Meanings Attached to Food and Sustainable Food Consumption

- A case study examining how personal relationships between food producers and their consumers in Uppsala, Sweden influence how consumers experience their own food consumption

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MARIAN VOIGT

Voigt, M., 2014: Meanings attached to food and sustainable food consumption. Master thesis in Sustainable Development at Uppsala University, No. 216, 46 pp, 30 ECTS/hp

Abstract:

This study explores the relation between meanings attached to food and sustainable food consumption. Specifically, this study examines how personal relationships between food producers and their consumers have an influence on how those consumers experience their own food consumption. Using a phenomenological approach, a number of consumers in Uppsala with various types of relationships to the producers of the food they consume were interviewed regarding their food habits and food related activities. Two groups of consumers with different kinds of relationships were chosen, and are as described: involvement in consumer-initiated alternative food networks (Group A), and no relationship at all to the producers (Group B). The observations and answers were analysed in order to detect meaning behind the interviewees' experiences of their food consumption. The meaning detected in the research material relates to giving and receiving food as a gift, how food products are valued and trust between consumer and food producer. Respondents with a connection to the producers of their food products connected meaningfulness with food related activities and with the people behind the food production. The more meaningful people find in their food, the larger the increase of the potential benefits of socialisation, preservation of food techniques and food related culture. This findings result in a strong argument for creating greater consumer engagement in food networks to increase sustainability in the food system.

Keywords: Consumer Producer Relationship, Consumption, Local Food, Phenomenology, Social Constructionism, Sustainable Development

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Summary:

This study explores the relation between meanings attached to food and sustainable food consumption. More specifically this study examines how personal relationships between food producers and consumers have an influence on how consumers experience their own food consumption. For the study a phenomenological approach is used. Phenomenology sets the ground for describing how people experience the world in which they live; their experiences are treated like phenomena for the purpose of objectively observing their individual reality. 14 consumers in Uppsala with various types of relationships to the producers of the food they consume were interviewed regarding their food habits and food related activities. Two groups of consumers with different kinds of relationships were chosen. The types of relationships presented by the interviewed consumers varied: from involvement in consumer-initiated alternative food networks (Group A) to no relationship at all to the producers (Group B). The observations and answers were analysed in order to detect meaning behind the interviewees’ experiences of their food consumption. Food and consumption can be seen as becoming meaningful for the interviewed consumers in three different ways: Firstly, food becomes meaningful through interaction with others in terms of giving and receiving food as a gift. Secondly, through how ones choice of products is made in relation to the values consumers have of food products, and finally, in the relationship to the producer which is seen from the perspective of trust towards food producers. Respondents with some kind of connection to the producers of their food products connected meaningfulness with food related actions and with the people behind the food production. The more meaning people find in their food, the larger the increase of the potential benefits of socialisation, preservation of food techniques and food related culture. This findings result in a strong argument for creating greater consumer engagement in food networks.

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List of Abbreviations

CSA  Community Supported Agriculture
GA   Consumer Group A
GB   Consumer Group B
RQ   Research Question
Foreword

I would like to take this space to discuss why I chose this subject and what qualifies me to tackle these vast questions. The local food network in Uppsala is familiar to me and I am very active in sustaining and supporting its growth. I am most deeply involved in five distinct (though interlocking) areas. Firstly, I live in a particularly alternative community in a student district with a community garden. Secondly, I have my own allotment where I am surrounded by other people keenly interested in growing and preparing food, sharing surplus produce together. Thirdly, through my independent bakery business 'Kulturbröd', that is moving towards becoming a cooperative bakery, with fairly paid workers and a positive presence in our local society. It is also my hope that it will one day house a café, and a shop with a bulk-buying ethical shop attached. My local circle of producer friends have also been making plans towards having a farm cooperative with a dairy and vegetable farm. The fourth aspect of my involvement is in Flogsta Matkoop. I helped to set up this food cooperative in 2012 with a group of people interested in improving the local food network. We got to know several local farmers and producers of all kinds, organised discussion groups with them with themes such as 'How can we support each other?' and designed and set up a system to order online - making orders accessible to all the members of the cooperative. The accessibility of food through the co-op makes it easy for some people who would otherwise have to consider time and convenience in sourcing ethical products. Today we have over 100 members. The organisation remains voluntary, alternating amongst the group and we go on visits to the farm to help out. Through involvement with the co-op it is very easy to become a home producer as there is already an existing market and easy distribution. In fact I myself sell bread through the co-op. Finally, I am involved in a local food market. Every Saturday I take my bread to the market to sell along with the other local producers and I do some of my vegetable shopping there.

This work is my way of taking a step backwards from these big plans to look into the challenges of how much of a difference feeding ourselves has on the depth of meaning one finds in food related activities. This work is also looking for indications to what direction our food systems may take in the future.
1 Introduction

Food products are increasingly being produced in countries far away from the places where they are consumed (Sundkvist et al., 2005; Gross, 2011). This leads to consumers having less of a connection to the soil, the place and the individual that were involved in the creation of the products they consume (Eden et al., 2008). Globalised food distribution relies on many factors, it creates food networks that are complex, short-sighted and far from transparent (Roberts, 2008; Gross, 2011).

Disconnectedness to food means we are increasingly seeing a rise in semi-processed food consumption that is predominantly purchased from multinational corporations (e.g. Steel, 2009; Gross, 2011). Consumers’ desire for convenient food access is causing the international profit-driven food industry to steadily increase their power over the food market (Roberts, 2008; Patel, 2013; Pollan, 2013). The current globalised methods of food production and distribution have tremendous impacts, both environmentally and socially. Environmental impacts include polluted waterways, greenhouse gas emissions, degraded or eroded soils, biodiversity loss and the dependence on diminishing finite resources, to name a few (Rockström et al., 2009). Additionally, about one third (1.3 billion tons per year) of the food produced for human consumption is wasted globally because food has become a disposable commodity and food waste is seen as an excepted by-product of the food industry (Gross, 2011; Gustavsson et al., 2011; Carolsfeld and Erikson, 2013).

To compound the above mentioned impacts, the globe is faced with social concerns such as population pressure, degraded health as a result of changing diets, degraded communities, poverty, unethical product supply chains, and the political and economic instability of our food supply (World Bank, 2007; Roberts, 2008). Parker and Schwartz (2010) argue that it is healthier to rely on local food rather than on imported goods since local food is more ripe, unpreserved and richer in nutrients and vitamins. Paul Roberts (2008) suggests that a food system less reliant on global and national suppliers but on regional food sources would be more climate friendly and energy efficient. While this position has been contested (e.g. Born and Purcell, 2006; Edwards-Jones et al., 2008), the distribution of food products is guided by neoliberal thinking that supports low-cost food production and consumption. The omnipresence of the present food system obstructs establishing a local and sustainable food economy (Gross, 2011).

Research suggests that a trend migrating towards alternative food networks with shorter supply chains and closer consumer-producer relationships is pathway towards food consumption that is more sustainable (Morgan, 2006; Eden et al., 2008). The consumer has a basic role in the food system and it is within each consumers’ purchasing power to affect what food is available to us. To come closer to reaching a sustainable level of food consumption more research is needed to fill the knowledge-gap in consumer behaviour. Weatherell et al. (2003) and Eden et al. (2008) state that more information is needed on how people decide between contradicting and/or contrasting information about food products and production and how they use this information to make their judgements. The aim of my research is to bring more clarity to the nature of consumer-producer relations. This study focuses on how food networks are perceived by the consumer and on how consumers decide which products, producers and product sources they will support.

This study looks into the meanings the consumers create in their consumption habits. The concept of meaning is understood here as the way an individual makes sense of their surroundings, on what areas they place significance and what connotations it brings to their mind. By choosing consumers with a variety of different relationships to the producers of their food, this study explores different motivations for product choice.

The overall research question:

When food consumers are making their food consumption decisions how does their relationship, or lack of relationship, with the producers affect the meaning they find in their food?

In addition:

What implications do the findings have on sustainable food consumption?
To help answer the first question I used a phenomenological approach and social constructionism to explore how consumers describe their consumption with regard to their shopping, preparation and eating habits. My second research question was explored through a combination of related literature and findings of the phenomenological inquiry.

In doing so, this study elaborated on existing research to give a deeper insight into consumer behaviour in Uppsala and present a diversity of themes and interpretations. An aim of the study is to inspire additional researchers to investigate with further qualitative research within the field of consumer behaviour and sustainable food consumption.
2 Food consumption research

Existing research around food consumption and the consumer-producer relationship is diverse and extensive. Scholars hold the concern that food consumers are increasingly becoming less skilled at making decisions which adequately support their health and diet while also considering sustainability and community development (Soper, 2004; Jaffe and Gertler, 2005; Roberts, 2008). Food preparation is becoming increasingly industrialised and food preparation ability and techniques are diminishing in a widespread way (Pollan, 2013). However, many state that simultaneously a growing interest in reconnecting to food and food practices and an increasing engagement in alternative food networks exists (e.g. Hjelmar, 2011; Katchova and Woods, 2011; Bean and Sharp, 2011).

Eden et al. (2008) explored how consumer practices can be changed; they show how consumers use trust and distrust as different agents that provide knowledge to promote sustainable and more ethical consumption. They further recommend that research should look far deeper into how consumers reason and why they do not often think about the origin of their product.

In line with Eden et al. Seyfang (2006) reasons that policy makers have thus far not met the challenge of implementing ways to reach a more sustainable level of consumption. If change towards a more sustainable consumption is going to happen the consumer will have to take the responsibility on themselves. Seyfang criticises the mainstream version of sustainable consumption and argues that the measures the economic growth-oriented food system have taken have been limited and will not bring about the necessary changes for sustainable consumption. Seyfang uses and tests the concept of ecological citizenship in which the obligation of each citizen is seen to be: “to minimise the size and unsustainable impacts of one's ecological footprint” (Seyfang, 2006, p.388). In addition, this concept strongly sees private consumer behaviour as both political and as a potential space for collective action for social change. Seyfang concludes that ecological citizenship is a useful model to accomplish a “deeper alternative sustainable consumption through a personal commitment to global, environmental and social justice rather than top-down restrictions” (p.394) and that there is a need “for diversity in social innovation and infrastructure in order for societies to develop resilience and adaptability to change whether that be economic, social or environmental change” (p.394).

There is an on-going discussion debating the advantages and disadvantages of local food. Some literature criticises local food policies in that they do not see the possible negative effects of local food systems regarding unequal power relations, injustice and unsustainability (Winter, 2003; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Born and Purcell, 2006). They suggest seeing the local scale just as any other scale, that it “depend[s] on the actors and agendas that are empowered by the particular social relations in a given food system” (Born and Purcell, 2006, p.196). Recently, Joosse (2014) investigated how ‘local food’ is perceived in a Swedish context. In her research, ‘local’ is seen as an underdetermined concept (i.e. it has no agreed upon meaning). Yet, her respondents did not take the qualities of ‘local’ for granted (as warned for by Born and Purcell, 2006, for example), instead they actively gave meaning to ‘local’ through dealing with food in their everyday life. For these respondents ‘local’ referred not just to simple proximity, but also to the relation between producer and consumption, the scale of production, as well as the length of the supply chain (Joosse, 2014). Milestad et al. (2010) investigated the specific qualities producers see in a local food network and how they perceive the alterativeness of this local food network. They argue that there is a flexible and variable notion of local: “The ‘local’ was pragmatically defined, depending on the availability of products locally and on where consumers could be found” (p.238). When stating that the quality of social relationships within local food networks is perceived to be very high, geographical closeness, as well as shared values, were given as reasons.

Research done by Bean and Sharp (2011) points out that consumers interested in organic food are more concerned about the environment and are more health oriented whereas consumers who prioritise local food consider it important to try to support local farmers and the local community. In addition, they found consumers’ shopping behaviour to be diverse; their investigations show that most of the consumers buying organic products are those who switch between conventional and organic food (Pearson et al., 2011).
There remains considerable scope to extend our current understanding of how consumers connect meaningfulness with their food consumption. Alternative and novel research methodologies will help address this question in the context of overcoming the challenges associated with sustainable food consumption.
3 The case of Uppsala, Sweden

The Swedish food market is divided mainly between the retailers ICA, Coop, Axfood, Bergendahls, Lidl and Netto, which all run different sized supermarkets of different sizes. Altogether the four largest retailer had a market share of 94% in 2013 (DELFI et al., 2014). Other food sources include Systembolaget (the Swedish government’s retail monopoly on alcohol), hotels/restaurants, organic shops, health food stores, farmers markets and farm-shops. Some food is also distributed through food box schemes and food cooperatives, although these numbers are very small (Axelsson, 2012; Ekoweb, 2014). An increase in food shopping via the Internet has been noticed over recent years and is predicted to increase much more in the years to come (Svensk Distanshandel, 2013).

Sales of organic food products in Sweden have also increased during recent years. The sales of organic food products have increased by a double-digit percentage every year for the last 10 years (excluding 2012 which was 3%) and in 2013 the increase was 13% (KRAV, 2014; Ekoweb, 2014). Looking at all the food sales from 2004 to 2012, the portion of those sales that were organic products rose from 1.9% to 3.9% (SCB, 2004; SCB 2012). Over the past few years the Swedish media has reported on shortages in organic production, stating that there is not enough organic products available to meet consumer demand (Kihlberg, 2014; Nilsson, 2014). By comparison, the sales of conventional products increased by about 35% from 2004 to 2012 (SCB 2012).

Food products in Uppsala can be purchased from any of 38 supermarkets across the city. Uppsala city has four marketplaces (Uppsala kommun, 2014). At time of writing, I observed local farmers selling products according to seasonal availability in two of these markets. These are Uppsala Bondens egen Marknad, which runs in April and May and from August until October, and Fyristorg Marknad, which runs all year around (Giske et al., 2002; Uppsala kommun, 2014; Bondens egen Marknad, 2014). There are three small private shops in Uppsala that sell locally produced and organic products (Friis, 2013).

There are two local box schemes available to Uppsala residents; the box scheme from Alsike trädgård in Knivsta and the box scheme from Ramsjö gård in Björklinge (Alsike Trädgård, 2014; Ramsjö gårdsprodukter, 2014). Both farms are located about 20 km from Uppsala. Ramsjö gård is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, this means that when customers subscribe at the beginning of the season, they pay for a share of the harvest and they therefore share the risks in an unguaranteed yield with the farmer (Andersson, 2006; Steen, 2009). In addition, a number of farm-shops (Gårdsbutiker) are available in the surrounding area of Uppsala (Samuelsson, 2012; Bondens mat i Uppland, 2014).

Local meat can be bought through Upplandsbondens, an organisation that sells local and organic certified meat products (Upplandsbondens, 2014). Local and organic certified milk products are available from the organisation Sju Gårdar, founded in 2009 by seven organic dairy farmers based in the province of Uppland. These dairy farmers process and market these high quality organic milk products and sell under their own label to supermarkets. Sju Gårder contributes with around 28% of the organic milk production in the province of Uppland (Sju Gårdar, 2014). Another distribution channel for local food is a food cooperative which has been active in Uppsala since 2012 (Flogsta matkoop, 2013). A food cooperative is an initiative by which consumers collectively order and buy organic products directly from local farmers. By cutting out the intermediaries and because of the dedication of participating volunteers, it is possible to have a huge influence on where the products come from as well as getting delicious and honest products for reasonable prices (Whitefield, 2011).

However, only a small amount of the food consumed in Uppsala is actually produced in the region of Uppland (Jonstad, 2009). Nationwide only 7% of the sales of organic products occur directly between producer and consumer (Landsbygdsdepartementet, 2012). Currently it is difficult to obtain detailed information about how much food actually is produced and processed in and around Uppsala. One reason for this is that the definition of what is local are perceived differently by consumers and producers (Joosse, 2014).

1 Supermarkets of the companies: ICA, Coop, Axfood, Bergendals, Lidl and Netto according to respective company website
To show the complexity of food provision and the different relationships between consumers and the products they consume a figure from Eden et al. (2008) will be used and adapted to the Uppsala case. Figure 1 shows simplified the types of relations between the products and the consumer that could be identified in Uppsala. The stages put in boxes are symbolising stages where the consumer usually has a knowledge-gab about the process. The dotted line boxes symbolise stages where the consumer has partial knowledge about the food production and processing because he/she takes part in it to a certain degree.

An overall increase in food consumption is noticeable Sweden-wide and in Uppsala. Local and organic food is available in and around Uppsala whereas local food is identified as the food that has less risk for knowledge-gabs (Eden et al., 2008).
4 Theoretical framework

4.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is not a fully coherent or easy to grasp theoretical approach. It has been interpreted and shaped by a number of philosophers and sociologists over the past two centuries, and no definitive methodology exists for its implementation in a research context. In this chapter I would like to give the reader a condensed overview of some of the concepts linked to phenomenology and social constructionism that have lead to how I have framed my research.

The foundation of phenomenology lies in the realisation that it is impossible to have an objective position and that there is no objective world out there. Edmund Hussler, who can be seen as the father of phenomenology, was mainly interested in the way the human mind works and how individuals shape their consciousness in each moment (Inglis, 2012). Phenomenology sets the ground for describing how people experience the world in which they live; their experiences are treated like phenomena for the purpose of objectively observing their individual reality.

Alfred Schütz is credited for making phenomenology more accessible for sociology. The question he posed was: how do people find meaning in their world in order to make sense of it? Schütz, in contrast to Hussler brings the discussion from the objective perceptions of reality, using phenomenology to frame questions of how people actually live in the world of objects and others instead (Jackson, 1996, p.19). He focuses on how people actively engage with life: “we engage in everyday life by acting and change by our actions” (Schütz, 1989, p.1).

Food, as a basic need is obviously a high priority for all people and a primary consideration in everyday life. However, food related actions and activities usually become very habitual with many people rarely reflecting on their habits as they fall into a routine. A certain level of satisfaction is established, balanced between taste, ethics, price and ease of both purchase and preparation that is specifically comfortable to them. It is likely therefore that consumers’ habits will affect the way they perceive their food related actions and activities, and vice-versa.

4.2 Social constructionism

Social constructionism is strongly connected to phenomenology at its core with the idea being that reality is not something naturally given but socially constructed (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009, p.23). This does not mean the construction is imposed by society, but that building ones own construction of reality is a social process (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009, p.33). It assumes that understanding, significance, and meaning are developed not by the individual alone, but in coordination with other human beings in that individual’s society. Social constructionism is based upon the social paradigms and belief structures present in the societies we live. Concepts that are so weaved into the fabric of our lives that we can not help but fall in line with them consciously or unconsciously.

Berger and Luckmann say that structuring thoughts through language provides the order to how we make sense of our everyday lives. We live in our societies with other people, altogether in the so-called “intersubjective world” (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p.37). When the subjective experience gets expressed it gets objectified (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p.33). Our interaction with one another is shaped by standard schemes of perceiving meaning that arise from our ideas about a shared reality, yet the perspectives one has on the reality of the common world are different between all people who share that world:

“I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between my meaning and their meaning in this world where we share a common sense about its reality” (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p.37).
When an individual is becoming a member of society he/she immediately starts to interpret the world and therefore creates meaning as a part of their socialisation process (ibid, p.149). In this sense individuals create meaning through forming a transitory understanding of their own reality in the parameters of the roles, norms and values that are commonly shared in their everyday life.

The outlined theoretical background from Schütz, Berger and Luckman is the foundation for how I will conduct my research into how people engage with and perceive their own food habits and food consumption. Through conducting my research three prominent themes recurred throughout and it became clear to me that they would hold as a valuable context through which I could analyse the meanings of my findings. These themes were: Reciprocity, values and trust.

4.3 Reciprocity

Making food for others can be regarded from the perspective of reciprocity and gifting, a concept put forward by Marcel Mauss (2002). Mauss stated that when objects are given they never become completely detached from the giver and gifting practices involve social obligations to give, receive and reciprocate (ibid). Reciprocity involves a commitment to exchanging gifts over time; an ongoing affirmation of a social relationship through the periodic offering and receiving of goods (Mauss 2002). Gifting is associated with affirming and extending social relations and therefore food, as a gift, can also be understood as shaping everyday life (Callari, 2002; Osteen, 2010).

4.4 Values

Schwartz’ Value Theory defines values as desirable, trans-situational goals, that vary in importance, and serve as a principle guiding force in peoples’ lives. This means that values serve as standards or criteria to individuals as they guide their selection and evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. In addition, values can be ordered by their importance relative to one another. They form an ordered system of value priorities that characterise people as individuals. This hierarchical feature of values also distinguishes them from norms and attitudes (Schwartz, 2006).

4.5 Trust

The changes of society from modernity to post-modernity have stimulated an interest in discussing trust by sociologists like Luhman, Giddens and Sztompka. Sztompka (1999) suggests that the role of trust can only function between humans, not between a human and an inanimate object or non-human. He maintains that one can only trust human actions, social actors, individuals and groups, but considers trust a construct of social reality.

Sztompka states:

“...In order to face the future actively and constructively, we need to deploy trust” For example: the politicians have to trust the viability and acceptance of proposed policies, the educators have to trust the abilities of their pupils, the inventors have to trust the reliability and usefulness of new products, and the common people have to trust all those who are involved in "representative activities” acting "on their behalf" in the domain of government, economy, technology, science” (1999, p.11)
When considering the standpoint that our world has become extremely interdependent; within every society the differentiation and specialization of roles, functions, occupations, special interests, lifestyles, and tastes has reached immense proportions. The more technology is applied to nature and society, the more life is becoming unpredictable (ibid). The complex interactions of technology as they bear upon nature and society create an ever larger number of unintended consequences (Stivers 1994, p.91). There is a growing anonymity and impersonality of those upon whose actions our existence and well-being depend (Sztompka, 1999).

The concept of trust can be put forward as "a simplifying strategy that enables individuals to adapt to a complex social environment, and thereby benefit from increased opportunities" (Earle and Cvetkovich 1995, p.38).

Trust is a major factor in our everyday life both consciously and unconsciously, indeed Hardin (1993, p.519) writes “With a complete absence of trust one could not even get up in the morning”, therefore it is also greatly important in how we perceive and deal with our food (Eden et al., 2008). Many products are grown, produced and processed outside of our control and we're left with little option but to trust in what other people do to our food. This is just as Sztompka stated: “We don't know enough about the mechanisms of human conduct as well as about other people's motives, intentions, and reasons” (1999, p.22).

Summarising, Phenomenology and social constructionism are used to analyse my research findings with the methods described in the next chapter. These two main theoretical aspects have also been at help to detect themes (reciprocity, values and trust) helping to make sense of the research material.
5 Methodology

The goal of this study has been to detect differences in how consumers with different types of consumer-producer relationships create meaning in regard to their food consumption. Borrowing from Schütz and Aspers, the “circle of understanding” in a phenomenological inquiry begins at the first level of analysis. During the first level of analysis the process of interpreting the interview material has been completed without connecting it to any pre-knowledge or theory. In the second level of analysis I used theories and notions to find structures or patterns related to theory to explain the first level constructs (Aspers, 2010). The choice of themes was elaborated after the first level of analysis was conducted, so to connect it as closely as possible to the findings of the first level inquiry. “This decision cannot be made from the researcher's armchair” as Aspers (2010) states. The chosen themes were used to help in answering the first research question.

The second research question on how the differences between individually created meanings implicate on sustainable food consumption in general is answered later on in the study with the combined help of the findings of my field research and of my review of the literature. A flowchart of the research design can be seen in figure 2.

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews are the foundation of this study. The study depends heavily on interviews because they are recommended for “detailed understanding of complicated behaviour [and are an] excellent method for understanding consumer motivation and the why of behaviour” (Arnould et al., 2004, p.228).

Finding meaning behind how participants perceive, make sense of, understand and experience their own consumption of food requires qualitative methods. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews helped to extract meaning from the consumers in the field.
An interview can be understood as a conversation with a structure and a scientific purpose (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). A semi-structured interview is a particularly flexible form of qualitative interview style that allows the researcher to pursue new or unexpected leads as they emerge (ibid). Though qualitative interviews demand the researcher to consider that their own verbal and non-verbal behaviour may affect the results (Bernard, 2011). Essentially, during the interview I talked with the interviewees about their food habits. For example: What is the participant’s favourite food? How important is it to take the time to put effort into cooking and appreciate what you are eating? What is your daily food routine? Where do you shop? With whom do you cook and eat? How important is breakfast, lunch or dinner? It is important to ask open questions to invite the participants to present their personal story (ibid).

5.1 Participants

Participants for this study were chosen purposefully, not randomly. This study is based on labour intensive, in-depth research, focusing on the participants and not drawing conclusions about any larger percentages of the population (Bernard, 2011). It was important for me to find people who enjoyed talking about food and who were happy to take the time to do so.

I entered the field and found informants with personal relationship to the producers of the food they buy through two local farmers in the surrounds of Uppsala and at farmers markets. Supermarkets and snowball sampling were seen as the entry-points to find people who have little or no personal connection to producers of their food (Bernard, 2011; Miles, 2014). The study also surveyed informants if they knew of other potential interviewees they thought had consumption patterns that might fit into this study.

The fieldwork of this study mainly took place in March and April 2014 in Uppsala. The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. For this inquiry 12 interviews were conducted with a total of 14 people living in Uppsala. The emphasis was to find inhabitants with diverse backgrounds, age and education to guarantee a diverse set of information. The informants were diverse in age, positions in life and family status. The study met goals in diversity of participants though all of my interviewees were well educated and working, and the majority of the participants were between 30 and 60 years old. Nine of the participants had a university degree. Four interviews were conducted in households with children. For more details about interviewees see table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Household composition</th>
<th>Relationship to producer</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 Adults</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnus</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 Adult, 1 Child</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara &amp; Johan *</td>
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<td>Retired climate researcher</td>
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*Table 1: Participants (All participants received a fictional name)*

*note: For this research 12 interviews have been conducted. 10 of the interviews were one on one interviews. The other 2 interviews where conduct with couples, therefore the total number of participants adds to 14.

The intention was to find a variety of people who had different types of relationships to the producers of the food they consume. One part (Group A) of the chosen informants were consumers who have a personal relationship to the producer of the food they consume. This means the consumers know exactly where at least some of the food they consume comes from - who grew it or produced it, and/or they know the producer personally. Group A (GA) consumers shop in supermarkets regularly too, but also get products from a variety of sources besides supermarkets. As shown in figure 3, eight GA participants have a relationship to the producer through getting food from a food cooperative, farmers market, CSA farms, by a personal contact that grows personal food and through growing their own food. Four of the GA consumers also shop at local/organic food stores.

The other group of consumers are people that have little or no relationship to the producers of their food products, they are here named Group B (GB). These six participants get their food only from supermarkets (see figure 3).
5.2 Interviews

The interview questions were designed to identify about the consumption practices and meaning participants placed in them. The questions (see appendix 1) belong to 5 categories:

- Shopping for food
- Preparing food
- Eating food
- Consumer – product relationship
- Consumer – producer relationship

Consumption practices “are the particular ways in which people understand, evaluate, use, and appreciate the objects they consume across different contexts” (Holt, 1997, p.335). Beyond just telling us what they consumed, the individual’s described food practices tell us why these consumers have the particular food activity behaviours that they do. The meaning they find in their consumption might have an even stronger impact on which products are used than the attributes of that product (Arnould et al., 2004).

The interview content was based on an interview guide that was designed prior to the interviews (see appendix 1). Ten interviews were conducted as one-on-one interviews and the other two interviews were held with two informants being interviewed together. In these two cases the informants were a couple and living together. These interviews allowed an opportunity to have a focus group type of interview to contrast with the single person interviews. All the interviews were recorded.

Although the interviews were recorded, notes were taken, this was mostly for follow up questions and thoughts that I had while the informant was talking. The ordering of the interview questions were seen as a check-list and not with the expectation that they be asked in the order given.

Figure 3: consumers’ food sources (in brackets: no. of participants who shop at particular place)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
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<tr>
<td>food coop</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>farmers market</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CSA farm</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>home growers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>small supermarkets</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: consumers’ food sources (in brackets: no. of participants who shop at particular place)
After each interview I would sit down in a quiet place to write down the thoughts, interpretations and ideas I had about the story I had been told. I felt it was important to sit down as soon as possible so as to not lose the impressions and feelings (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p.190). The interviews have been transcribed in full and I translated all the interviews from Swedish to English.

### 5.2.1 Interview analysis

In the analysis process I put aside the divisions I had made between the two consumer groups in order to observe all the data from a neutral vantage point and allow themes to present themselves without the bias of myself or the participants knowing what group they were in. I was able to look for patterns, i.e. who had common values, without my objectivity being clouded by having to discriminate between the two groups. The interviews are analysed using a mixture of techniques. Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 233) refer to this common type of interview analysis as “Bricolage”. With this method, the interpreter “adapts mixed technical discourses, moving freely between different techniques and concepts” (ibid.) Initially (first level of analysis), I read through the interview-transcripts to get an overall impression. As I read through the transcripts I marked interesting statements. I then collected these and sorted them under the headings of shopping, eating and buying. I tried to find patterns and themes that seemed relevant. I then drew comparisons between the statements of the participants. Finally (second level of analysis) I made sense of the data by organising the information in relation to existing themes (reciprocity, values, trust) described in the literature.

The interview transcripts can be seen as stories co-authored by the researcher. The engagement of the researcher in active listening and the posing of specific follow up questions based on their interest will determine a story to a certain degree. It was important to me to stay aware throughout the stages of transcription and analysis that the construction of the story would have been influenced by my own social construct (Kvale and Brinkman, p. 193, 2009).

### 5.3 Delimitation of the scope of the study

As food is such a fundamental part of life, interviews about food can easily become interviews about the lives in general of the interviewees. To limit this problem, throughout the interviews I always had the intention to get the interviewee back to food related issues. This research is limited to the consumers of Uppsala, Sweden and refers to the responses of 14 interviewees living there. In addition, this qualitative in-depth study has no obligation to statistical generalisability. Keeping time and resource limitations in mind this study mainly referred to the buying, preparing and eating of food at home and work and does not study eating in restaurants in depth etc.
5.4 Reflection

There are some elements that may have affected the outcome of the interviews to be considered. My involvement in various aspects of the local food movement in Uppsala over the last three years has led me to develop an understanding of the intricacies of Uppsala's local food network, this may lead to me giving leading follow-up questions. My educational background in Sustainable Development studies may have led to me having a pre-determined understanding of the situation in Uppsala. I needed to be aware of this through critical reflection throughout the inquiry and particularly during the interviewing and observation stages. On the other hand, having lived in Uppsala may also be beneficial to me when entering the field and finding cases to study. Food, as I see it, can be a very easy subject to get people to talk about and feel comfortable opening up about. However, I was concerned as to what extent I will be permitted access into people’s private lives and if it is possible to get to the core issues and receive real, honest insights. Since I am not Swedish there also has been some barriers in culture and language despite me speaking the Swedish language. Conversely, being from a foreign country also provided advantages, as the informants have been more motivated to explain to me, and in greater detail, the Swedish culture, etc. than they would do to a native Swede where some pre-knowledge is taken for granted. Interviewing consumers who enjoyed talking about their food consumption might have influenced the outcome because consumers with a more negative attitude towards food have not been considered.
6 Findings and analysis

The first part of the findings will present an overall picture about how the participants do their shopping. Following this, further findings are presented and analysed in connection to theory, which is structured into three themes. The first theme studies the people to people relationship connected to gifting and reciprocity. The second theme looks into the people to product relationship in connection to values. The third theme analyses the people to producer relationship and under the consideration of trust.

6.1 Food stories

This section presents the informants and discusses how and where the informants do their shopping. Specifically, I will present here the reasoning for informants choosing their particular shopping places. It will also present how food and food consumption relate to time and the role other people play during their consumption.

6.1.1 Shopping

I asked the respondents where they source their food from and how they go about their shopping in each place that they buy food. I also asked about their motivation for choosing each place. Because respondents buy their food products from a wide variety of places the answers were diverse. Some respondents only shop in various different supermarkets in Uppsala, while others use a combination of farmers markets, small organic shops, local food cooperatives, etc. to source their products as well. See chapter 5.1 for more information about the participants of this study.

Excluding one (Laura GA), all participants shopped in bigger supermarkets at least some of the time. Bigger supermarkets are seen in the Uppsala context as the supermarkets ICA Maxi, ICA Supermarket, Coop Forum, Willy’s, Hemköp and City-gross.

Shopping in a big supermarket is described by Per (GA) as something he enjoys, he sees it as relaxing and inspiring. He describes his feelings in the supermarket as positive and uses the offered variety of products as an inspiration source for his cooking, including new recipe ideas. Visiting supermarkets is meaningful for him because it gives him inspiration and motivation for preparing meals. Often he looks for inspiration for the food he wants to prepare when he arrives home from the supermarket with his shopping. The variety and changeability of the products that the supermarket stocks often leads to him leaving the supermarket with more than he had planned to buy.

Per (GA): “It becomes inspiring. Even if I have a shopping list, I usually return home with substantially more things than what I’d planned. You see things that make you feel wow, this I can make that out of. It should be a source for inspiration”

It can be argued that the wide variety of products makes shopping at bigger supermarkets very convenient; it is easier when one can do all of their shopping in one place. David GA, for example, feels satisfaction in knowing that he can get all he wants in one store as this saves him time.

David GA: “how lovely: there’s everything here.”

Some types of consumers use the supermarket as a source of inspiration when choosing the food they wish to eat while others will make the this decision at home, for example by planning weekly meals and using shopping lists. (Jan GB, Tomas GB).

Most of the respondents do their shopping once a week or every second week. David and Kerstin GA or Johan and Sara GB do their shopping without a specific meal plan.

Kerstin GA: “We go there and shop lots of food, and then we see what we’ll make with it, and go shopping again to get what is missing.”
Magnus GA on the other hand represents a consumer who enjoys being more flexible and spontaneous, he likes to buy what ever feels right for him in that moment. He goes shopping almost every day. This group of consumers value a freedom of choice and being able to make new food decisions each day. Magnus also uses the supermarket for inspiration and makes decisions in-store about the food he will eat each day.

Three of the respondents (David GA, Karl GA, Tomas GB) have more negative connotations to bigger supermarkets: Karl for example avoids buying from supermarkets. He gets the feeling that he is in a laboratory when he enters a supermarket and sees all the plastic packet products whose true origins he has no idea about (Karl GA).

David GA has contradictory feelings about his supermarket visits. He states at one point that he is happy that it is possible for him to get everything in one place, then at another he states that he is sad to see such variety and abundance of available goods in the supermarket.

David GA: “How awful with all that enormous amount of products people do not need...”

He indicates that he does not wish to take part in mass-consumption and apologises that he has to do it.

Tomas GB is also critical towards supermarket shopping, he does not like shopping either in supermarkets or shopping anywhere for that matter. He is critical of the way today's mass-consumption takes place and always feels confronted with that in an uncomfortably intense way when shopping at a supermarket. Tomas used to do his shopping once a week on Sundays after having planned the weekly menu. Now, however, he tries to make the best out of it by creating a positive connection to supermarket shopping. When Tomas is able to do the shopping with his wife he sees it as a welcoming opportunity to spend time together.

Tomas GB: “It’s quite nice that we’re doing it together”

Two families who use supermarkets were interviewed. Firstly, Sara and Johan GB who split their shopping between three of the major supermarkets. They choose each supermarket for particular requirements. The closest supermarket is chosen, if time is a constrain. The supermarket with best products is the place they prefer for their Friday evenings shopping trips. The supermarket with childcare facilities for their kids is preferred when there is no alternative other than to shop with the whole family. At the times when the whole family shop together Johan and Sara GB have to take care of their three children while also trying to consider their shopping choices. Johan and Sara describe these shopping experiences as very stressful.

Johan GB: “I have to do it. If I go there [supermarket] it is very stressful with all the children, one can not relax.”

When possible they go to the supermarket with childcare facilities for their two oldest children. Johan prefers to shop alone. Only then can he experience shopping as relaxing activity. Johan and Sara (GB) talk in a very practical and reserved way about their shopping habits. They see mostly as just a necessary activity that has to be done.

Sara GB: “It’s a necessary evil.”

David and his wife Kerstin (GA) have one favourite supermarket that they choose for its good availability of organic products.

Almost all of the participants in this study do at least some of their shopping in bigger supermarkets and see the reason for this as being the convenience of being able to get all one needs in one place. This is a major reason that supermarket shopping is so popular (Pearson et al., 2011). Two (Tomas, Johan) of the respondents belonging to consumer group B and one (Karl) of the respondents from the consumer group A expressed negative connotations to supermarket shopping.

All of the respondents use smaller supermarkets close to their homes to do additional shopping, as well as the main shopping they do in bigger supermarkets or elsewhere. For some respondents (e.g. David GA) smaller supermarkets feel more comfortable because respondents value the familiar relationship between employees and consumers.
David GA: “Those who work here recognise us, recognise the children, their names. That’s worth a lot, having a shop like that. I think they’re actually good at keeping a good assortment for such a small shop.”

For most of the informants however the small supermarket is simply chosen because it is nearby and easy to access, for this they are happy to accept that the prices are slightly higher and the diversity of products is not as high as in the bigger supermarkets.

Three of the respondents use organic shops to source some of their products (David/Kerstin, Karl, Claudia all GA) while mainly using the organic food boutique “tantens gröna”.

David’s (GA) argument for shopping in an organic store is that he does not have to question the quality of the available products. The shop owners have already made a decision based on sustainability values, he thinks.

David GA: “Here, someone’s already made a good choice. You can’t be sure, but there’s still many well thought through choices, and then you don’t have to spend time choosing what you think gives you the best feeling. The question only concerns what I actually want, or what I think I can afford.”

Group A consumers buy food from a source where they have personal contact to the producer. This could be either shopping at a farmers market, a food-cooperative, a CSA farm or buying the food from an individual, i.e. a friend with an allotment.

Participants’ motivations for choosing these ways are very diverse. For Per (GA) and Emelie (GA) for example, it is a combination of convictions and taste, as well the feeling that it is special to have a product which is limited and not available in every supermarket.

Ulrika GA prefers not the anonymous potatoes from the supermarket that are cleaned, uniform and are collected and carried home in a plastic-bag. Instead she prefers the potatoes from Gunnar, the old man on the market who stands there to sell them every Saturday. They taste better and look different and are in a way “uglier and more earthy”. Potatoes in that case are experienced in a more natural way, too. It can be argued that Ulrika uses the market experience as a symbol for traditional and natural food provision. It can also be seen as a ritual. The market is used as something that is always there, that one can trust in times of uncertainties, and that gives a feeling of trust and belonging.

Ulrika GA: “I think people have a need to be in some kind of context as a human. I can’t say that I know, for example Gunnar and his potatoes on a very personal level, but I still have a kind of relationship with him. He cultivated it. Therefore, it’s also a relationship with the potato. It is just the thing that it is more beautiful, more sensual, more fun…and as a plus there are shorter transportations…”

or

“There is some kind of authenticity at Fyristorg that I enjoy very much.”

Karl GA gets some of his food products from the food cooperative in his neighbourhood. There are many things that are nice around getting his food from there, he thinks. One of them is the way how to pick up the products: The pick-up usually takes place in the community house where the ordered vegetables arrive in a bunch and everybody picks up her or his own and pre-ordered portion. Karl experiences a very friendly and welcoming atmosphere during the pick up. Often there are many people present and it is crowded but it feels good! Karl compares the pick-up with somehow sharing loot. He has developed a trust towards the group because he knows the people who are involved.

Karl GA: “There are many things that are fun around there. For example going to number 45 when there’s vegetarian Mondays. There’s a lot of people there, and quite a nice atmosphere. It almost feels like sharing a prey.”

Claudia GA and Laura GA are members of a CSA-farm that is situated close to Uppsala and offers a box scheme delivery service for its members. Vegetables are grown under the members commitment that they will buy a veggie box over the whole season. The connection between the product and producer is seen as very close.
Claudia GA: “Anders and Kerstin’s vegetables feel personal. They’re covered with soil, have strange shapes, and their carrots would never be approved by EU-norms. Their carrots’ flavour… Coop’s carrots have the right shape and colour, but they’re pale in their flavour, like plastic bags. It’s not comparable.”

Laura GA: “I think it’s fair that food can have a rather high price if it’s good for me, without pesticides… good for other people.”

Others get their products direct from the farm as Per describes:

Per GA: "Well, we go there when we have the need to. We know them a little bit… they’re often closed, Sunday/Monday, but I usually go there anyway and pick out what I need. If they’re at home I’ll pay them directly, and if they’re not, I pay by myself. Total self-service.”

or

"You go there and have a look around, and wander through their green house after the nicest tomatoes. They’ve got 40 different kinds: small, tiny, black, yellow. It’s an experience in itself to look for those sun kissed tomatoes that really have a flavour.”

Some respondents do a weekly planning (Laura GA, Tomas GA, Jan GB) others like to be flexible and decide every day anew what they want to eat (Tomas GB, Per GA). Reasons for planning are diverse. Some respondents want to be sure that all ingredients to make a proper dinner are already home when they come from work and have the possibility to start right away with preparing the meals without the need to think too much. A main reason for planning dinners is also to be able to prepare lunch-boxes for the next day (Laura GA, Tomas GA, Jan GB). In addition, respondents mentioned that they plan because they actively use the planning-phase as a possibility to exchange ideas and wishes between them and their partners and to come up with new meals and challenges for example by using cookbooks and try out new recipes (Tomas GA, Jan GB).

Jan GB and his partner plan the 5 to 6 meals they have during the week and buy the main ingredients on a shopping-event once a week in a big supermarket. The motivation is to save money and time and to be able to prepare a lunch-box they can take to work or university next day. They want to be effective and not need to think much about which food they should have for dinner after coming home from a hard working and study day. The advantage is that the ingredients are already at home and one just need to decide which of the planned dinners is going to be prepared that very day.

Jan GB: “…it’s so much easier then. Come home, ok, we’ve bought this, and then we cook it. It’s a much wider mental step if you have to come up with what to make the same day.”

Tomas and his family also do a weekly planning and do the main shopping once a week after planning for different meals on Sunday morning. The shopping takes place mostly on Sundays because that is the day where the shops are most empty. Both informants keep it flexible as to what kind of dinner they actually make each day in the week. Jan is an engineer and seems to be well organised. He keeps track about expenses and optimisation is very important for him.

Both of the above described households prepare lunch-boxes for the next day. This is another reason for planning of the cooking.

On the other hand, Magnus, for example, does not plan at all. Almost every day after work he passes by the supermarket and buys the food he wants to eat, spontaneously according to what he feels like in the moment. He wants to be flexible. Since his work place is providing him with food for lunch there is no need to prepare a lunch-box in advance and no need to make a planning.

Magnus: “…it leads to me going [shopping] almost every day because I don’t know what to eat when I go home from work.”
6.1.2 Time

The relaxed cooking for many respondents takes place on weekends (e.g. Ulrika GA and Jan GB). However, it is also recognisable that the food on weekends sometimes is simpler because weekends are filled up with social activities (Tomas GB). Weekends are the times where people go and invite or visit friends and families to have meals together. Food making seems to be less planned and less organised on weekends which also has an influence on how advanced or good it happens to turn out in the end. Many respondents (e.g. Per GA, Tomas GB) express that making food under time-constraints is what they try to avoid. People are more experimental on weekends and rather planned during the week. During weekdays the food making is mainly concentrated on having a good meal in a regular schedule. Some of the informants prepare extra food to be able to take it to work/school as lunch-box for the next day (Tomas GA, Jan GB, Laura GA).

Per GA: “Right after I've taken off my jacket and shoes after coming home, I go directly into the kitchen and start with preparing dinner.”

For Per GA, preparing a warm dinner for his wife and himself takes up to 2 hours, but it does not matter for him. It has become an important part in his weekday routines. Once in a while he even prepares two dishes when he and his wife feel for different food.

It is noticeable that the cooking is often divided between couple partners. Either one of the partners is cooking rather on weekdays and the other on weekends, or one partner mostly does all the cooking and the other is cooking hardly at all. Jan GB for example, prepares the food mostly on the weekends whereas his girlfriend mostly prepares the dinners during weekdays. The reason is purely practical because Jan works in Stockholm and comes home late and his girlfriend is studying at home. For Ulrika GA and her husband it is almost the same. Ulrika's husband works from home and prepares food during the week. Ulrika mostly cooks on weekends and when guests come. Participants describe it as a nice experience to have the time on weekends to cook and to try something out and be flexible with time. In that case the partner that has the weekend cooking seems to have the nicer job. He/she cooks for pleasure whereas the partner who takes on the cooking during the week might be doing it because he/she has to do it. Cooking under time constraints and not to knowing what to cook sometimes might be stressful on weeknights for example (Karl GA).

The planning of the weekly dinners and shopping the ingredients in advance helps to make cooking more relaxed during busy working days as described above.

When Johan is alone with his children the food preparation has to be quick. Mostly he just warms up a dish Sara has made days before. Other times he warms up semi-processed food from a tin can.

Sometimes a meal only has the purpose to make the stomach satisfied. What is the difference to a meal that offers more than just a full belly? People put different meanings in making and eating-events. Some of the informants manage to have a meaningful experience with almost every meal they have every day (e.g. Per GA). Is it not only about mindfulness and how actively one eats. It is also about creating a relaxing moment. A moment to reconnect to one's own body. A moment to feel what the body needs, and then satisfying that need. One could ask why can not all eating moments be special? Being in the here and now and not somewhere else at the same time.

Eating can be seen as an ritual too. For Johan, Sara GB and their children Friday evening is a special time. It is the time that is spent with family only. When the family celebrate both the end of the week and the beginning of the weekend. A special dish is served; which is spareribs and French fries for the kids and Johan, and fried entrecôte for Sara. Johan has a glass of wine too. To get the produce for this meal they especially drive to a supermarket with better quality food and buy better products in order to value Friday's celebration more. Good meat, and sometimes organic meat, too. The whole process on Fridays can be seen as a transition process from the working week into the weekend. This transition starts on Friday afternoon by already doing the shopping of the ingredients for the dinner. At home the dinner is prepared and the table in the living room set in a nice way. When sitting together in front of the TV, enjoying the food and spending time with each other the weekend is started. Tomas describes Friday evenings as something special, too. The food that has been made is better in quality and has been planned properly.
6.1.3 People

Ingrid GB: “You become happier and nicer to others if you eat nice food. If you eat bad food you become grumpy and unpleasant in your behaviour.”

Starting with the statement of Ingrid above this section will elaborate on what role partners, friends, family members or colleagues play during food making and the eating of food. Ingrid simply states that there is a relation between what we eat and how we treat others.

Magnus GB sees the most important experience while making food is the interaction several people have between each other. The experience of eating what comes out of a group process when creating a meal is something special for him. For Magnus actually the cooking becomes a social event and that is important for him.

Karl GA sometimes has his little son sitting next to him in the kitchen. His son already tries to help out. Karl enjoys the company of his son a lot but at the same time he is also more stressed because he has to concentrate and take care of him.

Laura GA would rather cook her food by herself and is happy when doing so. In the cases when she and her room mates meet casually in the kitchen and each of one wants to make food, they do the cooking together.

In the following I present and analyse examples of how the respondents experience the different parts connected to eating with others. During the analysis the notion of gift and reciprocity has come up and is taken to a further discussion that will be presented after this section.

A meal is used to shape atmosphere when there is room to sit together and have time for each other. The social aspect during eating is important. Eating together gives room for talking, exchanging and meeting. Often eating food is more a symbol of the social act happening the purpose of filling up the belly has a minor role. The fika-break Swedes have is a good example for this. The space created space whilst having a fika offers people chance to exchange and meet.

During meals respondents can talk about all issues of life. Seldom are the conversations connected to the food itself. Of course, the food is often presented but barely discussed. Per uses the dinner also to plan the next dinners, which is not well received by his partner:

Per GA: “I like to talk about what to have for dinner the following day, while we’re having today’s dinner. Unfortunately (laughs), it’s not normally that popular, and my wife answers: “Can’t we finish what we just cooked today before we start talking about tomorrow?!?”

Ulrika does not want to talk about food at all. Talking about food is something that one has already been active with sufficiently before the dinner, and according to Ulrika that is enough. When the food is ready the event itself can be enjoyed without thinking so much about the doing anymore. Having the meal is the enjoyment, a celebration.

Tomas is tired of talking about food during lunch-meals at work and that is because he is mad with his colleagues who always talk about their food during lunch-breaks. For him its cold talk.

Tomas GB: “I want to, having expressed something, change when I say something and listen to someone else. Food-talk is just polite conversation, like the weather.”

or

“A lot of talk, superficial, technical… no need to hold any position, not being involved in the conversation with your personality. You can talk with your colleague for 10 years without getting to know each other at all.”

For Ulrika GA and Tomas GB it is not as personal to talk about food. They want to have conversations at the table which are much more personal.

In contrast, Laura GA prefers to eat alone after coming home from work. She argues that she had enough social interaction at work and needs time for herself after coming home. Laura used to read newspapers
while eating, which could be seen as an additional help to make her not accessible for her two roommates who might access the kitchen when she is eating. It could also be argued that reading the newspaper might slow down the eating speed and make eating healthier.

Shopping habits and how the informants relate food to time and people, have been put together in the previous sections. In general, the responses collected are very diverse and it is difficult to see clear distinctions between the two different consumer groups reasoning. The following section will use three different themes to get a closer look into the consumers food related behaviour.
6.2 Theme 1: Gift and reciprocity (Relation: People - People)

Sharing meals in the company of partners, friends or family is very important for a lot of the interviewed respondents. The social life connected to dinners between partners or among friends can be seen as a process of giving and taking over a period of time. Per GA cannot think of one day where he has not shared dinner with someone else. Tomas describes eating alone as much more boring than eating in company. For him the meal becomes much tastier simply because he is eating in company.

Wanting to give a 'gift' can be seen as a product of developed meanings over time. Meanings become attached to food when it is shared between different people or groups (Osteen, 2002). When we look at food and food preparation in the context of a gift giving culture we see implications that different people are attaching different meanings to the giving and taking of food. This is shown by the material presented below. In addition, one has to remember that food, as a gift, is not an item that will last over a long duration of time as other gifts do. When the particular food item has been consumed it is gone. However, a memory stays.

Having a meal with one’s partner can strengthen the relationship (Per GA, Tomas GB and Ulrika GA). When one partner makes their partners favourite dish for his or her partner, they might use it as a way of saying “I like you”, or “I appreciate you”. The person who makes the food might later receive compassion or feelings of being appreciated when their partner expresses that he/she liked the food.

On Sunday morning Johan and Sara GB have breakfast together without their children. The children instead, have breakfast in the oldest son’s room while watching a children’s show. This routine seems to be very important for the couple. They use it to have a moment to relax together and also for planning the week ahead. All the respondents connected creating quality time with others to food giving and sharing events between members of their social circle.

Considering reciprocity in relation to food is a way of explaining why making food for one another is perceived as relationship building (Tomas GB, Magnus GB, Ulrika GA, Sara and Johan GB). The issues around reciprocation that came up in the interviews underlined that the interests of others, along with self-interest, are furthered in the exchange of gifts. The parties who express a wish to foster social ties regard this as a high priority. Emelie invites friends for dinner and the dinner holds great meaning because it is meant to make her guests happy. Some interviewees who live together with their partners describe how they switch between having the responsibility making food for each other (Jan GB, Ulrika GA).

Emelie GA explains that it makes a big difference for her whether she eats alone or not. When she eats alone it does not matter what she eats. It can be some simple bread with sausage, she just needs something that will give her energy. Many widows, as investigated by Sidenvall et al. did not enjoy making food only for themselves. Many of them found it difficult to find food they wanted to prepare. They did not see the point in cooking something nice for themselves alone. They also often left meals unfinished (Sidenvall et al., 2002).

Sara GB makes food from scratch for her children because it gives her a good feeling to know that her children get good quality food. For herself she does not make such a big effort in preparing food. When Emelie GA makes plans to eat with her living-partner it is usually a really special dish. This, for her, is the time to put great effort into food making.

Emelie GA: “Tonight I’ll be by myself, so it doesn’t matter what I eat… but if we’re eating together it has to be something that’s fresh… at work, then I sometimes eat to get a little energy, and then it doesn’t really matter, but not when we’re eating together… then it’s really important to me”

She presents herself as a very giving person who doesn't find great meaning in preparing nice food just for herself. A food experience for Emelie is a good one when she can make food for someone else. For example when she can create a very special food experience for her guests. Even going as far as to make little surprises or unexpected gifts for them. Emelie wants to make other people happy and surprise them. It seems that she does not want or expect anything back in direct exchange for this, which according to Mauss (2002) is an attitude that is possible in small quantities but only to a certain extent.
Ulrika GA likes to cook for others, especially for her grandchildren. Her grandchildren particularly like the food that comes from her garden. It gives to her a great satisfaction when the food she has made makes others happy, especially when it is made from produce grown in her own garden. She finds recognition and happiness in the positive feedback from this. Ulrika loves gardening; she describes how, as soon the weather permits it, she eats outside in the garden. She points out that her grandchildren like eating the food she grows. Her food is valued by the people who are close to her. Mauss argues that there is a need to get something back when we give (2002). For the people who are always cooking for others, what are they getting back? Ulrika might take the happiness from her grandchildren as a gift back. Making a personalised gift can give satisfaction, like making someone’s favourite dish for them, for example. One does not have that satisfaction with buying something ready made.

Ulrika GA: “Cooking for other people is almost like some kind of language. A sort of communication. If I make broad beans for my husband, because I know he really likes broad beans, then I’m telling him something through that”

People generally put much more effort into the food preparation when cooking for someone else, particularly a person they like or someone they want to do something kind for. People tend to try harder when others are around to acknowledge their efforts and find value in them because they see it as more purposeful. Therefore the person one cooks for creates the meaning for the food making.

The empirical material collected from the two different consumer groups point in the direction of no noticeable difference in the way each group exchange food amongst their social circle. But it can be said that food exchanges express the personal bonds between givers and recipients. A connection to the producer of a product consumed during the personal exchange has no important role at this stage. However, respondents do try to get good products for the recipients of the gift according to their values. Having a relationship to a producer or not, does not have a huge influence on whether the creation of meaning in a meal made for someone else takes place. The focus here lies in the effort of making food as a gift. The process of adding value lies more in the preparation than in the choice of product-source or consumer producer relationship.
6.3 Theme 2: Values and Food (Relation: People - Product)

This theme analyses how people express their values about the different food products they consume. It is assumed that the way in which each respondent values their food is strongly connected to how involved they want to be in the creation of their food and what kind of relationship they want to have with the products they consume. Values are set by the social context.

Different products and food practices hold different values for each individual. Food and food-practices become valuable when a connection is made between the individual and a product or practise. According to Schwartz, “when we think of our values we think of what is important to us in life. Each of us holds numerous values with varying degrees of importance. A particular value may be very important to one person but unimportant to another” (Schwartz, 2006, p. 930).

There are often conflicting and competing values at play in the process of product-choice. From the empirical material we see different sets of values emerging to be weighed up for priority. Many of these values are connected to ‘the good product’, which can be seen as a variety of ideals, i.e.: sustainable, local, personalised or practical. This study has particularly looked at the differences and similarities of how the two consumer-groups value their food-products. I will now explore the possible definitions of a good product based on the participants individually constructed reality.

Value of the “good” product

It is noticeable that the values that the participants hold as priorities for their food plays a big role in the way they choose their products. Conflicting values and priorities are noticeable and often described by the informants as they are difficult for product-choice. These priorities also change and develop with time. Participants source their products from a variety of places to combat these conflicts. Emelie GA for example shops for local products directly from her work-colleague while buying other products from supermarkets and smaller shops. Many informants can be seen as having hybrid shopping habits (Ehrnrooth and Gronroos, 2013). That means they use a number of different sources for their food. David and Kerstin GA) buy organic products at different places. Ulrika GA gets products from her own garden or at the local market. It is also noticeable that people who become parents develop stronger priorities on buying better food for their children. They usually change the products from the sources they already know and do research to make more conscious choices, for example by buying more organic products or less processed food (Pearson et al., 2011). Since Sara GB has children she buys more fresh produce in order to make meals from scratch. Food suddenly becomes a higher priority when families get children.

Karl GA: “We buy more organic food now… it’s changed from less than a year ago but because of Lou [his son] we’ve reconsidered our choices.

good = organic?

Around two-thirds (their own estimations) of the food Kerstin and David GA buy for themselves and their three children is organic (David). They noticed that the availability of organic products has increased over recent years and that they can now get almost all the organic products that they would like. They value teaching their children about what organic products are and why they are important while including them actively in the shopping-process. They do this by asking the children to help with collecting products when they are in the supermarket together for example. David and Kerstin want to buy more organic food from sources they know but these intentions do not always lead to the practice of actually doing it. It is tempting and easier to get most of the products from the supermarket instead of the more local supplier because everything is in one place at the supermarket.

Jan GB and his girlfriend try to buy mostly organic products with consideration of price affecting how much they actually do this. If the price difference is too high between the organic and non-organic alternative, they will choose non-organic. Jan debates with himself whether he can afford the more costly alternative but as he says, he lives on a student budget and must consider trying to save for any future investments he and his girlfriend wish to make.
Magnus (GB) does not buy organic products at all. He is the only informant who does not buy organic products ever. This type of consumer might see organic products in contrast to conventional products as not different in quality and merely more expensive. This group of people might come to this reasoning because they see no connection between quality and organic farming. However, Magnus expressed that buying from a local farmer is a reasonable alternative that he would consider instead of being reliant only on the supermarkets. However, Magnus mentioned that he has not bought from a local farmer thus far because he does not have the energy right now to change his food-sources.

Magnus GB: “I’m not someone who buys organic, nothing. Mostly because I don’t believe the whole thing...because I think, it’s not about ecology but it’s about making money. If you look at the milk production: farmers complain about not getting enough money per litre spent, and then they start (being) organic and get a couple of SEK more per litre. I’m not exactly on that train. I see it more as the company earning more money on something we have previously been delivered.”

Tomas GB doubts that the cows that produce organic milk are happier than the cows living on a conventional farm. Although he has these doubts, he does buys organic products despite them being more expensive. An alternative that he sees is to get in contact with the local farms who deliver the milk and judge by himself, though he has not taken these steps yet.

Many respondents say that they find it difficult to see what kind of food choice is the best choice. It is difficult for them to trust that the available products are good products. At the same time they are not actively trying to do anything to change the situation, they accept it as the way it is. Johan GB claims that this is the time we live in, everything else would be much too inconvenient. He likes the easy way.

When Laura GA was younger she blamed the food system for choosing to not be environmentally friendly. But now she sees the system as not being the one in the wrong and thinks that consumers need to change their own habits. The more she thinks about it the more she is sure that she does not want support companies she is whose practices she doesn't agree with.

Laura GA: “I’m very involved in environmental issues, and I connect them to my own lifestyle, one way I can have an impact is in the choices I make with my money... I want to reach the core issue. I have to change my own habits too...”

She sees it as the consumers who have the power over their consumption. This can be seen in observing how much vegetarian food is available to buy currently in comparison to how it was 10 years ago, she argues. At the same time, she says, one does not want to be too extreme in the sustainability of their food choice as this can make life very hard. Tomas GB mentioned that he tried to avoid the multinational companies but since the larger food network is not transparent, and almost all brands are connected to one or another multinational food giant, he felt that it was impossible to not buy from “Kraft or Unilever”. Even though one has good intentions, he says, one ends up buying products from the companies one does not want to support. He goes further and argues that we live in this particular time in history where this way of consuming is what our society is doing. Most of our shopping takes place in the supermarket rather than through growing our own food. Tomas does not want to oppose the present structure too much because swimming against the stream takes too much energy. He sees it from a broader perspective and is aware that times will change.

Tomas GB: “It’s not acceptable in any way, the lifestyle we have now, if you consider that it will be impossible to live this way in the future. Everyone can’t drive a car and fly in aeroplanes. It’ll change... It is changing. A bedouin; a newly rich oil sheik, said: My father rode a camel, I drive a Mercedes, my son will ride a camel”, now we’re driving a Mercedes.”
**good = vegetarian?**

Tomas (GB) makes a broad generalisation; he sees vegetarian food as good food above all else. In his experience vegetarian people are not happy with scrap food (by this he means insufficient veggie options in supermarkets and restaurants) because they have a deeper interest in food. He says that he does not see much difference between organic or non-organic products, and says eating more vegetarian food is sufficient for him to live a healthy life. When it comes to vegetarian products that attempt to be direct replacements for meat products such as vegetarian sausage, he doesn’t enjoy it because it does not feel real for him. This sausage tries to be something it is not, and that it will never be, so this will never be a good product according to Tomas.

Tomas GB: “We eat a lot of vegetarian food. It’s fun. We’ve done it for a few years now. You get to learn a lot of new dishes. My personal relationship to food has changed in this time. Compared to 4-5 years ago, there’s a big difference but I think that’s completely fine. I’m more aware of environmental reasons for eating less meat”

**good = expensive?**

Another way to create value for products is to connect quality and price of a product. By not buying the cheapest products respondents feel more sure that the quality is sufficiently high. Better quality is seen in this context as products containing less additives and more natural ingredients. When talking about quality connected to price respondents express that they are not always sure if they really can trust that the products are really better than the cheaper alternative (Magnus GB, Sara GB, Johan G).

**good = practical?**

Good products for Sara and Johan GB are practical products, like for example, those that are easy to handle for their children.

Johan GB: “Organic is sometimes not practical…if the ecological sort of milk also had the plastic cork, then I would have bought it.

Good products, as regarded on the grounds of practicality are products which one does not need to clean that much. Per GA is very sloppy at cleaning and pealing and therefore feels much safer when the products he buys are organic.

Per GA: “All this alarm about pesticides, I start to think more and more about it…we are very sloppy at washing our vegetables at home and it is very stupid to take the industrial alternative. They are often very intensely sprayed.”

Uncertainty about which product to buy was seen in the feedback respondents gave: Sara GB for example talks about her uncertainty about what type of eggs she should chose in the supermarket. She expresses that she does not know which chickens have a good life and which do not.
David GA expresses happiness, when he gets hold of good raw-materials - such as fresh fish from a fisherman he knows or hunted meat from a friend. He tries to get fresh fish directly from a fisherman when he travels to the west-coast of Sweden. Sometimes it happens that he will meet a fisherman just as he has come into the harbour. This is the freshest fish one can get. Per also talked about the fish his farmer friend catches in a lake just 200m away from his house. Both Per GA and David GA are interested in a close connection to the origin of the product they consume. The way they get their fish is special and most likely not the common one. Even though they have fishermen as a resource, they do not buy all their fish products from them. Shopping is so easy from supermarkets and the other usual sources that the fish bought in these places is mostly used for every day consumption, not a special occasion.

Products that have a limited availability hold a different value than products with seemingly unlimited availability. Many local products change in availability over the year. Per GA for example cannot wait for the time when the tomatoes first become ripe and he is able to go and pick them at the farm close by. He describes the first time in the year of going to the greenhouse as a treat. It is something special, just available for a short period of time, not all year round. Emelie GA makes efforts to get eggs from her work-colleague as she sees a big difference between them. The feeling that products are not available in abundance makes them more special and valuable, causing people to be more willing to try hard to get them. This mostly happens, when products have already been experienced and are a part of ones routine like the eggs are for Emelie. This also depends upon just how much effort it takes to get these products - for Emelie it is not a big effort, since the eggs are delivered to her workplace. Some respondents mentioned that it is too much effort to get all the products they would like to get from an alternative source (Dan and Kerstin GA). There is only space in their lives to make this extra effort when things are going smoothly enough to allow one to take the extra time and energy needed to think about alternative ways to get products.

Kerstin GA: “When I have lots of energy and I am not drained, then I manage to think “organic” or “fair-trade” and shop at good places. When I was working at a school in Gottsunda, it was pretty tough and always after 4pm I was completely exhausted and then I went into the ICA there and I could not cope that day to choose the best meat... and then I would shop pretty fast.”

Laura GA sees it as very important to buy locally produced products. Her motivation is to strengthen the local community to make it more adaptable and therefore capable of facing changes. If she, for example, grows her own vegetables she will not be as dependent on products from other countries. While shopping, Laura is very aware of where her products come from as she reads the ingredients list very carefully.

Besides growing her own food Laura GA also buys food from a local farmer. For Laura it feels good to know the farmer personally. Food is not just a necessity, it has greater value for her. Once in a while she visits the farm and helps out. She feels that is is even good for her personality, to learn how to grow food, get good vibes and to be a part of the social exchange that takes place on the farm while working together. She explains how well connected she feels to her own food production when, for example, she sows vegetable seeds at the farm she volunteers at and then receives the same vegetables she has planted later in the year as part of the farm’s veggie box scheme. Laura does not want to just consume. She likes to be a part of the process behind something. Because she is aware that growing food is a lot of work she is willing to pay a reasonably high price for good non toxic products.

Laura GA: “With Ramsjö gård, it is good for me when I go out, get some exercise, social company, I learn new things, it's good for the environment, good for my personality… it’s not just any kind of organic celeriac, it has significance because it means that I have had a great time.”

Claudia GA says that she can really feel how good the food is that she gets from a vegetable farm near by to her. She feels better in her body when eating this good food. She and her living-partner share a weekly big box of locally produced vegetables. When she compares the food she eats at home to the food she
could get in a restaurant that would cost a lot of money, she feels very pleased with the food they eat at home.

Claudia GA: “I have a pension that is below the minimum for existence and he [my living partner] has a pension that is not at all big: and then here we are sitting, and having luxury food all the time!”

Claudia makes the argument that good quality food does not necessarily have to be unaffordable, it is a question of priorities. For Claudia it is the highest priority to consume good, healthy food. She sees a direct connection between good food and health and, since she describes herself as very sensitive to chemicals and pesticides, she is highly motivated to only consume food that is free from chemical contamination.

Laura GA tries to eat a vegan diet but this sometimes falls into conflict with eating local. Many vegan products like vegan sausage or vegan cream are heavily processed and the production is mostly done outside of Sweden.

Laura GA: “I am totally vegetarian but I try to eat vegan, but I’m not so strict. For me it is more important that it is locally produced. Much of the vegan food is pretty processed. For example, vegan sausage, pretty processed, it comes from a factory in Germany...there one misses the local element.”

Taking supplements and vitamins is something she tries to avoid and therefore she will sometimes eat dairy products; for example when she is invited to a friend's house for dinner and would rather not be picky as this makes it easier socially to be predominantly vegan. Laura feels conflicted while eating a traditional Swedish dish called “Semla” that is made from cream. On the one hand she does not want to eat dairy products any more, yet on the other hand it is a tradition she likes very much and it is difficult to buy the vegan version of it. Since she feels quite strict in sticking to vegan food in many other cases she makes an exception with the Semla because of this good feeling she has about the strong tradition.

good = sustainable?

When David (GA) gets hold of raw ingredients, which he sees as products produced in a sustainable way, he describes his food-experience as much stronger than with conventionally produced products. This is because he is aware of how and by whom these products were made. For him, it is about the respect that has been given in the creation of the product. This also influences how he will go on to prepare the product when it is in his own kitchen:

David: “If I have respect for the products I prepare them as good as possible. If I get tomatoes, onions and carrots from a farmer nearby and put it together with a piece of lamb-fillet from our farmer, I am doing it as good as I can!”

In contrast, a product which is not sustainable according to his values it will not be treated and respected in the same way:

David: “If I buy Findus Fish Sticks I do not care if I fry them 3 or 10 minutes. There is no love behind them any more. That is fish that has travelled around the world with strange ways of production. The product is in some way already destroyed.”

Firat, (1997, pp. 6, 8) states that the new consumer asks the question “am I finding meaning in this?” However David is also in a conflict here; he connects eating less meat with sustainable consumption but has problems putting his sustainable aspirations into practice sometimes. His children prefer meat dishes to vegetable based dishes.

Using good raw ingredients leads to the preparation process for some respondents being a valuable one. When they make a good quality meal out of good quality products they feel happier with what they have made. Emelie describes this same feeling about preparing the meat she buys from her work colleague. In contrast, when a meal from good quality raw ingredients does not work out well, respondents are
unhappier than if they had used less good quality products. Again, it is about values. What does this say about the people who use good raw ingredients? It suggests that people who use good raw ingredients are more aware of their food.

David is continuously debating with himself to find the best ways to consume sustainably as a family though he often does not live up to the intentions he has. He looks deeply into sustainability because he and his partner have children and want to do only what is best for them. However he is in conflict over which products are sustainable and which are not.

David GA: “There is a conflict when buying sustainable: Should I buy organic carrots from Italy or not organic from Sweden, should I buy greenhouse tomatoes from Sweden? One doesn’t know what’s best for the world... or should I stop buying tomatoes...should we buy sugar snap peas from Kenya...? The transportation is not good for the environment, at the same time the transportation can be valuable for the country, it is very hard to know, unfortunately...regarding seasonal fruits we are aware in the winter we do not eat any fresh tomatoes...it would be good to have clearer advice.”

Consumers from the two consumer groups have different values, as referred to in the empirical material. Products for consumers from Group A are more likely to be valued through the people and the place behind their making. Whereas consumers from group B were more likely to see what they're doing in each moment as important rather than the bigger picture. For example, the practicality of the usage of the product. The values prioritised by group B consumers are created more by societal norms than those prioritised by group A. For example, a higher price is often seen as implicating a better quality product. However, consumers from group A are also consuming the same mainstream products and holding the same ideals as consumers from group B. I think this shows that we can't escape societal norms. It seems that some people are more influenced by them than others but we are all involved in it and influenced by it - even those that are more engaged in alternative ways of thinking.
6.4 Theme 3: Trust (Relation: Consumer - Producer)

Emelie (GA) sources some of her meat from her work-colleague who raises lambs and sells his meat at work. He brings meat to work on an irregular basis at times when the farm produces a surplus. Her secondary source is the supermarket that sells meat from a local slaughterhouse 40 km out of Uppsala. Emelie made contact with the suppliers of meat from a promotion-stand in the supermarket while she was doing her usual shopping. During her talk with the meat supplier representative she learned about the company and their production conditions and could taste the products they offered. Through the good taste of the products, and the informative personal conversation with the company representative, she created trust towards the products of that company. From that day on, Emelie has not bought any other meat in the supermarket other than that which comes from the local slaughterhouse.

In supermarkets and the mainstream shopping methods there is mostly no interaction available between the producer and the consumer. There are too many barriers. Here, Karl’s quote about supermarkets is to the point:

Karl: "You can tell it’s really standardised, a lab-feeling. You don’t really know where it’s from."

Ulrika and Emelie connect the value the potatoes and the meat has to the process of producing them, they have faith that these processes meet their standards because they know and trust the farmer in question. When Ulrika describes meeting the farmer, she talks about his worn out and dirty hands, which she sees as the signs of the labour behind her food products. Similarly, Emelie’s experience with her work colleague creates meaning for her because she trusts that the processes of making the products are good, and she knows the farm that they came from. Elizabeth grew up on a farm and values this connection to the land. In both cases the values of the products are very personal. The person who sells the products embodies the processes that have been put into the product. The potatoes from the market become a metaphor for the good, traditional, trust-worthy product. Even in their urban lives they are offered opportunities to connect to the countryside. Ulrika and Emelie have consciously sought out shopping methods that facilitate connection to the countryside and have integrated into their urban lifestyles.

Per GA seems to be a person who enjoys life in many aspects. He loves to cook, this can be seen in how much time he spends every day doing food preparation. Sometimes he even prepares two different meals, when he and his wife are in the mood for different food. Eating in calmness and in a relaxed atmosphere is important to him. In his interview he describes an occasion of a visit to the farm’s greenhouse to pick tomatoes as a treat and expresses happiness when describing this event. It seems that Per is connecting his idea of the good life with the ways he gets his products. This can be seen in the specific way he shops with such excitement and enjoyment at Gunilla and Pelles’ farm.

Magnus GB feels fooled by the products he buys and blames the system for it being only money orientated:

Magnus GB: “We are actually cheated…you can never know, and then hopefully the spraying is much better these days than in the 80s, where one could use just about anything. Today there is a little more research and alike…what happens…as usual, is that it ends up in money, everything is about money making.”

Magnus seems to not trust the food he buys but is in a way adapting to it by trying to buy the slightly more expensive products that he sees as being on the safe side. However, Magnus wants to shop as spontaneously and as easily as possible every day without having to question his shopping style.

If supermarket shoppers would look more closely into how the products they buy are produced and transported they might feel uncomfortable with continuing their lifestyle. People often block out or avoid things like this to make life and decisions easier (Eden et al. 2008). Lack of knowledge is a choice, as Wynne (1995, cited in Eden et al. 2008) argues, and public ignorance is a socially constructed response to a lack of public agency.

David GA: “I am interested in doing things the whole way. I think it is beautiful to not need to buy processed food. I would do it all by myself when I had more time.
and opportunity. Our neighbour had a farm ... it's both, it is taste, so damn good, and because it is a satisfaction to know that this comes directly from there, no middlemen, produced in a great way!”

The motivation for getting more involved in the production and processing of one’s own food is noticeable in some of the respondents. However, many respondents are hindered by time constraints to actually get more involved in their food production. (David GA, Johan and Sara GB)

Consumers from group A have often created relationships to producers that have existed already for a duration of time (Ulrika GA, Emelie GA, Per GA). This relation and the personal knowing is described by the consumers as very important for them. Meaning is created through the personal relationship to a person they know and whom they almost see as a friend. Some of the respondents have visited the places where the products are produced and have seen and experienced the production process. Group A consumers have knowledge about the producer. They know about their backgrounds and life histories. This knowledge and exchange adds authenticity to the products and causes the consumer to want them to continue their work.

Per GA: “It is a lot of work. I know how it works… They (Farmers, Pelle and Gunilla) are really worth that they sell much so they can make a living out of that and be able to continue doing what they do. It is a lot of work, good stuff! That you want to support!”

Consumers of group B are not critical about the products they buy. Only Magnus GB has concerns over the present food industry and its tendency to want to fool the consumers. On the other hand he argues that much research has been done into food, causing it to become healthier and safer. It seems that he is building up some kind of trust to adapt to the uncertain conditions.

The creation of trust in the production of a product happens in various forms, for example; through personal connections, or through showing the traditional methods used in production. This can make the process seem more understandable and wholesome for a consumer. When the shopping-event of food becomes an interaction between consumer and producer people begin to get to know and connect with each other. (Eden et al., 2008). As Ulrika (GA) described, she got to know a man selling produce on the market and he also got to know her. There is the opportunity for a personal exchange on the market. Ultimately, we want to return to people we know and trust (Seyfang, 2006, p.385). It creates a good feeling of belonging and personal context (Giske et al., 2002).
7 Discussion

In answering the first research question of how food consumers' relationship, or lack of relationship, with the producers of their food affect the meaning they find in their food, I used a phenomenological approach with regard to exploring how consumers explain their food consumption activities; related to shopping, food preparation and eating. The concept of meaning was understood here as the way an individual makes sense of their surrounding. The second research question, which connects sustainability and food-consumption, is answered in the second section of the discussion with the help of the presented literature in combination with the findings of the phenomenological inquiry.

7.1 Food consumption and relationship to the producer

The first level analysis of the research material made it possible to identify three major themes, which have been studied individually. Food and consumption can be seen as becoming meaningful for people in different ways: Food becomes meaningful through interaction with others, through how ones choice of products is made, and in the relationship to the producer.

The predominant meaning found in food consumption is identified as interactions between people. Food becomes meaningful for the informants when they make food for others with the purpose of making others happy. Differences in the practices of giving and taking between the two consumer-groups (Group A and Group B) could not be identified from the empirical material.

The respondents confirmed that they felt that giving food, inviting people and preparing food together strengthened their relationships. Some informants did not see any sense in making much effort with food just for themselves. Where informants shop, and what kind of products they choose, is partly connected to what relationship is going to be strengthened through their action. Some respondents buy food for a dinner with friends at other places than where they do the weekly shopping. Johan and Sara GB drive to a shop with products of higher quality for their Friday dinner for example. The importance of the social interaction during the Friday dinner in Johan and Saras GB case, or when guests are expected in the case of Emelie GA, confirms that food-connected actions build up social relationships. The kind of food that is seen as appropriate for this relates to the consumers’ value system. When there is an intention of giving food, pricing seems to play a minor roll and the values connected to “what is a good product” become more important. Respondents put more effort into buying better products when guests are expected.

Mauss (2002) says that by especially returning the gesture of a gift a moral bond emerges between the persons exchanging gifts. In addition, he stated that there is an obligation to give something back. In the research material it could not clearly be confirmed that people see an obligation in giving something back. However, examples show that compassion is something givers appreciate getting back from the receiver of a food gift (e.g. Emelie GB or Ulrika GA).

What kind of meaning people put into their consumption is partly determined from the values they have. This research is mainly concerned with product choice; priorities and how respondents make sense of the priorities they have chosen. For example buying organic products might be motivated in one way or the other. For some respondents the pricing (e.g. Jan GB) is most important and they only buy organic products when it does not overreach a set price-limit. If food-products are valued only in connection to monetary values (which could be a result of the way reality is created by this individual and his/her surroundings), then this consumer may consider organic food as another way for the producers to make more money - for instance in the example described by Magnus GB.

Differences in how the two consumer-groups make sense of their product choice could mainly be seen in the way they purchase food. All respondents from consumer-group A say that they take up additional action or extra initiative to get some of the products they consume. Adding this extra action to their routine is worthwhile to them because the food is valued in a special way. However, this interpretation is based on the assumption that buying food in the supermarket is the most convenient way to get food, which might not always be the case. Respondents from consumer-group A see valuable food as products
that are locally and/or organically produced. Respondents often had ambitions to get more food from sources that are seen as alternative, and mentioned that they were only partly happy about how they meet them e.g. David GA, Sara GB in line with Eden et al. (2008). They found it difficult to balance their food consumption aspirations alongside their everyday life responsibilities. The result of that was that their values were sometimes put aside for convenience.

Some consumers in this study seem to look for excuses to not investigate further into the products and the labelling (e.g. Sara GB, Magnus GB). Today's behind-the-scene mass production of meat and animal-based products makes it difficult to know how animal products are produced. If the classification of meat or animal based products reflects that the animals have lived a good life or not, it is still up to the consumer to judge finally. Not knowing is a choice (Wynne, 1995 in Eden et. al. 2008). The choice to not know makes it possible to not feel bad when buying certain products that might have had a negative impact on the environment.

The concept of trust is deeply connected to food and food production. Even though consumers often talk about trusting the product what they actually trust is the people involved in the production of our products (e.g. Ulrika GA, Emelie GA). Seeking trust can be identified as a mayor motivation for consumers looking for a closer relationship to the producers of their food. But why is trust necessary? As the world has become increasingly industrialised, many parts of the supply chain of products have become uncertain, which concerns many consumers (Seyfang, 2006; Roberts, 2008; Gross, 2011). We often hear about food scandals in connection to major supermarkets and large companies. When trust has been built up consumers have a better feeling about the food products they buy (Ulrika GA, Emelie GA, Claudia GA).

Trust is a concern shared by all consumers interviewed. Building up trust can happen in different ways. Some base their trust and therefore their product choice, on their visual judgement, while others try to get as much information as possible, for example from studying the package labels to find a reason to trust. Some consumers do not trust conventional production at all and will solely build trust by creating a personal relationship to the producer. When one starts to have a relationship to a producer the product is no longer anonymous and knowledge is created. Personal relationships between producers and consumers create the moral obligation to not disappoint each other (Claudia GA and Laura GA). The consumer therefore can trust that the production of the product is of good quality whereas the producer can be sure that the consumer will keep on buying their products, which is supportive for the local food system (Eden et al. 2008).

Group A consumers are seen to be particularly active in creating a personal connection, and also taking control over being responsible for their own food situation by being involved in the different stages of food production. An awareness of their own power is noticeable and it can be said that they are taking the initiative to improve their personal and local food situation. Group A consumers no longer blame others or the system but rather commit themselves to being active in social change.
7.2 Sustainable food consumption

Seyfang (2006) states that it is the consumer who has to do his or her bit to increase sustainable consumption and minimise the environmental impact he or she has. The responsibility lies within each of us. This research looked at the ways in which consumers describe their actions in connection to food consumption. This research also showed how different people create meaning connected to food and that people with a higher degree of connectedness to the producer hold more meaning in their food. The statements of the interviewed consumers showed that a food provision system with strong local networks can bring benefits and greater meaning to our food. Benefits can be seen as more consumer knowledge about the way products are produced, greater trust and social competence, all of which is making food systems more resilient from the social perspective and at the same time more environmentally friendly (Seyfang, 2006; Eden et al., 2008).

In addition, creating and improving local food networks can create fun and meaningful activities. Alternative local food networks improve the local economy (Eden et al, 2008) and help to give people a meaningful food experience. In creating these networks we can develop greater community engagement and become more socially active, which is also in line with the concept of ecological citizenship.

Putting the findings of this study in relation to the concept of ecological citizenship, it is strongly supported that individual action can be a tool to motivate collective change towards a more sustainable consumption to develop resilience and adaptability to change (Seyfang 2006).

The discovered themes of this research, that food becomes meaningful through interaction with others (reciprocity), through how one’s choice of products is made (values) and in the relationship to the producer (trust), show a potential for an improved social life sector in the case of Uppsala. Respondents of this research saw a value in the people who are connected to the food-making and to the actions that are related to the production of their food. Local markets, local shops and food cooperatives as being a part of a alternative food network, seek more engagement because that is a tool that can strengthen the social life sector. The strengthening of the social life sector is an important way to make food consumption more sustainable (Eden et al., 2008).

However, the type of life led by the respondents of this study tends to outline what level of engagement that will be. Not everybody wants to grow his or her own food. Many respondents of this study described that they have contradictions to balance, usually their food consumption ambitions with their personal everyday life responsibilities. Convenience was often named as a reason for not engaging deeper into looking for food products with more connectedness to the producers. Interviewees with children expressed that conflict especially. On the one hand they wanted to make healthy and good food for their children but on the other hand they often did not have the time to engage in the producer relationships, so at last, bought their products in the supermarkets (e.g. Kerstin GA, Johan GB).

The availability of shops with organic (locally and not locally produced) produces in Uppsala is limited (Friis, 2013). As well as this, the assortment in those shops is less diverse and the products are more expensive (David GA and Friis 2003). The respondents (David GA, Jan GB, Tomas GB) who prioritise organic food in their main weekly shopping buy these items in bigger supermarkets instead and not in the local organic shops. The organic shops are mostly used for special products only which is one of the main reasons why people go there (Friis, 2013).

Though a convenient lifestyle is very important for many consumers in this study, and despite Soper’s (2004) statement that the consumer is manipulated by merchandising and not seeing his or her responsibilities to act as a citizen with communal consciousness, each and every consumer needs to put his/her actions into a larger context. A consequence would be that consumers who do not wish to be active in the local food network by themselves need to realise the value of the work invested in producing local organic food. In addition, consumers are asked to be more willing to support the producers through paying realistic prices, seeking to educate themselves, and thinking critically about mainstream food production and distribution for example (Bean and Sharp, 2011).

It could also be argued that a sustainable food system can be promoted by making it more convenient for consumers. However, as mentioned earlier, people connect meaning to their food related actions. If the
actions connected to food decrease, the potential benefits of socialisation, preservation of techniques and food related culture, and whatever other significant meaning people are finding in their food will also decrease. This leads to food becoming less meaningful for people. What is needed to improve our food systems is individual action, involvement in local community hand in hand with changed policies rather than the current method of sticking with the same systems we have always had just out of convenience rather than considering sustainability (Seyfang, 2007; Evans, 2011).

A strong local food network does not only mean good consumer-to-producer relations but, crucially, supportive producer-to-producer relations, too (Milestad et al., 2010). This is necessary so that the producers can support each other in strengthening networks, sharing surplus, filling in a need and improving general conditions in the local food system. This stands in direct contrast to the mainstream capitalist-led food system.

Being actively involved in something, finding satisfaction and meaningfulness in your life are strongly connected to each other. It seems that more involvement and more action brings more meaning. The fact that reconnecting with the food we eat is beneficial gives the possibility and necessity to strengthen the local food community (Gross, 2011). What do we gain by building up the local community? The globalised and consumer-culture lifestyle is only possible because we have access to cheap fossil fuels (Roberts, 2008). Creating local food networks not only decreases our demand on fossil fuels, it also strengthens local communities, making them more adaptive to change (Seyfang, 2006; Gross, 2011).
8 Conclusion

This research contributes to the discussion of how to make our food consumption more sustainable. Specifically, this research intended to investigate how consumers create meaning with their food habits depending on the relationships they have to the producers of their food. Qualitative research was chosen to elaborate on the problem from the viewpoint of the consumers while trying to identify what themes lie behind the complex process of food consumption behaviour. The actions consumers were asked to reflect upon related to food were; shopping, preparing and the eating of food in their local context, namely Uppsala. Two consumer-groups were chosen. One group has relationships to producers and the other group does not. The first of the identified themes was giving and receiving gifts connected to food. On this, the study showed that meaningfulness for food is created through the individual’s motivation to prepare food for others. A difference between the consumer groups could not been identified. The second theme investigated was values and food. Consumers with a relationship to the producer create more values around the people and actions present in the process of making their food. Consumers without a relationship to the producer have more values around mainstream, societally determined value systems such as financial considerations and convenience. The third theme investigates trust for the producer of one’s food. It became clear that personal relationships create trust, and that the consumer group with a direct relationship to the producer were more sceptical about the products and found choosing products more challenging.

Consumers with a good relationship to the producer developed meanings that were deeply rooted and connected to the places and people involved in their food consumption. When linking these findings with sustainable development, it becomes obvious that there is potential benefit in encouraging consumers to invest more time in getting the good products they want, as this could lead to more consumer initiated food networks. This discussion, specifically the second research question, has been conducted with the hope of motivating further thinking, debate and discussion about how we will take the necessary steps towards drastically changing our food systems through improved local food networks and stronger local communities.

Indicated by the research material more themes can be identified and studied, for example; gender issues associated with food consumption. The diversity in the research material can provide other researchers with interest in consumer behaviour and encouragement to continue understanding consumer behaviour.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to a number of people, without whom this study would not have the outcome it has:

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Thank you!
References


Patel, R. (2013) *Stuffed and starved: from farm to fork the hidden battle for the world food system*,..


Personal interviews:

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<td>Jan</td>
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(All participants received a fictional name)
Appendix

Appendix I: Interview guide

Interview Guide

Preliminary Title of Thesis:

Meanings attached to food and sustainable food consumption

For the data collection of this thesis, semi-structured interviews with open ended questions will be used. By using the interview questions and sub-questions as a check-list, I will try to let the interviewee lead through the interview. At the same time the interviewer will express a very open attitude of trying to learn from the individuals being interviewed. (Bernard, p-160, 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions:</th>
<th>Sub interview questions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When food consumers are making their food consumption decisions how does their relationship, or lack of relationship, with the producers effect the meaning they find in their food?</strong> <em>(empirical and analytical)</em></td>
<td>What are your experiences while buying food?</td>
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<td>What are your experiences while preparing food?</td>
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<td>What are your experiences while eating food?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What is the relationship you have to the food you consume?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What is the relationship you have to the producer of the food you consume?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What implications do the findings have on a sustainable food consumption?</strong> <em>(analytical)</em></td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>
Introducing the interview

In the beginning of the interview I will introduce myself and the topic but stay brief so as to not influence the interviewee too much. By keeping eye contact with my interviewee, and see that my body language is relaxed I want to create a friendly, open and personal atmosphere so the interviewee feels comfortable, relaxed and acknowledged for giving me their time and information. (Bernard, p 169, 2011)

How do I present myself and the study?

“I am a master’s student at UU and SLU, writing my final thesis in sustainable development and I am interested in how people consume their food.”

“This study is about how people consume food. Therefore, I would like to ask you questions about how you get, prepare and eat your food and what kind of relationship you have to the food you consume.”

What about recording, usage of research material and anonymity?

To have the best outcome of this investigation I would like to ask you for permission to record the interview. The recordings will be used for the purpose of this research only and your information will be kept confidential. I would also ask you for permission to use quotes from the interview in my research paper.

Interview questions

The interview questions are matched to 5 sub-questions and the introductory questions. The 5 sub-questions are directly related to the empirical research question stated above. Interview questions in blue match to more than one sub-question. The collection and division of the interview questions are basically seen as a check-list and not expected to be asked in the order given below.

Introductory questions, demographic information:

- Please, tell me about yourself (free-time, what do you for pleasure, job)?
- Where, how and with whom do you live? Age?

What are your experiences while buying food?

- Can you tell me about how you get your food?
- Where do you shop your food mainly and why at that particular places?
- Describe in more detail how your shopping takes place at the different locations you get your food from. What are the differences between them?
- What are the quantities of food you buy at different places?
- What criteria are important for you when you buy your food? (health, origin, pricing?)
What are your experiences while preparing food?
- Describe, what do you do with the food after it comes into your house?
- Please describe how you prepare your food into meals and dishes?
- How is time and cooking related to each other for you?
- What about other people. What role do other people have, when you cook?

What are your experiences while eating food?
- What is your favourite meal/dish?
- What gives you joy/satisfaction during eating? What doesn’t?
- What kind of eater are you/have you been? Have you always been the eater you are now? If not, why has that changed? What are your eating habits now?
- With whom do you usually eat? How do you handle food and eating for your family?
- What about other people? What role do other people have when you eat? What is the difference when you invite guests?
- How important is it for you to have time while eating?

What relationship do you have to the food you consume?
- What criteria are important for you when you buy your food? (health, origin, pricing?)
- Describe the daily routines related to food. Please talk more about the different meals you take over the day (breakfast, lunch or dinner).
- Tell me more about how you deal with when it comes to throwing away food?
- Do you grow your own food? What and how, please describe.
- How important is it to eat healthy, diverse food?

What relationship do you have to the producer of the food you consume?
- Where do you shop your food mainly and why do you do that at that particular places?
- Do you personally know people you buy/get food from? Describe the relationship you have to them.