world is jointly facing, and shaking up notions of who the heroes, villains and victims might be. Here academia aligns increasingly with activism for epistemological as well as ethical reasons, challenging the rules of business-as-usual and policy or politics-as-usual far more than even a generation ago, not just in the study of culture, but even in climate research (Capstick et al. 2022). An inspiring example rooted in anthropology is Anna Tsing's and her colleagues' powerful take on what modernity-as-usual means today, available online in *Feral Atlas* (Tsing et al. 2020).

We have moved on a good distance from the times of my doctoral studies when I really struggled with my chosen topic, the question of how and why ordinary people in Europe protested the ordinary local damages of modern development (Berglund 1998). On the one hand, I initially had trouble making material damage matter to peers and professors who were interested primarily in society and culture. On the other hand, I was nervous of even addressing the mainstream, for whom 'environmental' problems were technical, let alone trying to persuade them that culture mattered (too).

The former challenge, of making material constraints apparent, was in a way the easier one. Like Greta Thunberg, we burgeoning environmental social scientists followed 'the science', however aware of its internal complexities, hesitations and contradictions. Supported by a historical and sociological understanding of science, researchers of my generation did a lot – I feel – without necessarily destabilising the underlying premise that technoscience deals with universals while culture explains surface variation. And with actor-network thinking and other ethnographically grounded ways of complicating the reified dualisms in our western habits of thought, it became even easier to incorporate materials, meanings and the dynamics of complex systems into our accounts. Following Bruno Latour, an inspiration to many of us, we sometimes felt we achieved that simply by producing long lists of the affected entities and expecting that this mixing and matching of actors that western science preferred to keep separate, would serve to destabilise old-fashioned dualisms.

Making culture matter has been harder. In the late 20th century, cultures of environmental management and protection had traction to the extent that they aligned with cultures of technical and scientific expertise. Even when they did so, much justified worry was written off as ramblings from 'prophets of doom', such as the authors of *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972). The post-war 'great acceleration' of fossil-fuel-based economic activity and the socio-ecological vulnerability and damages associated with this meant problems of planetary scale. Across many governments but also in different political movements, a view emerged that global solutions and world-wide institutions represented the best chances of addressing them. Instead, we got the Rio declaration of 1992, and the countless conferences, summits, conventions and statements that it inspired. But as a break on damaging practices it was ultimately disappointing (see for example Scoones et al. 2015) and arguably led to subordinating the ecological environment and people's embodied and local experiences to the needs (or lobbying) of mainstream economics and finance. Powerful spokespersons for neoliberal arrangements effectively put the regulation of environmental harms – broadly defined – back by decades while environmentalists mostly remained caught in the detached language of science and so struggled to communicate the urgency of the situation (Wapner 2021). An already entrenched industrial-capitalist assault on life may have been gathering pace, but the global environmental governance we got was not a technocratic super-ministry working out how to thrive within limits, but a series of intergovernmental agreements of varying effectiveness reached after painstaking negotiations. These put in place a kind of UN-sanctioned, recognisably western-friendly global institutional apparatus and its prevailing ethos, increasingly captured by critics with the idea of One-World-Worldism (Escobar 2017). This framework not only reinstated the problematic hierarchies of those western dualisms (science trumps belief, the west is better than the rest, and so on), it obscured the cultural specificity of western economics itself and the mainstream cultural features that it reinforced and that in turn reinforced it. With this cultural blindness, even those of us already fearful for 'the environment', failed to notice the weirdness of the WEIRD world and the knowledge practices it insisted upon. As a result, countless edifices, practices and innovations that were based on cultural and economic rules *other* than those of neoliberal and notionally western capitalism have continued to be belittled and destroyed.

However, in the shadowlands of modernity, endless variations on how to be human have persisted, as researchers of culture will know. Academics and activists have documented many of these together with devastations experienced at the geographical margins of global capitalism. Equally important has been the fact that some time ago researchers also started to put the engines of neoliberal normality under the spotlight, for instance by studying bureaucracies or finance workers or, indeed, forms of middle-class activism as I did.

The sustainability of the food system

As an anthropology graduate researching environmental protest in the 1990s I found it extremely helpful that the discipline was already characterised by "a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view" (Geertz 1983, 69). Today, culturally sensitive research on food and its increasingly global travels benefits from this legacy, as numerous exciting texts straddling agricultural economics, histories of technology and socio-cultural dynamics have demonstrated recently. Food in its global guise has now come to the attention even of those like me who arrived there via a focus on local urban phenomena, such as the now ubiquitous practice or urban farming.

I see talk of a so-called food system in 2022 as somewhat misleading. The system appears more as some kind of out-of-control yet baked-in machinery producing social, ecological and epidemiological troubles at ever bigger scales. The word system implies something reproducible as an entity, which the dominant global system of food provision is not (even if sacrificing some people and places might be considered an acceptable way to sustain it in the shorter term). As in the world of capitalist innovation generally, and as sociologist Ulrich Beck spelled out in the 1980s with his book, *The Risk Society*, no single mastermind and no detailed blueprint preceded the chaotic and paradoxical outcomes of modern enterprise and innovation. Perhaps Beck was ahead of his time (Tooze 2020), but with food at the centre of climate policy and land use ever more recognised as a health issue (not least through global yet variegated experiences of COVID-19), what is gradually coming into view are the dysfunctionalities of this way of organising global exchange. As an observer of and participant in sustainability discourses, my sense is that something else that is coming into view is the fact that the culture (or cultures) of this risk society – the modernity or capitalism or western mainstream ways – does not have universal appeal, nor is its colonising power totalising or inevitable. Like interdependencies between global and local things, this is probably not news to ethnologists or anthropologists, but it is interesting to see others contemplating such possibilities too.

In keeping an ear for activist, municipal and state discourses in Finland where I live, I would even go so far as to claim that recent years have witnessed far-reaching shifts in how environmental policy and practices are discussed. There are at least signs of a 'cultural turn' in environmental policy. Though it may not yet be a dominant discourse, it is clear that experts in culture, notably ethnologists, anthropologists and historians of many stripes, are invited to comment and given authority, as new rules for managing the contemporary condition are being worked out.

For me, the closing discussion at SIEF was a wonderful indication of how food research nourishes and energises research on those many domains that have been hampered by the twentieth-century banishment of culture (not complete, but still debilitating) from things environmental. Food is food through a number of contexts, appearing at different stages, in varying roles and enacted in multiple relationships as it constitutes a vital and necessary part of social life. It is cultural, for instance, in the way that the list of possibly edible or inedible things varies from place to place and time to time. Its production, preparation and consumption are nevertheless grounded in geographical and historical situations even as they show infinite ingenuity. Furthermore, great pleasure is taken in this ingenuity and there are tremendous emotional stakes in performing any part of the processes around food according to (or not) the rules. Food and food practices are embodied in the human and nonhuman bodies involved, as well as in the material properties of what becomes food. There are rules about baking bread, for example, that come from the way grains and micro-organisms behave, and that have been learned in laboratories and kitchens over millennia. There are equally significant rules around food that are only intelligible as cultural, as signs or vehicles of belonging. Finally, even before the age of the container ship and the extraordinary machinery feeding global populations today that encompasses land-use patterns, labour practices, economic circuits and biological exchanges, to think of food has always been to think of networks and connections of different kinds. No wonder that one alternative word for those who mistrust the idea of the Anthropocene is Plantationocene (Perry and Hopes 2019)!

What I'm suggesting is that food bridges the yawning gap that we in the environmental social sciences were struggling with in the 1990s, as we tried to persuade one audience that matter mattered and another one that culture mattered. Thirty years on, in the closing discussion, food turned out to be a relatively easy way to overcome that still lingering but by now much altered divide in how we conceptualise the world around us – the environment – between the material-scientific and the meaningful-cultural. By talking about food in its many dimensions and always returning – as scholars of things ethnological do – to the concrete joys and troubles that ordinary people face in their relationships with food, we have maybe avoided the sense of detachment that characterises both the academic poles that were once so easily classified into mutually unintelligible sciences and humanities (the two 'cultures', as British scientist C.P. Snow so famously put it in 1959). In our discussion, the topic of food allowed us to talk intelligibly (I hope) about complex events and environments diffuse in time and space. We used it to talk critically about human diversity and the place of humans on the planet without opposing the cultural to the technical. We spun brief but persuasive stories about how mainstream expertise can be weaker than expertise at the margins. We touched on how art and science work together rather than as mutually exclusive in generating important knowledge and skill. We also discussed situations where the very framework that pits a centre against a margin is utterly inadequate. Food turned out to be a very good vehicle indeed for discussing some apparently intractable problems that have beset thinkers as well as activists for a long time.

Moral judgements and the contradictions of activism

Our discussion on Breaking the Rules also illustrated how the binary oppositions of everyday politics can be reworked into more grounded and defensible, if politically less flashy situations. We discussed how, in talking about food (or any other) activism, one needs to specify what protest is seeking and in what context before one can make any judgement about its rightness or wrongness (however defined). I was delighted by Håkan Jönssön's notion of anti-activism-activism. Such a term is helpful for keeping in mind that although the arena of food provision is easily politicised and moralised, it is impossible to reduce its politics to simple for-or-against antagonisms. The current agro-industrial complex is attached to social and ecological life in such myriad and complicated ways that easy judgement is unwise. Environmental conflict and the many problems that stem from unsustainable systems are in fact never reducible to some good-versus-bad or centre-periphery dynamic, nor can universal 'best' practices ever be easily identified. Careful empirical study, whether undertaken in food studies, political geography, agricultural economics, ethnology or anywhere else, is more likely to undermine any lingering assumptions about development as a linear progression from poor, primitive and hungry at one end to the most developed – often a vaguely defined 'we' – at the other, however scientifically defensible such stages might once have appeared (Massey 2005). In fact, it is probably only from a political and ideological stance of superior detachment that it is even possible to imagine that there is a dominant and politically neutral centre, however threatened (or at least hugely irritated) it might be, by an ideologically biased activist fringe. So, in our discussion, we dwelt at length on the fact that activism and its moral justifications are only intelligible in context. It should be noted that not dissimilar dynamics are increasingly reported in connection with populist politics, where similarly, the same individual can be both oppressed and oppressor (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021).

So, as we find ourselves drawn – as researchers – to some but not other activist causes, we are still capable of deepening our understanding if not in sympathising with mutually antagonistic political positions. Such insights come from sensitivity to culture and its nuances. They come also with an appreciation that culture is anything but immaterial or a matter of choice.

This brings me back to the tendency of those in power to imagine that theirs is a culture or no culture (Traweek 1988), somehow free of or above the dependencies that in fact constitute human life as emplaced and always simultaneously and irreducibly semiotic and material. This produces, however, a paradox in that, as I (Berglund 2022) and many others have argued, environmentalism itself has been able to bolster western, capitalist, hegemony at the same time as claiming cultural and political neutrality. We are sadly familiar with eco-gentrification for instance, and we know that sustaining environmental quality among the wealthy often means sacrificing some to lives of unimaginably terrifying environmental, that is, everyday, conditions. In much of the environmentalist mainstream, moral indignation blossoms about the dirty or otherwise wrong ways that the poor pollute, leading to perverse outcomes like ever more unsustainable greenwashing and eco-consumerism.

Illustrative examples can be found around the consumption of processed foods, which the wealthy often like to and can afford to avoid. Often they contain multiply problematic ingredients such as palm oil. Now that wealthier consumers in North America and Europe have identified the environmental ills of palm oil, and multinational companies have found replacements more palatable to these fussier consumers (sunflower oil replacing palm oil, for example) the less attractive products are simply marketed more forcefully in Asia and South America (Wilson 2022). The overall environmental burdens have not gone away, nor the health problems, which have simply been shifted elsewhere, probably to places less equipped to deal with their costs.

In my intervention at SIEF, I told the audience about my own apparently paradoxical position, a mix of privilege and discomfort that I know to be shared by many environmentalists. I said I learned to care about the environment from the experience of the Finnish summer cabin on an island in the Baltic Sea, from where I participated in the online panel. I talked about how cabin life in Finland is suffused with rules and rule breaking of many kinds. As children my cousins (from the other cabins of our island paradise) and I learned to respect them because the practical reasons seemed unassailable: high-topped rubber boots would protect against dangerous adder bites, rules about heating saunas, saving fresh water, picking (or not) certain berries or mushrooms or using and cleaning outhouses obviously needed to be followed, at least if one was to be part of the collective. We also learned nuances of etiquette, often around food, that, as some of us have later realised, placed us in a particular social class (even in Finland!). An obvious example might be learning how to eat crayfish and to sing the drinking songs that go with this seasonal activity – not that all of us became accomplished in either of these.

It was that seaside environment that prompted my interest in environmental problems. There I was able to observe fish stocks dwindle and to learn about the effects of eutrophication on wildlife as well as holiday-makers' experience. For blue-green algae has become a routine scourge that can make swimming impossible, besides which sea water no longer always serves even for household purposes - more technologically complicated, energy intensive solutions are needed to enjoy cabin life. Still, as one gets old enough, one also appreciates improvements. One understands that not all change is a sign of damage.

Long ago my annual island experience started to become an emotional roller-coaster, a reminder of paths not taken but also a cherished landscape (or seascape) that connects me to a history and a social world and is obviously part of my identity. It did teach me to care about nature and its creatures, and to appreciate that I am linked – through the abundance of locally produced and therefore obviously fresh food, for example – to the more-than-human world, both on the island and beyond it. With the chance to enjoy that delightful environment every year, I have learned, like many Finns, to think of myself as close to or at least particularly appreciative of nature. The paradox or contradiction is that those of us lucky enough to have access to these paradise-like holiday homes are among the worst perpetrators of the environmental damages. Unless we drop out of our social networks and their material entanglements, we can only live unsustainably.

I hope this does not disqualify us – this rather vaguely defined 'we' – from the debate. Certainly environmentalist sentiment is strong among WEIRD populations, but so long as this leads merely to shifting to new gadgets and adopting lifestyles marketed as green and sustainable, the impacts on wider (consumer) culture and its ecological footprint will be tiny if not perverse, as with the palm oil example. More significant may be that it is precisely in places where transgression carries fewest risks – among the wealthy, by various definitions – that the dualisms of western thought and other self-destructive cultural habits of sustainability-as-usual – are being deconstructed as well as reconstructed in sometimes exciting ways. I do not wish to extol wealth or the wealthy, but if they/we are joining activism, altering everyday habits, calling attention to crisis through political mobilising, artistic pursuits and scientific practices, and so fostering what I have called 'other ways of knowing' (Berglund 2022), the transgressions of wealthy risk takers are worth highlighting. For activists of many backgrounds in many places really are poised to replace the unsustainable political culture of endless economic growth and frenetic technical innovation, I think. Having worked in academia for some time without research funding, these kinds of small efforts of the luckiest have become something that I have been putting to academic but also political use in various texts on Finnish middle-class activism. I have called this 'the comfortable slot' because modern comforts have been so taken for granted here (Berglund 2019), but it is also uncomfortable in that anyone inhabiting it knows how significant is their own role in perpetuating global destruction.

To return to food, it has become a vehicle for thinking about the generalised and diffused crises that combine in the very idea of environmental sustainability. In contrast to the habit of discussing crisis as an abstract global issue, working on shared troubles through food allows other ways of knowing to flourish – eye-to-eye over a meal, elbow-to-elbow in the garden, and art work by art work in public space. Such practices make room for more experimentation about matter and more curiosity about people than older environmentalist formulations allowed. Through such engagements, it also becomes less difficult, even for wealthy westerners, to appreciate that the modernity that for so long appeared to us as universal and inevitable is both odd and oddly (self-)destructive. Rethinking the everyday practices and politics of food means appreciating its histories and above all facing the intellectually demanding issue that today food is always both global and local. Perhaps thinking with food even makes it easier to start unpacking and better coping with the wider forms of unsustainability in our own ways of life as well. I am not suggesting that food-related political activity leads in any automatic way to change, in fact we are witnessing considerable digging in of heels, parochialism (and worse) as well as overtly anti-environmental politics, which scholars of culture must engage with too. Nevertheless, languages and grammars are evolving, however slowly and hesitantly, around food that identify and verbalise our collective crises better than mainstream policy and general-purpose green discourse can.

Our discussion at SIEF demonstrated that to talk of food is always to talk about people and about culture, and to do so in a way that does not ignore its materiality. Thus, as a way of putting people into environmentalism and nuance into crisis talk, scholarship around food may have a bigger role here than I, at least, had appreciated.

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COMMENTARY

In Search of Ethnological Research on Sustainable Foodways

Håkan Jönsson

All research fields have a prehistory, and the theme of this special issue is no exception to that rule. When I was invited to offer a commentary based on my comments in the 'Baking the rules' session at the SIEF congress in 2021, I realised that there was a need to put the comments in context. They were based on both research and applied work within the field of food ethnology, in which I have been working since I first started my PhD project in the first months of the new millennium. In this introductory commentary, I provide a personal background to the theme of the issue, and I have also taken the opportunity to include a wish list for future research in the field.

The early years

Food and meal research in Nordic ethnology has experienced its ups and downs. In the 1970s, and even into the 1980s, it was a well-trodden field of research, at a time when other cultural science disciplines did not think that food was a field worthy of academic attention. The first wave of ethnological food research focused on food as substance and its material forms and (pre-industrial) agriculture. Although research on food and food-related artefacts had been an integral part of ethnology since the beginning of the 1900s, it experienced a renaissance in the 1970s and 1980s. Similar to how earlier ethnologists mapped buildings, customs and traditions, researchers in the 1970s and 1980s mapped food as a form of cultural expression (see Bringéus & Wiegelmann 1972). Where did the food and meal habits originate, how did they spread, from whom and to whom? While the mapping focus in ethnological research was largely abandoned in other fields of ethnology, it survived for a long time in ethnological food research (Bringéus 2000).

The social context, the meal, became more prominent over time. Günther Wiegelmann, a German professor in folklore and editor of *Ethnologia Europaea* from 1971–1983, believed that the meal was a unique field in European ethnology, an interesting point of focus that no one else was interested in or could study as well as ethnologists (Wiegelmann 1971). It is most likely still difficult to find fields where time, space and social environment interact as clearly as in food culture research, especially with respect to the meal itself.

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Food research and cultural theory

When I began my doctoral studies in 2000, ethnological food research was in a period of decline. It was considered traditional and lacking a theoretical edge. In retrospect, I find this opinion by the renowned professors of the day somewhat strange considering how many cultural theorists have focused on food and meals as an important source of inspiration. Mary Douglas, Margaret Mead, Marcel Mauss, Erwin Goffmann and Pierre Bourdieu are just a few examples. Even the notion that traditional mapping research does not lead to any ground-breaking theoretical concepts can be challenged.

A good example of a theoretical framework that emerged from the mapping tradition is the term foodways. The interest in the geographic spread of certain foodstuffs provoked a more general interest in the transformation of food in different spatial, social and historical contexts. In the search for patterns in what, how and why we eat, under what circumstances and how the patterns change, the term foodways became established already in projects conducted during the New Deal in the US (Anderson 1972). Foodways as a conceptual model for food research considers the interrelated system of food shared by members of a particular society and includes all stages of food preparation and consumption. The idea of foodways also points to how food travels between geographical spaces, connects past and present, and is related to other cultural configurations. From the beginning, the term has been used in contexts where the research was not only intended to document and analyse but also to change food habits. The application of foodways research, which began in the 1930s, expanded to include wartime committees, where both Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead had important roles, to attempts to improve the dietary patterns of workers and immigrants in Western Europe from the 1960s onwards. Attempts have been made to replace foodways with similar terms, namely foodscape or food system. They all have their pros and cons, but it is fascinating to see how foodways still can inspire new generations of scholars to move from a study of specific details relating to food to a study of the processes, networks and interactions related to food, drink and their consumption (Jönsson 2013).

A revitalised field

After completing my PhD in 2005, I was kindly but firmly advised by my mentor against continuing in the field of food research if I had any ambitions of remaining in academia. An attempt to arrange a food panel at the 2006 Nordic Ethnology Conference in Stockholm underscored that argument. It was a session with some nice papers and presentations, but no one except those who had written a paper for the session attended. But then something happened.

After many years of food hype with celebrity chefs on TV and a gastronomic revolution in both the restaurant sector and the domestic kitchen, academic interest in food and meals in the cultural sciences was rekindled. When, six years later, we again organised a food panel at the Nordic Ethnology Conference, it was suddenly among the most well-attended sessions. Both we as the organisers of the session and the conference organisers were surprised; the room was too small to host the attendants in a fire-safe manner. Since then, the positive development has continued.

For a period, researchers focused strongly on consumption and identity as well as on the role of food in constructing place-bound communities and conflicts (Brembeck 2007; Lindqvist & Österlund-Pötzsch 2018; Tellström 2006). As food producers returned to supposedly authentic foods and cooking methods, and as the EU introduced country of origin labelling schemes, ethnologists followed suit, problematising and deconstructing notions of tradition, origin and authenticity (Linde-Laursen 2012; May 2013; Jönsson 2020). In recent years, issues of power, resistance and sustainability have come into focus as well. A new generation of ethnologists wants to study the shortcomings of current food systems (see Marshall 2016; Raippalinna 2022; and not least the articles in this issue). There are many examples of in-depth ethnographies on so-called alternative food networks, both consumer and producer organisations and those that seek to unite producers and consumers in the pursuit of common goals (e.g. Grasseni 2013, 2018; Gruvaeus & Dahlin 2021; Petursson 2022). In the new era of food research, researchers seemingly feel less anxious about working with actors outside universities. Applied ethnology has grown in recent years, with food as one of the important fields. Applications of ethnological food research can be seen in many different contexts, from participation in innovation projects in collaboration with industry to food activism in NGOs.

As evident in this issue, one current trend is a move from a focus on food consumption to other parts of the food chain. Most notably, researchers are now focusing on agriculture and waste practices, but also all intermediary phases — processing, packaging, labelling, distribution, retail — have become topics of study from various cultural perspectives. Foodways research is no doubt vital, and just as the concept indicates, it includes both the entirety of the food chain and how food moves between and interacts with different geographical and cultural spaces.

Interdisciplinarity and ethnological food research

Many food researchers from the cultural sciences collaborate with researchers in a diverse array of interdisciplinary fields: public health, sensory studies, economics and geography, to name a few. When thinking about sustainable foodways, certainly room exists for even more interdisciplinary collaborations, not least with researchers in disciplines dealing with long-term sustainability topics, such as ecologists and biologists. One important future contribution will be to unveil the class-based, culturally defined ways of dealing with sustainability. Much can be learned from the experiences of interdisciplinary projects on diet and health. Climate, just as public health, is a field where it is difficult to define where science ends and morality begins. The alienating recommendations for dietary habits that middle-class scholars and public health professionals have tried to impose on working-class people and immigrants for decades share some striking similarities with contemporary recommendations about lifestyle changes to become more climate friendly.

Current sustainability initiatives often seek to implement urban, middle-class conceptions of sustainable food choices in their projects, while ignoring the perspectives of the people that the projects are supposed to be working with (immigrants, people in rural areas, farmers, and so forth). The pitfall of ignoring the perspectives of marginalised groups is prevalent both in top-down (UN, governmental, regional) and bottom-up (NGOs, activist) initiatives. Food culture researchers may have an important role to play as intermediaries between different interpretations and practices related to sustainable living and eating, thereby counteracting, or at least illuminating, the unequal distribution of power and injustices produced both in the current food system and in attempts to change it.

Another important point of focus in interdisciplinary settings is the dialogue between past and present, which is at the core of ethnology. Much of the research done in disciplines working with food lacks an historical perspective, which often leads to conclusions that consumers are poorly educated about diets, nutrition and sustainability impacts and that proper information and gentle nudging will prompt them to change their dietary habits if they are just provided with correct and accessible information. The historical processes that have shaped the symbolic qualities of food and meals are too often neglected. If acknowledged, researchers often view such ‘cultural’ values and processes as problems that are difficult or even impossible to change precisely because they are related to ‘culture’. Here, we must also take on the role of emphasising that culture is not static, but in a constant state of transition. Culture and heritage are not only or primarily about preservation; they are also potential change agents (Hafstein 2012). Culture as offering a potential way to make sustainable transformations is a topic that ethnologists can bring into interdisciplinary settings. This is not to claim that heritage is inevitably good from a sustainability viewpoint. Culturally embedded habits promoting sustainable transformations do not exist everywhere or at the same time and should be topic for empirical critical research. Here, I want to highlight that ethnology is grounded in an empirical research tradition. Unlike other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, which may downplay empirical research and engage in the subtilities of current popular theories about culture and society, ethnology offers a grounded empirical approach that I have found capable of building trust in interdisciplinary settings. The scientific approach of ethnologists and engineers is not as different as we might have thought before engaging in interdisciplinary projects.

Farmers, activists and academic hooliganism

As mentioned, an increasingly diverse range of items are the object of study in ethnological food research. But blind spots still exist, which may derive from the background and cultural settings of the researchers. While plenty of ethnographic studies have been done on organic, biodynamic, urban and regenerative farming practices, much less research has been done on what is commonly referred to as 'conventional' farming. It is difficult to foresee a future without farming or farmers, so I think much can be gained by including mainstream farmers as a study field in ethnological food research. It may well be that many ethnologists are critical of the current agro-industrial complex and present good arguments from that standpoint. But it would be unfair to deny the knowledge about matters of sustainability and circular and regenerative practices possessed by farmers on family-owned farms, those who have cultivated the soil and the landscape for generations.

My relation to farming and farmers was the starting point for my reflections at the closing session of the SIEF conference in 2021, 'Baking the rules', where I related my journey from first obtaining some funding to develop a culinary tourism project in 2006. In one of the first meetings, I met a women specialised in growing asparagus, but also in welcoming guests to her farm and organising small events. Her view of academics from the city was, to put it gently, not overwhelmingly positive. The idea that such a person knew anything about the hard everyday practices of dealing with either farming or culinary tourism was almost ridiculous to her. It made me realise, the hard way, that I had to reconsider both my skills and my way of communicating with people outside the university. My idea that I could maintain the academic position of providing different perspectives and knowledge proved naïve, and thus my initial efforts at promoting the development of culinary tourism failed. Critical thinking is not the only ingredient necessary for building a successful culinary tourism project. But I gradually learned, and finally even gained respect from the asparagus farmer. For several years, in parallel to securing short-term positions at the university, I worked with applied projects in the food sector. It sparked not least reflections about ethics in relation to applied ethnological food research (Jönsson 2012).

The 'Baking the rules' session invited thoughts on the entanglement of (or conflicts between) academic research and activism in the field of food research. Food is indeed a vibrant field for activism, often connected to such fields as urban agriculture research, climate research, organic food research and animal rights research. While I am not totally indifferent to these types of activism, as we definitely need a more sustainable food system than the one we currently have, I feel more attached to farmers and small-scale producers than to urban, middle-class activists engaged in urban farming and arranging fossil-free meals. Perhaps it is a typical example of the 'going native' phenomenon, given the fact that my years working with applied food projects affected me on many levels. As a result, I decided to join the Farmers' Association (they welcome members who are not active farmers) a few years ago.

This decision is related to food activism in at least two ways. First, I see my applied projects in the food sector as a certain type of activism, as each has sought to promoting small-scale, traditional and local food. Second, many of the projects have involved farmers, and some of them have dealt with products like cheeses, sausages and other traditional animal-based food. Some 40% of the farmers specialised in animal husbandry in Sweden have experienced threats from activists, especially animal-rights activists, in recent years (Ceccato et al. 2022). The Farmers' Association is something of a red flag to the activists. It makes me question whether I am in some sort of anti-activist activist position today?

As Eeva Berglund remarks in her commentary, there can and should be room for many types of activism in food research, since power, subordination and liberation can take many forms. I would like to propose that the lines of conflict may not be so much between researchers that arrive at different conclusions regarding which changes to the food system that should be applied, but between researchers that strive for action-based on research and those who want to remain within the semi-closed environments at universities.

To be clear, I do not mean that ethnologists should stay away from any attempts at having an impact on more sustainable lifestyles, leaving that work for the activists. Even as an anti-activist activist, I have found a sense of community with activists that I do not have with those of my research colleagues in academia, who are solely engaged in constructivist theories.

A lesson from the postmodern research turn in the 1990s is that deconstruction may be an interesting intellectual exercise without leading to anything other than a sense of cultural relativism, where all practices can be for-given in the name of culture and academics can safely remain in their comfort zone at seminars. As important as it is to deconstruct and criticise the hidden values and norms behind interventions in the name of climate and sustainability, we should not stop there. Can you imagine any other field where deconstruction without reconstruction would be considered a legitimate contribution to society? I doubt it; such persons would be labelled hooligans. I have come to the conclusion that *academic hooliganism* is no better than other forms of hooliganism. We should continue to deconstruct and criticise but also do our best to come up with better solutions and calls for action than the ones we merely seek to deconstruct and criticise. As cultural researchers firmly grounded in an empirical research tradition, we also share joint responsibility to ground our calls for action in empirical research and to do so not only from ideological or theoretical standpoints.

A wish list for future research

The format of a commentary provides us with the privilege of not only commenting on the routes to this special issue, but also looking ahead to future ethnological research on sustainable foodways. As stated above, I would like to see more ethnographies on contemporary farming and farmers. One starting point for such studies may be to return to some of the writings in the life-mode analysis tradition, where self-employed family farmers were one of the groups originally defined as a specific life mode. The main features of life modes are still relevant, and it is interesting to see how writings from the 1980s still acknowledged farmers as an influential group within society.

Life-mode analysis was an attempt to understand not only different conditions informing work and life choices, but also a way to approach social tensions and unequal development. Danish ethnologist Thomas Højrup's work on 'The forgotten people' (*Det glemte folk*, Højrup 1988) is of interest here. Focusing on a life mode that differed from that of the dominant groups in society, he criticised scholars for neglecting the perspectives and the inherited skills and knowledge possessed by the group. It was also difficult for the members of such a forgotten group of people to make their arguments heard since they lacked the cultural codes to communicate with the dominant groups. While those defined as the 'forgotten people' may well have had plenty of knowledge and a desire to transform their marginalised communities into thriving and sustainable communities, they were excluded and forced to comply with top-down 'development' initiatives, which often posed a threat to both the wealth and attractive lifestyle of the community. Thomas Højrup was not thinking of farmers when he wrote about the forgotten people, but I think his analysis shows some clear parallels with how contemporary farmers are treated in both academia and politics. Their perspectives and knowledge are neglected in discussions about society in general and climate transition in particular. I believe that the search for sustainable foodways may benefit from including ethnographies of farmers dealing with hi-tec appliances, precision farming and the day trading of cereals, to name just a few of the practices in the hidden and forgotten life of contemporary farmers. Such a focus will not only help researchers update their definition of the life mode of family farmers; it may also offer some food for thought on sustainable (and unsustainable) practices that will affect the food system of tomorrow.

Another field for future research is sustainable foodways and emotions. The emotional aspects of food are now finally a respected topic in ethnology, a turn that we can see also in the nice compilation of articles in this special issue. Food and mood are connected, as Icelandic ethnologist Jon Thor Petursson points out in his doctoral thesis (Petursson 2019). There are many different types of emotions connected to food. Senses of fear and distrust are unavoidable when examining contemporary foodways. Yet still, we should not forget the positive aspects of food and meals. Food is a problem in many contexts (not least in families), but it is also a source of joy, happiness and comfort. I would love to see more detailed ethnographies about the joy of eating, the sense of satisfaction after finishing a plate of food and the comfort of commensality.

Such research can also be an antidote to some of the actions proposed by advocates of food fears. As a supposed expert in the field, I am often approached by journalists when they want to write pieces on people's anxieties, fear and disgust for certain types of food. Eating insects as a way to save the planet and narrow-minded consumers rejecting insects based on emotions have been a topic of many recent articles, and I am asked how consumers can be educated to stop having such a negative emotional reaction to the idea of eating insects. Consumer fears of novel technologies, such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs), is another topic where supposedly irrational consumers counteract new and more climate-friendly food solutions. Advocates for novel technologies and disruptive innovations in the food sector seem to forget that there are plenty of paths to sustainable foodways. Hi-tec solutions and new protein sources, such as insects, may be one path, but there are many others as well. Meat consumption was much lower in the rural areas studied by earlier generations of ethnologists compared to consumption levels in contemporary urban settings. Sustainable future foodways can thus be inspired by traditional food habits without giving up the sense of belonging to previous generations.

I see great potential in returning to the early years of ethnological food research, but with new questions. How sustainable were people's diets? How was a place-based circular economy created in rural villages, not only through farming and cooking, but also through the rituals, traditions and proverbs communicated during the meals? Previous research contained certain biases that should be critically examined. Undoubtedly, studies have focused more on wedding cakes, cheeses and other sorts of food connected to festivities than on the dull food and meals eaten on an everyday basis or in harsh times. A sad but telling example is a book that I inherited from a retired colleague, Kerstin Kuoljok Eidlitz's doctoral thesis on food and emergency food in the circumpolar area (Eidlitz 1969). No one had bothered to even cut open the pages in the book during the almost 50 years that had passed since she had written it. After taking some time to open the book and read it, I found it to be one of the most thought-provoking and relevant research studies done on sustainable foodways in Nordic ethnology. The history of emergency food is a neglected, yet highly relevant topic when discussing how the current food system can be more resilient. The study of emergency food and resilient practices in both the past and present is the final field that I would put on my wish list for future ethnological food studies, but I am convinced that many more paths deserve to be trodden in the future.

Concluding remarks

In this commentary, I have offered some personal reflections on the roots of ethnological research on sustainable foodways and potential routes for the future. Together with the articles and commentaries in this issue, it can hopefully inspire discussions about the content, ambitions and applications of such research. After more than twenty years of conducting research and development projects in the field, I am delighted to see the growing interest, and not least the restlessness, in the search for transformations of both foodways research and the food system in general. While there still may be more studies to conduct on how food can make us feel safe and comfortable, I nevertheless feel comfortable in seeing that the study of foodways is a vibrant and dynamic field in Nordic ethnology.

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Ethnological Fieldwork. New Fields and Forms.
Jenni Rinne

Etnologiskt fältarbete. Nya fält och former 2022 (eds.) Kim Silow Kallenberg, Elin Von Unge, Lisa Wiklund Moreira. Lund. Studentlitteratur. ISBN 978-91-44-15326-1

The book is a compilation of articles written by a number of ethnologists addressing the problems of ethnological fieldwork. It is mainly targeted at students and teachers in Sweden and elsewhere, but researchers also could benefit from it. It is a book that builds on an earlier work, *Etnologiskt fältarbete*, published in 2011. However, the editors are explicit that the present volume is not an updated version of the earlier work, but rather offers a new contribution to the methodological literature that compliments the previous version. This is partly because, in addition to more traditional approaches, such as interviews and observations, the book introduces new fields and aspects of fieldwork that relate to recent research in Swedish ethnology.

The book is organised into four sections, beginning with two articles. The first article reviews the process of formulating research tasks and questions. The second article focuses on the importance of reflexivity when thinking about the relationship between the researcher and the field. Reflexivity is important because the dialogical nature of fieldwork impacts the production of knowledge. Reflexivity also forms the basis for conducting ethical research.

The next section concerns certain fields where ethnological research is currently practiced. The first articles in this section discuss institution ethnology. When doing fieldwork in institutional settings, researchers must take into consideration the rules and hierarchies of an institution when negotiating access to the field and adapting themselves to the research environment. The section then includes an important article on participatory research and the co-production of research knowledge. This particular approach is especially important in fields that deal with people in vulnerable positions, such as indigenous and disability studies. Discussing for whom and on whose terms the research is ultimately being done is crucial when working in such fields. The section concludes with an article introducing examples of research being done outside Sweden. Swedish ethnology, being foremost a research field focusing on everyday life and cultural phenomena within the country's national borders, has now been extended by scholars wishing to focus on related conditions elsewhere. Then, for example, language issues and situated knowledge become important points of focus when considering knowledge production.

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In the third section, the book shifts focus to the actual methods of collecting research material, such as interviewing and participatory observations, which address the most traditional ways of doing ethnological fieldwork. The articles in this section are also the most pedagogical in the sense that they describe all the necessary steps, from preparing for the interviews and observation situations to being in the field. In addition, the section contains articles about autoethnography and digital fieldwork. The latter has become especially important given the increasing amount of time spent on the internet as well as the fact that many current phenomena can be studied by using digital material. The section concludes with a salient reminder that written sources, for example those collected from archives, the internet or authorities, all need to be considered when doing ethnological research. Triangulation and combining different materials to answer research questions is common practice in ethnology.

The book concludes with a section on the interpretive, writing and analytical phase of the research process. The section begins with an article about ethnographic writing as a method. Ethnologists produce text during different phases of the research process and not only when writing the final academic article or student thesis. The writing done during different phases of the process is considered here as a way of thinking about and working through the analysis. The authors of the article give concrete writing exercises to help researchers with the analysis work. The authors also address the difficulties of writing and advise scholars on how to overcome them. The second article of the section is about the method as a concept. The authors explain the use of the concept in different parts of the research process. The article clarifies the relationship between method and material and method and analysis and gives examples of how the method is understood in different research texts. The last article of the section is about researchers should do after the material has been collected, how they should organise, delimit and frame the empirical material and chose the best approach. The authors of the article also note the importance of comments on and criticism of academic texts, which is part of the work of knowledge production. The academic community has a role in ensuring that the knowledge being produced has been thoroughly considered and assessed on a deeper level. The final article in the book is by Lars Kaijser and Magnus Öhlander, who edited the former ethnological fieldwork book. They reflect on the changes that have occurred in ethnology and thus ethnological fieldwork from the mid-1980s onwards. The article highlights continuations, shifts and changes in Swedish ethnology that have affected the methodological questions.

The collection of articles serves students and teachers well by carefully describing from a pedagogical standpoint the research process, with descriptions and examples from the field and research texts. However, I must note that even though the book promises to introduce the most current and new issues related to fieldwork, it lacks certain approaches that, at least in my opinion, should be included in such a book. That is to say, it should have discussed more embodied ways of doing fieldwork, such as sensory ethnography, and how they can assist researchers in bringing forward different ways of knowing and producing cultural meanings. It is especially important to account for different ways of knowing when thinking about the current discussion on decolonising knowledge production as well as post-humanistic ways of understanding the intertwining of humans, materiality and nature. It is not only discourses and narratives that inform our cultural understanding of the world; emotional affects and sensory experiences are part of it as well. A particular kind of fieldwork is required to make them a focal point of ethnological analysis. Having said this, no single compilation of articles is exhaustive when it comes to the different approaches to fieldwork. Thus, I would highly recommend the book, especially for students and teachers of ethnographic fieldwork and ethnological ways of producing research knowledge. It is an important addition to the existing qualitative methodological literature.

AUTHOR

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An Intellectually Bold Volume on Ethnography with a Twist
Ida Tolgensbakk

Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas and Aino-Kaisa Koistinen (eds.) 2020. *Challenges and Solutions in Ethnographic Research: Ethnography with a Twist*. Routledge. ISBN 9780367376857. 256 Pages.

This interdisciplinary volume was published during the global Covid-19 pandemic and may therefore have escaped the notice of many of its potential readers. However, it is a work that deserves the attention of a broad range of scholars. It is creative, thought-provoking, and sometimes provocative in its quest to twist ethnographic practice. The stated goal of the volume is to "rethink ethnography 'outside the box' of its previous tradition and to develop ethnographic methods by critically discussing the process, ethics, impact, and knowledge production in ethnographic research". Building on the works presented and discussed at the Ethnography with a Twist Conference held in Jyväskylä, Finland in 2019, the authors represent trans-(North-)Atlantic institutions and a variety of disciplines working with ethnographic methods.

The editors introduce the volume by pointing to two uses of the titular word 'twist': as an intentional aim to conduct ethnography with new tools, and as sensitivity to use those unexpected moments – twists – that always occur in fieldwork. This is a nice way of connecting several aspects of ethnographic fieldwork that have perhaps become more visible in recent methodological developments. When e.g. the affective turn invites us to be more attentive to the embodied nature of human interaction and knowledge production, researchers move into areas where we need to push the limits of our tried-and-tested vocabulary. When participatory approaches to ethnography insist on collaboration with all participants in our studies, the chance of the unexpected multiplies.

The authors urge us to view ethnography with new eyes and discuss common problems and issues with a candour and courage not often seen. They build particularly on methodological developments moving towards multi-modality in process and outcome, such as autoethnography and retrospective, subjective, collaborative, and reflexive turns in ethnography. Although the individual chapters have their flaws and weaknesses, the authors and editors deserve praise for the effort bringing together new ways of thinking about ethnography in all its facets. The result is a volume that has the power to inspire as well as to invite debate. The thirteen chapters of the volume are divided

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into four sections, and they span from researchers' collaborative analysis and writing, visuality, and other forms of multi-modality to discussions of power relations, the ethics of ethnography, and embodied and affective ethnography. The volume does not even restrict itself to contemporary fieldwork but moves into testing new methods for interpreting archival data (Chapter 11 on the sensorial-affective experience of migration).

The volume is not a handbook in new ethnographic methodologies. I would rather say it is a tasting menu, offering possible novel solutions to old and new problems. As such, it would make a good addition to traditional methodology literature – something to point adventurous students to when they are on their way into the field for the first time and will benefit from knowledge of the plethora of creative solutions that exist. The book would also be a good companion for experienced researchers wanting to move beyond the state of the art or to read for inspiration when starting a new project. For both these purposes, I appreciate that the editors have made the extra effort to put together a helpful index. Several of the individual chapters contain very helpful short or more comprehensive literature reviews on the methodologies they discuss. For instance, Chapter 1 starts with an introduction showing how the development of ethnographic practices is ongoing, with a shift towards collaborative, multi-sited, and mobile ethnographies trying to adapt to current cultural transformation. Similarly, Chapter 5 on the ethical challenges of using video in ethnography both takes us through the history of video in documenting fieldwork as well as points to how the new GDPR guidelines affect academic practice. Furthermore, some contributions can be read as instructions on how to conduct experiments similar to those of the authors: Chapter 2 describes a sensory ethnographic workshop in such detail and with enough practical advice that it would be possible to copy, and Chapter 4 does the same with participant-induced elicitation in digital environments. The methodologies in Chapter 6 (storycrafting) and 7 (drawing as an autoethnographic method) are similarly instructively and enthusiastically described, giving even this non-visual reader a temptation to try.

Ethnography has many layers, and the volume touches upon several of them: from planning and executing fieldwork to gathering data and analysing it, together with peers as well as with informants. Most of the chapters of the volume actively discuss collaboration in one or more of these layers, from accessing the field to reflexive co-creation of methodologies and theoretical developments. Some of the more fascinating contributions describe radical co-construction of analysis, even including the reader in the analytical work – such as when the authors behind Chapter 3 extend an invitation to the reader to "travel with us through the process of ethnographic knowledge production", and move on to take the reader on a walk. They are attempting nothing less than communicating the unwritable, and this reader found it a very fruitful experiment. Another example of this is the contribution to involuntary ethnography in Chapter 12, where the reader is presented with an open-ended analysis and an invitation to share in the author's discomfort and doubt.

The best parts of this volume are those where the authors have genuinely tried to do something new in their ethnographic practices and simultaneously have managed to explain these inventions clearly to the reader. This is not an easy feat. In its weaker parts, the volume shows how difficult it sometimes is to convey in written form the complexities of methodological practice. The main point of each chapter is to discuss methodologies, but to be able to do that, they have to explain their case studies, and the balance between the two endeavours sometimes is not ideal. For instance, in the way Chapter 9 describes challenges to studying people living in poverty, the author comes off as naïve and perhaps not prepared to do ethnology outside her own culture. Similarly, in Chapter 8, since the main point is to describe a particular retrospective methodology when studying commemorative practices, it is difficult for the reader to understand why the author so strictly opposes another, existing approach to commemorating the same practices. In both these chapters, this reader felt she did not get "the whole story". At the same time, the generous invitation to get to know the research process from the inside helps make up for such flaws. Several chapters make visible aspects of research we do not normally see, such as unabridged transcripts and field notes.

Overall, the volume is a very thoughtful collection of ground-breaking work, helpful to both beginners and experienced researchers working with ethnography. Taken together, the different chapters pose critical questions to the entire process of knowledge production in ethnography. It invites radical openness around how we act in the field, with the field and with each other. In describing such a courageous volume as this one, it seems unfair to ask for more. However, if I were to ask for additions or to suggest next steps for the editors, it would be to build on what is hinted at in several of the contributions but is not followed up on: the structural aspects of research practices, those that are beyond the researchers' command nevertheless have a great impact on what ethnographic research is capable to do. Funding, and the time restraints of research projects are two such banal but important structural aspects; another is the limits posed by publishers and journals in how research results are published. A radical approach to working with, around and against such limits from the same team of excellent scholars behind this volume would be a joy to see! As this volume stands, I am grateful for the intellectual boldness of its editors and contributors, and I look forward to their further work.

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The Definition, Preserving and Guarding of Cultural Property and Heritage during the Second World War

Niklas Huldén

Legnér, Mattias. 2022. Värden Att Värna: Kulturminnesvård som statsintresse i Norden vid tiden för Andra världskriget. Göteborg, Stockholm: Makadam förlag. urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-462299

This work concentrates on how the concept of national Cultural property was conceived, constructed, perceived and in the end protected from destruction during the Second World War in four Nordic countries. The author, Mattias Legnér, Professor in Conservation (Kulturvård) and docent in History at Uppsala university (Campus Gotland) in Sweden, has authored and participated in several works on the subject of use, preservation, and re-use of historical buildings and he has also in wider international contexts touched on the main theme in this investigation including cultural heritage questions.

Legnér uses the terms "monuments" and later "cultural property" (defined by UNESCO 1954) as a succession of words meaning the material expression of a certain culture representing a group of people, such as a nation or state. Sometimes this has been called an "exclusive us" by (ethnologists Regina Bendix and Valdimar Hafstein) representing something that cannot be owned by others. Cultural heritage would in its turn then represent "an including us" indicating the existence of a global cultural heritage which has glimpses i UNESCO's Haag convention. These are not uncomplicated terms and their interpretation has varied through the years. However, "cultural property" seems to have had a strong impact on national laws and the possibilities to trade with these kinds of materials, hence it is used in much of the text.

Starting with some general backgrounds in the writings of the destruction of civil property during the First World War the author then proceeds to the main fear of the ever-expanding airborne warfare that was foreseen to take place in future conflicts. Indeed, the German attack on Poland in 1939 then gave examples of this extensive bombing on both civilians and the destruction of "monuments" perceived as national treasures by the Polish. The German forces showed up an outward facade, which incorporated a program for the handling and preservation of national property during warfare. In practice, they robbed the country with the purpose of breaking down any Polish national "spirit" and morale remaining, thus preparing the country for a complete takeover. This was not completely known – or spoken of – in Sweden by

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the time that museum professionals and others in the trade started preparing means of protecting and preserving the “Cultural property” during the war. Nevertheless, it was soon to be known, not least by the London blitz and all the care taken to shelter buildings and evacuate museum collections and archival material.

The study is based on a vast archival material to a large part derived from the Antiquarian–Topographic–Archive (ATA) in Stockholm. Several other state and private archives in Sweden and in other countries are also represented. The main questions for the study are listed as follows: How was the past used in media and in relation to the war and how did sheltering and the preservation of cultural property differ from the peacetime efforts? Which measures were used and why? Who was responsible? When did military or political organizations use cultural heritage as means of engagement and which consequences did it have? How can similarities and differences in this handling of cultural property in different Nordic countries during wartime be explained? Answering these questions and taking them through different locations and political entanglements during a timeline stretching over several years and different interpretation schemes of course results in a dense description comprising fifteen chapters and some 450 pages with numerous fine illustrations.

The work is therefore massive, and it is probably only possible to relate to some aspects of the text through this review. Sometimes the reader struggles with cascading “in–depth” excursions in seemingly quite loosely tied background information regarding for instance different interpretations of what is Swedish in older art and how these relate to the art-conception in Nazi-Germany. However, it has to be noted that the information in these cases always is neatly tied up with the initial questions and analyzed in discussions following the main chapters and in the conclusive chapter.

Many of these measures regarding the cultural property during wartime get mirrored through the actions and writings of a few prominent people belonging to the leading circles in the museum and archival world in Sweden. Mainly the architect and Director-General of the National Heritage Board *Sigurd Curman* (1879–1966) and art historian, professor *Johnny Roosval* (1879–1965) serve as agents of action through the scenario of wartime protecting of the cultural property. As such, they are highly suited as they also had connections to the other Nordic countries in similar or worse predicaments during the war. Indeed, they seem to have had much influence also in helping their Nordic colleagues in different ways during this time. That said one has to mention that the total count of people interacting in the text is close to two hundred.

The chapters mostly addresses the situation in Sweden, where different plans and strategies to protect the cultural property made up before the war, were still not mature enough to be implemented fully when the war broke out. But we get insight in to how the actors tried to sort out museum collections into different classes, ranging from “elite” groups that would have to be evacuated or otherwise specially protected, to classes of “lesser” value that were dealt with using smaller measures. Some monuments like Bernt Notke’s medieval sculpture of St George and the dragon in Stockholm Cathedral (Storkyrkan) get to serve as an example of how different interpretations could arise regarding the national treasure status of the artefacts. Important observations about using national cultural property for more or less propagandist and sometimes military reasons are discussed thoroughly in several of the chapters.

The situation in the neighboring countries more directly engaged in the war shows some of the same concerns regarding how to handle the protection and use of cultural property. The German invasion of both Norway and Denmark in 1939 shows how the invading forces in some aspects showed a great respect for the countries “Germanic” history, but simultaneously didn’t have problems using monuments for military actions, even destroying some. Regarding Swedish concepts of the Finnish war experience show some differences due to the situations. Finland was attacked by the Soviets in the “Winter war” 1939–1940 during which the support and help of the professional Swedish museum staff involved was wholehearted and stretched even to arranging the evacuation of Finnish children to Swedish families. The support during the Continuation War when Finland was allied with Germany was not announced in the same open manner, but still contained help with the planning and even the evacuation of some museum collections. The evacuating of secret military cryptographic material and expertise in 1944 is not discussed. After the war, the help for the rebuilding of destroyed museum buildings, for instance the Turku castle was strong.

This is an important book with deep insights into situations that are not going to vanish easily. Legnér concludes the text with references to recent instances of destroying cultural property for different reasons, including the simple reason of degrading other peoples’ and nations’ morale and ethnic/national spirit. Sadly, this destructiveness seems to be an aspect of war regardless of time and international treaties.

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CONFERENCES

Cultural Knowledge in a Changing World – Research, Teaching and Cultural Encounters

Helena Laukkoski

The XI Ethnology Days and VIII Finnish Conference on Cultural Policy Research were held in Jyväskylä on 17–18.3.2022. The theme of the conference was cultural knowledge in a changing world – in teaching, research and cultural encounters. During the two conference days, we heard three inspiring keynotes and were able to participate in several different workshops, where we heard about ongoing research in the fields of ethnology and cultural policy.

After two years of Covid pandemic lockdowns, the conference was held in person. This meant that we were able to meet and greet our colleagues and enjoy conversations over coffee and during lunchbreaks throughout the conference. This networking aspect was important for me especially since I began work as a doctoral researcher during the pandemic, and we have had only a few opportunities to meet our colleagues in person and discuss our research. I believe we can all agree on the fact that meeting online on Zoom or in Teams is not the same as meeting in person.

The year 2022 was a year of celebration for many supporting organisations at the conference. Ethnos ry turned fifty, the Society for Cultural Policy Research turned ten and the Centre for Cultural Policy Research Cupore turned twenty. This reminds us about the importance of research in these fields and serves to emphasise the significance of ongoing and future research and education, a point also noted in the conference programme since one of the workshops was a panel discussion on Cupore and the role of research in decision making.

Building Societal interaction in practice

The first keynote speaker was university teacher, Kaisu Kumpulainen, from the University of Jyväskylä. The title of the keynote was ‘Building societal interaction in cultural research and education’[1]. Kumpulainen began by reminding listeners that in addition to education and research, societal interaction is one of the three responsibilities of universities in Finland. The keynote focused on how the Kumu degree programme promotes societal interaction. Kumu – Cultures, Communities and Change – is a relatively new and multidisciplinary de-

1 Original title in Finnish was ‘Yhteiskunnallisen vuorovaikutuksen rakentaminen kulttuurien tutkimuksessa ja koulutuksessa’.

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Photo 1: The conference was held in Jyväskylä, on the Seminaarinmäki campus (Helena Laukkoski 2022).

gree programme that combines ethnology, anthropology and cultural policy. On a pedagogical level, Kumu focuses on a connective pedagogy that combines theory and practice in education. Kumu students are invited to participate in research projects and different networks during their studies. This allows the students to strengthen their professional identity and offers them practical tools for their future working life.

In the keynote, Kumpulainen introduced several research projects involving Kumu students. One of them was a participative cultural planning project (OSKU) in the municipality of Sumiainen and Palokka suburb, where the residents had expressed concerns about the negative effects of municipal mergers. The concerns included, for example, the loss of local identity and services and

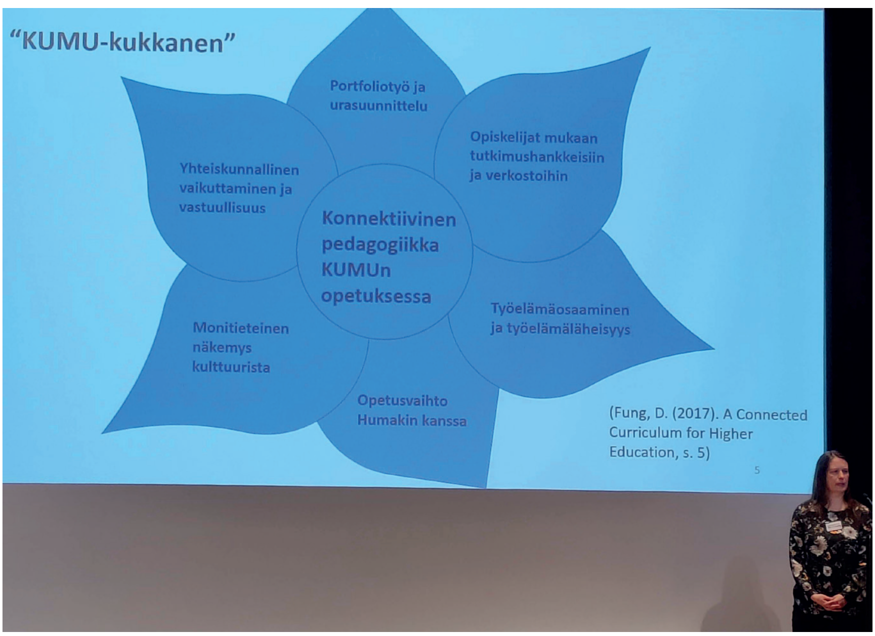

Photo 2: Keynote Kaisu Kumpulainen presenting the 'Kumu flower', which demonstrates the role of connective pedagogy in Kumu teaching (Helena Laukkoski 2022).

the deterioration of vitality in the area. The goal of the research project was to discover how the sense of locality and spirit of the village community have been built and maintained over time. The aim was also to serve the local communities by offering them ways to develop the local areas and increase vitality in the area. Visualisations documented the results of the research project and were distributed to the residents and local associations. Also, a public event was arranged for members of the local communities so they could hear the results of the project. Kumu students worked as research assistants in Sumiainen and held participative workshops for the residents. This offered the students the possibility to work in the field and learn in practice.

Learning in practice increases students' work life skills, giving them the opportunity to experience working as part of a research project. Students in the field of culture have expressed concerns about moving into working life after completing their studies because career paths in the cultural field are not straightforward. As a young doctoral researcher, I recognise and share this concern. Based on Kumpulainen's keynote, it seems the concern has been heard by the University of Jyväskylä and the Kumu degree programme has responded to it. The keynote demonstrated how societal interaction in the fields of cultural research and education can be increased in a way that serves the students, university and society.

Digital cultural policy

The second keynote, 'Exploring platforms: Moving from policy to practice in the age of tech giants', was given by Bjarki Valtýsson, an associate professor at the University of Copenhagen. The keynote focused on digital cultural policy, which is important since we spend increasing amounts of our time in different digital environments. It is important to know what the roles of digital platforms are in producing cultural heritage and how these digital platforms are regulated.

The research example that he chose to use reflected the complexity of digital cultural policy. Valtýsson presented a project in which researchers analysed Google's privacy policy and terms of service since implementation of the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The analysis focused on different versions of the same policy documents. Since 1999, Google has adopted 35 different versions of its privacy policy and 19 versions of its terms of service. We heard that the analysis of these documents has not always been easy or pleasant. The goal of the GDPR was to give us a better understanding of what companies do with our data. Valtýsson noted that the research project found GDPR had increased the complexity of data management rather than reducing it. In fact, Google's post-GDPR documents are even less transparent than before. While they do safeguard the rights of citizens, it is now harder for indi-

Photo 3: Keynote Kerstin Kuutma began her presentation by showing examples of Ukrainian cultural heritage (Helena Laukkoski 2022).

viduals to understand the policies. This is because the GDPR itself is complex, and this complexity is most evident in the regulatory framework related to it.

The keynote inspired discussions on different topics, such as algorithms and their role in the digital environment. The power of the tech giants was also discussed and demonstrated by the fact that even though people acknowledge the issues related to Facebook they do not leave the platform. The role of social media and digital environments has also increased in the academic community. You can use Facebook or Twitter to seek peer support or discuss your research. As mentioned earlier, it is also one of the reasons why we need to research digital cultural policy and how these digital services are regulated.

From cultural heritage policies to cultural heritage politics

The third keynote was by Kerstin Kuutma, a professor from the University of Tartu and UNESCO Chair on Applied Studies of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The topic of her keynote address was 'Cultural knowledge and heritage politics in a changing world'. Originally, the title focused on heritage policies rather than politics, but she shifted the emphasis due to the current world situation and war in Ukraine. In my opinion, this is an example of how the academic community can respond to and reflect ongoing changes in the political world.

Kuutma began the keynote by introducing Pysanka eggs, which are traditional Ukrainian Easter eggs decorated using a written-wax batik method. We also saw some pictures of the Ukrainian community in Estonia celebrating Easter, reflective of the fact that a practice considered an example of major heritage in one country can constitute a minor heritage in another. We were also reminded of the fact that cultural heritage is not a given, but a social construct, and the ways in which people conceive of cultural heritage is related to cultural politics. In addition, we heard a brief history of the identification, mapping and institutionalisation of intangible cultural heritage in Estonia.

The misuse of cultural heritage was also brought up in the keynote discussion. The nationalist Ekre Party in Estonia has defined heritage as one of its core values. Likewise, we have seen the rise of nationalist parties in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. These parties often claim that they are protecting local cultural heritage. The parties also claim they are protecting the nation from hostile parties. These examples led to much discussion and to the general question of who has the right to use cultural heritage and for what purposes. Concern was also raised about the destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion.

Multidisciplinary workshops

During the conference, we had the opportunity to participate in a variety of multidisciplinary workshops. I had difficulty in choosing which ones to attend. The workshop presentations were mainly given by researchers in ethnology and cultural policy, but museum professionals and historians also presented their ongoing research in these fields. This highlights the multidisciplinary approach of the conference.

Two different workshops gave participants the chance to hear about ongoing research related to the museum and heritage field: ‘Heritage, knowledge and research’ and ‘Museums and research collaboration’. We heard inspiring presentations about different research partners, such as museums, archives and artists. In addition, we heard about the ethics of decolonising the collections of the Finnish National Museum and about research on how artists have included particular environments, such as swamps, in their art or performances.

Maria Vanha-Similä spoke about collaboration on one such research project. A research project entitled ‘Minun maaseutuni’ (My countryside) is a collaboration between the University of Jyväskylä and Sarka – the Finnish Museum of Agriculture. In the presentation, Vanha-Similä highlighted the mutual benefits of such research collaboration. The researchers were able to make use of the museum’s networks in their fieldwork, and the museum obtained new material for its collections and exhibitions. Another interesting example from the museum field was Jenni Suomela’s presentation about using the Finnish National Museum’s textile collections in her doctoral thesis. Suomela’s research has focused on fabrics and the different fibres used in them. In her thesis, Suomela developed methods for recognising the fibre materials used in the fabrics. These examples of collaboration highlight the variety of research being done in the fields of ethnology and cultural policy.

To conclude, the conference offered a variety of perspectives on current ethnology and cultural policy research. It emphasised the importance of multidisciplinarity and the ways in which these two different fields of research can benefit and learn from each other. To gain cultural knowledge about the changing world, we need to be aware of the opportunities offered by multidisciplinary approaches. In my opinion, the best way to take advantage of these opportunities is to hear about ongoing research, and what would be a better place than this type of conference.

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CONFERENCES

RE:22
35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference in Reykjavík 13–16 June 2022

Inés Matres & Shikoh Shiraiwa

As a prelude to midsummer, 450 scholars and students in ethnology, folklore, and related fields gathered from 13 to 16 June at the 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference in Reykjavik. The University of Iceland celebrated the 100th anniversary of this triennial encounter relayed among universities in the Nordic region.

This edition was sparked by a theme provided by the first syllable of the northernmost capital in the world, "RE". The hosts invited participants to present topics "integral to the ethnographic/folkloristic touch" through re-verbs and re-nouns. This resulted in a myriad of expressions and gave chance to discuss current research that revives the past through tales, crafts, and folk songs; makes us rethink the once familiar everyday life in this strange present; and seeks our reaction to future uncertainties. To suggest a common thread to all possible (re)configurations, Aleida Assmann has given much attention to this prefix in conjunction with cultural memory (e.g. 2008, 2020). For her, "re" is a performative agent that brings the past into the present by an act of *re*membrance, affecting greatly what survives into the future. Memory works through selective mechanisms that inevitably induce its opposite: forgetting. We can use this to remember that through our interpretations, certain subjectivities and perspectives are represented, reconfigured or renewed, while we should be mindful and seek those that remain silent.

Reflecting the broad internationalisation of this conference, the authors of this report are immigrants in Nordic culture, ethnology, and folklore. Even if our projects are tied to these disciplines, and we are based in this region, our (research) identities lay elsewhere. Subsequently, this report does not attempt to be representative. Our "picks" and "reads" were inspired by the keynotes and the panels we visited, which we sorted in the temporalities that converge in Assmann's mechanisms of memory, and in the phenomena we study: the past, the present, and the future.

The multinational collaborative work, *Grimm Ripples: The Immediate Legacy of the Grimms' Deutsche Sagen in Northern Europe* (2022), was the starting point of folklorist Terry Gunnell's keynote lecture. In it, he sketched the extensive history of the northward "cultural *tsunami*" of *Deutsche Sagen* [German Leg-

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ends] (1816–1818) by the Brothers Grimm, emphasising on the revolutionised aesthetics and illustrations in those folklore books and other media in a small period of time, especially by the young artists.

Gunnell noted that movements of collecting and publishing the folklore suggested "new forms of national art replacing the earlier stress on Mediterranean neoclassical imagery," though some collections were not intended to be used as national images. As the nineteenth century saw the rise of nation-states and self-enlightened imperial colonial expansions, there is no doubt that fairy tales, legends and myths evoked a strong nostalgia and romanticism, which were used to construct idealised local/national identities breaking away from the simple narrative of the ancient Greek origin of European cultures. Those folklore tales were also accompanied by illustrations and artworks, making the imaginary into powerful, tangible visual language. Some were further adapted to music, drama and other types of performances.

I (Shiraiwa) participated in sessions that related to my research on (re)construction of collective identity and nation in museums, as well as (re)examining the system of producing knowledge-decolonising universities and knowledge. Out of many intellectually stimulating presentations, two were perhaps the most related to my research objectives. Siria Kohonen from the University of Helsinki presented "Magical thinking within us and them", which challenged the common assumption that magical thinking is "primitive" and "rationally low". She presented magical thinking as intuitive and reflecting, which is a human's fundamental process of thinking and a natural way of producing knowledge, supported by the view of cognitive psychology (Nemeroff & Rozin 2012). Kohonen continued, 'magical thinking is a universal mode of thinking despite culture', which made me reflect on Yuval Noah Harari in *Sapiens* (2011) about humans' "ability to speak about fiction" as "the most unique feature of Sapiens language" (2011, 27), allowing humans to mobilise the masses. Here, I am not framing magical thinking as creating fiction solely but connecting it to the human's creation/imagination of religions, myths, and legends that ultimately constructed the powerful social, political and cultural identities and borders, such as nation-states. Magical/intuitive/reflective thinking is perhaps a natural way of producing knowledge and identity, making it uniquely 'us'.

Veronika Groke, an independent researcher, also (re)examined what counts as knowledge, questioning the separation of human and nature in her presentation, "Hybrids in literature and literary hybrids: writing 'nature' in the anthropocene". Academia has long undermined (and is still largely undermining) oral history and storytelling as scientific knowledge, including literature about relationships between humans and non-humans, a type of narrative that Groke pointed out as a "different mode of thinking".

Both presentations echoed current decolonial discussions on challenging the naturalised notion of knowledge and how it is (re)produced through the western/white/male/heterosexual/Christian centric dichotomy (e.g. Grosfoguel 2011, Mignolo 2018, Mbembe 2018, Atalay 2008) as universal 'truth' and 'good' (Brameld 1950, Curtis2012, Tlostanova 2017).

Contrary, the discussion also touched on the more complex nature of how those 'magical' imaginaries and identities were appropriated into some indigenous cultures to further self-othering. Indeed, such identities of cultures, nation-states and religions, among others, are socially constructed and continue to be reconstructed through 'magical' imaginary for the present time, amplified by further romanticized narratives and histories. Borrowing Kohonen's presentation title, magical thinking is indeed "within us and them", and it is a crucial element of constructing and legitimizing identities and the national frameworks.

Without leaving collective imaginaries completely, Ethnologist Tine Damsholt gave her keynote lecture "Re-assembling everyday temporalities". While she disclaimed that borrowing Latour's famous re-verb was playfully meant, Damsholt honoured her long-term interest in the destabilizing factors of everyday life and probed the agency of an essential actor in our lives: time. Parting from diaries written during the COVID-19 pandemic, she illustrated how the choreographies of our everyday lives became disrupted by these exceptional times. More importantly, that the pandemic has made the complexity of time perceivable and susceptible to cultural investigation. Those attempting to organise new messy routines remind of Wacjman's *industrial time* (2014), while Löfgren's *throwntogetherness* (2014) helps imagine how the micro-temporalities of chores, work, leisure, family, plans and worries about the future literally converged at home in March 2020. Damsholt's final aim was to call upon those of us who research the mundane everyday life not to leave 2020 hastily, because "what the conclusions are", as one audience member asked, are not yet in sight.

The present with a strong sense of "passing on" was common in panels on children's perspectives, kinship in the digital age, and relations to learning. After years in Finland, and as participant observer of children and youth's everyday practices, I (Matres) have come to understand Minna Canth's involvement in the "lasten asema" (or childrens' position) as a near folkloric trait to consider the youngest (and vulnerable) in all earnest for all matter of business. This compass still guides research in Finland and was implicitly shared in many presentations.

Like adults, children produce meanings from their own experiences. These meanings were the focus of Maria Reimann from the University of Warsaw in her presentation: "Sometimes it's a problem, when people ask". The meanings that children give to their home when they live in shared custody situations collide with that of the surrounding adults, and this is the source of many conflicts. Reimann's insisting on the children's (not parents') voluntary participation and adopting a method chosen by her young participants, procured a productive exchange, and a chance for parents to realise about tacit norms that (we) unconsciously extend to (our) children.

Discussions followed on how social norms, as Horst and Miller recognised, are rapidly incorporated to the digital realm (2012). Mary Cane from the University of Aberdeen made a memorable inventory of her peer-informants' historical, biological, affective and technological tools in her presentation "What resources do grandmothers call upon to reach out to distant family and readjust to the digital world". Digitally or clinging to old-ways, faraway grandmothers are reclaiming their tradition-bearing role in families while generating new forms of folklore.

Rewinding to adolescence, Maria Zackariasson from the University of Söderstrom in her presentation "Youth involvement in a school context" suggests that cultural analysis can help including youth's activisms in school, or from school activating youth to such forms of democracy. To mitigate overheated discussions, out-of-hand situations, or empty classes gone to FridaysForFuture strikes, Ehn & Löfgren's concepts of perspectivization, contrastation and dramatisation (2012) can foster a productive dialogue with young people on matters that move their time.

With the typical Icelandic pride in its remoteness and a rather Mediterranean sense of celebration left in our memories, these and other discussions can be (for the time being) found on the conference website ethnofolk.org. The usual ethnographic/folkloristic thematic streams, and the newly founded "Feminist Approaches", will be reprised on the 36th conference edition in Turku 2025.

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