Telling the story of a sustainable business model in Arctic luxury food tourism

Giovanna Bertella
School of Business and Economics, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway
giovanna.bertella@uit.no

Abstract: Luxury gastronomy can be relevant to tourism in terms of sustainability. This study adopted the perspective of business models (BMs) as narratives to explore luxury gastronomy and sustainability in the case of a food project in Arctic Norway. This study focused on the story that drives, communicates and legitimises the project's BM and its sustainability. The main findings suggest that the specific BM can be viewed as a story revolving around two interrelated major themes: sustainability as an integrated part of quality and luxury as time for inspiration and self-care and as coherence (in experiential terms as well as in relation to sustainability commitment). The adoption of the perspective of BMs as narratives helped uncover the social dynamic dimension of the BM, which concerns the process through which businesses emerge from social interactions and, in the investigated case, is essentially an expression of a collective effort to include an element of innovativeness within a context that is otherwise rather static.

Keywords: luxury gastronomy, sustainability, business model, narrative

Introduction

In the last two decades, the business model (BM) concept has gained momentum among tourism scholars (Reinhold et al., 2017; Hjalager & Madsen, 2018; Reinhold et al., 2019a, 2019b; Baiocco & Paniccia, 2023). According to the oft-cited definition by Teece (2010), such a concept refers to "the manner by which the enterprise delivers value to customers, entices customers to pay for value, and converts those payments to profit" (p. 172). In tourism, much attention has been directed to digital and transport-related BMs (e.g. Reinhold et al., 2020; Magdalina & Bouzaima, 2021). Scholars have adopted the BM concept to explore various aspects and forms of tourism, such as innovation and sustainability (e.g. Presenza et al., 2019), sport tourism (e.g. Perić et al., 2019), and social tourism (e.g. Franzidis, 2019). Food tourism is no exception: the BM concept has been applied quite extensively to agrotourism (e.g. Di Gregorio, 2017) and, to a lesser extent, to digital innovations for food tourism (e.g. Huang et al., 2009). In line with the broader tourism literature (Reinhold et al., 2019a), food tourism studies that adopt the BM concept vary considerably in relation to the way the concept is adopted. For example, Everett and Slocum

(2013) used the term "BM" but did not define it, while Freytag and Hjalager (2021) referred to central contributions from the management literature.

In addition to the variation in the depth with which the BM concept is adopted, scarce attention has been paid to the social dynamic dimension of BMs in the tourism literature. The relevance of this aspect has been commented on by several management scholars in general and in relation to sustainability (e.g. Cavalcante et al., 2011; Mason & Spring, 2011; Bocken & Geradts, 2020). A possible way to approach the study of BMs that focuses on this dimension is to depart from representational perspectives of a BM as the sum of various components (e.g. activities, resources) and adopt the perspectives of BM as practice or BM as narrative. Despite their potential, these perspectives are scarcely adopted.

This study adopted the perspective of BMs as narratives to empirically explore this perspective's potential in relation to the investigation of the social dynamic dimension of businesses. It focused on luxury gastronomy, i.e. a hedonic food offer that is sophisticated and laden with symbolism and social status values (Talukdar, 2022), and its possible contribution to sustainable tourism and asked the following question: What story drives, communicates and legitimises luxury food BMs in relation to tourism and sustainability? The next section starts by presenting luxury gastronomy in tourism and its relationship to sustainability. It continues with the presentation of BMs as narratives relevant to sustainability. The following section describes the methodology and methods of the empirical investigation, which concerns a luxury gastronomic project within a tourism company that offers boat tours around Tromsø, a town in Arctic Norway. Such a context was chosen due to the sustainability challenges related to transport and food production and the relatively lively culture and night life of the specific town. The findings of this case are then presented and discussed in relation to the two major themes of sustainability as an integrated part of quality and luxury as time for inspiration and self-care and as coherence. As outlined in the conclusion, this study's main contributions are the identification of major themes characterising the luxury gastronomy BM in tourism and the adoption of a seldom-used perspective on BMs, namely the perspective of BM as narrative.

Theoretical background

This section begins by presenting the potential of luxury gastronomy in tourism. It continues by describing the perspective of the BM as a narrative and its relevance to the social dynamic dimension of BMs and to sustainability.

Luxury gastronomy and tourism

Luxury gastronomy can play an important role in tourism. The relevance of food tourism to regional development is broadly recognised in the literature, and particular emphasis is placed on the importance of close links between production and consumption (e.g. Henderson, 2009; Hall & Gössling, 2013, 2016; Everett, 2019). Luxury food tourism, characterised by exceptional quality, premium prices, exclusive character, hedonism, novelty and creativity, was found by Balderas-Cejudo et al. (2022) to be relevant to regional development when it is implemented through experience design activities, promotion of terroir products and rural

tourism. The experiential pleasure of luxury food goes hand in hand with well-being when the offerings are not only tasty and creative but also healthy (Talukdar, 2022). Luxury restaurants have the potential to represent a destination and become the main attraction for affluent tourists (De Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019; Batat, 2021; Poljak Istenič & Fakin Bajec, 2021; Huang et al., 2023). Nowadays, their attractiveness can be amplified by social media (Lee & Ko, 2022; Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022; Madeira et al., 2022). Luxury food experiences during travel are the ultimate liminal fluid experiences—'third spaces' that are culturally and symbolically significant and charged with deep meanings about identity and belonging (Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016; Bessiere, 1998; Richards, 2002; Everett, 2019; Roy & Gretzel, 2022).

There is a growing interest by scholars about luxury consumption, with occasional references to tourism and hospitality, and in some instances, such interest includes discussions about sustainability (e.g. Amatulli et al., 2021; Athwal et al., 2019; Batat, 2022a; Bharwani et al., 2023; Correira et al., 2020; Gurung, Brahma, & Goswami, 2022; Moscardo, 2017). Such discussions are undertaken with the intent of understanding luxury experiences from the perspective of tourists (e.g. Correira et al., 2020) and uncovering to what extent and how companies implement sustainable initiatives (e.g. Bharwani et al., 2023). A few studies have focused on gastronomy and explored the relationship between luxury food tourism and sustainability. In the context of restaurants, the chef's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is found to play a central role in environmentally sustainable practices (Batat, 2020, 2021; Mrusek et al., 2022). Huang and Hall (2023) describe valuable sustainable practices, including those related to food procurement (i.e., local food, farm-to-table activity, food foraging), preparation (i.e., efficient restaurant, sustainable menu, minimising waste), and presentation (i.e., restaurant's history, community outreach, cooking school). Importantly, these authors argue that fine dining can not only adopt but also promote such practices. Such an element relates to the transformative potential of luxury experiences (Batat, 2022a, 2022b) and points to the possibility of the diffusion of sustainable practices not only among the professionals of the sector but also among the guests, who can learn and be inspired to act more sustainably in relation to their food choices.

BMs as narratives for sustainability

Essentially, BMs concern how companies can create value for their stakeholders. BMs are often described as referring to a limited number of central works in the management literature, and alternative views are only marginally adopted. First applied at the end of the 1950s, the BM concept has a relatively long history rooted in the information technology literature and developed within the organisational and management literature (Osterwalder et al., 2005; Baden-Fuller & Mason, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2016). Many scholars who explore BMs rely heavily on the BM canvas conceptualized by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010). The BM canvas is an analytical description of the nine main components of a business: value proposition, key partners, activities, resources, customer relationships, channels, segments, costs and revenues. Another popular view on BMs is the one presented, for example, in the oft-cited work by Teece (2010), according to which BMs are the logic through which value is created, captured and delivered through specific architectures of revenues and costs. The concept of architecture is also used in another very popular work by Bocken et al. (2014),

which focuses on sustainable BMs that, in more recent contributions (e.g. Schaltegger et al., 2019; Freudenreich et al., 2020), are studied with particular emphasis on the broad group of stakeholders that are influenced and influence the BMs.

Although such views on BMs are practically useful and conceptually easy to grasp, the intrinsically social dynamic nature of BMs can be better appreciated by applying alternative views of BM, such as the perspectives of BM as practice and BM as narrative. The importance of the social dynamic dimension of BMs is recognised by Cavalcante et al. (2011), among others, who used the BM concept to study innovation. Teece (2018) extends this discussion on BM innovation by including dynamic capabilities considerations, on which Bocken and Geradts (2020) elaborate in relation to sustainable BMs. Mason and Spring (2011) note that there is broad agreement among scholars about BMs evolving 'through the interactions of individuals in social groups, both within the firm and within the wider business network' (p. 1033) and propose to conceptualise BMs as practices, i.e. loci where the interplay of knowing, doing, becoming and feeling occurs through engagement, tools and procedures. In the tourism literature, a shy attempt to use the practice perspective to emphasise the dynamic dimension of BMs was made by Sahebalzamani et al. (2022) in their longitudinal study of nature-based tourism companies facing the COVID-19 crisis. A deeper, although not exhaustive, discussion about entrepreneurial practices and BMs was undertaken by Bertella and Legernes (in press), who, based on their understanding of entrepreneurship-as-practice, studied the BM of an ecotourism company.

As an alternative to the practice perspective, the perspective of BMs as narratives can help to explore the social dynamic aspect of BMs and sustainability. There are two main reasons for the relevance of such a perspective. First, stories are effective communication devices, which is an aspect that is relevant to the communication of the value proposition of a BM to customers as well as to other stakeholders. Another reason that makes the perspective of BMs as narratives interesting is that stories tend to follow a standard structure about one or more characters thinking, feeling and doing in response to an event that requires a change. Such a basic structure is extremely relevant to sustainability, which is a value-laden concept that implies change in relation to what is done and how it is done to create value for a broad spectrum of stakeholders that goes beyond the traditional view of companies' offerings being beneficial for customers and shareholders. The relevance of narratives to sustainability is confirmed by the vast literature pointing to the opportunity to frame sustainability challenges as problem-solving stories (e.g. Fishcer et al., 2016; Veland et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2019).

Scholars who adopt the perspective of BMs as narratives highlight such narratives' value in terms of making sense of the underlying business logic in a way that can contribute to the promotion and legitimation of BMs. For example, Podoynitsyna et al. (2020) referred to what they call a meta-narrative as the essential overarching narrative structure of a new BM through which entrepreneurs attempt to find a balance between the distinctive and innovative aspects of the business and the necessary legitimation. This is in line with the idea of entrepreneurs tackling the challenges of the numerous ambiguities implicit in trying something new (Martins et al., 2015; Bruni & Comacchio, 2023). Taking an evaluative perspective, Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009) reflect on what makes a story and, likewise, a BM good. To function as sensemaking devices for entrepreneurs and as communicative and legitimising devices for other stakeholders, BM narratives must be engaging and able to capture dimensions that are difficult to represent in frameworks,

including the inherent dynamism (stories are about the unfolding of events) and social aspect (stories are about one or more 'heroic' characters facing challenges and/or rivals, sometimes with the help of allies).

Extremely limited tourism studies have applied the perspective of BM as a narrative, despite its use being recommended for future research by Reinhold et al. (2017). The study by Manniche et al. (2021) suggests that some BMs, specifically circular economy BMs, can provide powerful narratives to engage tourists and promote sustainable consumption practices. More comprehensive in relation to the link between BMs and narratives is the study by Freytag and Hjalager (2021), which discusses food and adopts the BM as a narrative perspective for an empirical investigation about BM configurations. Among the identified BMs, two are relevant to the current study about luxury and sustainability: the VIP Club BM, which refers to exclusive food offerings that combine tradition with modernity, and the Recycling & Upcycling BM, which emphasises sustainability and circular economy practices. While Freytag and Hjalager (2021) adopted a methodology based on narrative interviews to investigate 46 cases, the current study focused on the in-depth investigation of one case and on the adoption of the methodology and methods explained in the next section.

Methodology and methods

The view of BMs as narratives requires a constructivist methodological approach, which is characterised by the acknowledgement of multiple truths and realities and relies on mutuality between researchers and those being researched (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Reinhold et al. (2017) explained that such an approach is suitable for exploring the concepts and relationships that shape BMs in the minds of managers and entrepreneurs, and this applies to the perspective of BMs as schema as well as BMs as narratives. In the literature, the constructivist approach to BMs refers to cognitive mapping and causal mechanisms between unsatisfied needs and the development of value propositions (Furnari, 2015). The view of BMs as narratives goes a step further: BM narratives can be considered unfolding stories that include—but are not limited to—causal mechanisms and can be expressed effectively through the typical structural components (characters, context and turning point) (Podoynitsyna et al., 2020; Wall et al., 2019).

Based on this reasoning and aiming to explore the story that drives, communicates and legitimises luxury food BMs in relation to tourism and sustainability, this study adopted the methodological approach proposed by Bertella (2023) in her investigation of small providers' sensemaking stories for sustainability. The idea behind such an approach is to explore the practitioners' worldviews by investigating how they tell the three types of stories: their own stories in relation to the specific business/project, the story targeting tourists and the story of the destination. Importantly and in line with the constructivist approach, these stories are to be considered subjective interpretations of the reality by the teller, who, as explained in the next paragraph, is a central person in the selected case. In terms of BMs, such stories can be considered to shape the meta-narrative discussed by Podoynitsyna et al. (2020): they illuminate different aspects of the BM and help elucidate BM drivers and intended experiential value, as well as contextualise the business idea and its implementation within the specific destination.

The chosen case study concerns a luxury food project within a tourism company in the town of Tromsø in Arctic Norway. This context is interesting, as there is limited or no local production of certain foods, and the geographical area is peripheral and characterised by rather poor infrastructure and possibilities for green transport. Consequently, this case can offer some insights to problematise sustainability in particularly challenging situations. Moreover, the town of Tromsø is a rather active cultural scene for urban experiences, including cafes and restaurants. The data were derived from one of the two project leaders, who used to be a student at the local university where this paper's author works. The author also shares the same cultural background with her. The data were collected at different times. The researcher met with the project co-leader while conducting another research in which she was involved as a co-researcher and co-author of the related paper (Bertella, Brall & Berti, in press). This study had in the story targeting the tourists one of the main focuses: its findings, which were derived from the close collaboration between the author and the project co-leader, were extremely valuable for gaining a good understanding of such a story. During the collaboration on the previous study, the author learned about the project co-leader's life, along with her experiences and opinions about the food and tourism offered in Tromsø. This served as the point of departure for an in-depth interview that was conducted, in which the project co-leader was asked to tell her story about herself, the project and of Tromsø as a food destination. The interview, which was recorded and transcribed, had a colloquial tone, and the acquaintanceship between the author and the project co-leader smoothly facilitated the communication to the extent that the first draft of this paper was carefully read by the respondent, who contributed with several valuable comments on possible changes to clarify and better represent her point of view.

The analysis of the data focused on the identification of meaningful recurring themes in the overarching narrative about how the project and its novelty are contextualised, communicated and legitimised in the specific destination. To uncover such themes, the text of the joint study, related notes, and the in-depth verbatim interviews were reiteratively read, and codes were applied across the stories. For example, the code "food as part of a place's culture" was used to explore the contextualisation of the BM narrative. The following subcodes were related to this code: 'comparison of Tromsø food culture with food cultures in Oslo, Nordic and European cities' and 'comparison with the project's offer and related offers in Tromsø' at the destination level; 'food as a cultural experience for tourists' at the storytelling level; and 'comparison of Norwegian food culture and Italian food culture' at the personal level. Other examples of codes adopted to explore the contextualization of the BM narrative were: 'food tourism before and after the COVID-19' and 'food tourism now and in a more sustainable future'. A similar coding process was undertaken to explore the communication and legitimation of the project through the analysis of the stories' characters, their actions, relevant events and possible turning points. Such an iterative process allowed for the unpacking of the meta-narrative and identification of two meaningful themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which are presented and discussed in the next section.

Findings and discussion

After the description of the project and its context, this section presents and discusses the main findings of the project's BM. This is done by elaborating on the two interrelated major

themes that emerged from the analysis: sustainability as an integrated part of quality and luxury as time for inspiration and self-care and as coherence (in experiential terms as well as in relation to sustainability commitment). This section closes with some considerations of the social dynamic dimension of the BM narrative.

The setting and the gastronomic project

Norway is self-sufficient in terms of the production of animal-derived food, although it imports a large proportion of the food for the animals' sustainment, depending considerably and increasingly on legumes, vegetables, grains and fruit (Regjeringen, 2015; OECD, 2021). Located in the northernmost part of the country, Tromsø is a medium-sized town with approximately 77,000 inhabitants. Fisheries constitute one of the most important sectors of the economy, while agriculture is rather limited, and there is an ongoing debate about a possible shift towards an increase in plant-based food production (e.g. Johansen, 2023). The regional agricultural production capacity is low (Bjørkhaug & Rønningen, 2014), making food import a necessity. The tourism sector has experienced considerable growth in the last decades, especially cruise tourism and winter tourism, and has significantly contributed to the local economy as well as to the recent development of the town (Menon Economics, 2018).

The luxury gastronomic project object of study was inspired by the British Supper Club formula (i.e. gourmet food for a restricted number of guests) and is called the Vulkana Supper Club (Vulkana Supper Club, n.d.), named after the tourism company that hosts it. It was developed in 2021/2022, with a second edition in 2022/2023. The project focuses on luxury meals served to a maximum of 12 guests on a former whaling vessel from 1957 that was redesigned by the Finnish architect Sami Rintala and includes a well-equipped kitchen, an elegant dining area and an outdoor spa. The project relies on the engagement of high-profile Nordic and European chefs.

Major themes of the narrative: The underlying understanding of sustainability and luxury

The project co-leader's stories indicate that sustainability is considered an integrated part of the exceptional quality that is at the very core of the BM and that such understanding is one of the major themes that shapes the overarching BM narrative. This is expressed in the respondent's words as follows: 'If you aim to quality, especially today, … you can't ignore sustainability'. This is in line with the perspective discussed by Bharwani et al. (2023) in the case of luxury hotels, with the difference being that in the investigated case, sustainability is embedded in the BM and this is done explicitly, as evident from the use of terms such as "sustainable" and "green" on the project's website. The project's sustainability relates to four aspects that expand on the considerations by Huang and Hall (2023) about restaurants' sustainable practices of procurement, preparation and presentation. Taken together, the four aspects, which are presented in the following text, concern the reconsideration of the categories of tourists, residents and collaborators and the commitment to local ingredients and zero-waste principles.

The two aspects that point to a reconsideration of the categories of tourists, residents and collaborators suggest that the lines between the traditional categories of stakeholders have been blurred. The first aspect concerns what, in the co-leader's view, marks the project's contribution to sustainability and centres on the identification of the primary target group in the residents, followed by domestic and international tourists. The Vulkana Supper Club provides Tromsø residents the opportunity to experience excellent meals prepared by high-profile chefs, some of which are from Michelin-starred restaurants, in an elegant environment. This is viewed positively from an environmental point of view, as explained by the respondent:

> 'It is better that one person, the chef, flies to Tromsø, than 12 or more people travelling to his restaurants in Rome or other places in Europe.'

Such reflection is also linked to the challenges of the climate and the COVID-19 crises:

> 'In a moment like this... with the climate emergency and the recovery from the COVID … when we should think more responsibly about the carbon footprint and mobility and so on… it's better to bring the experience here, instead of travelling to the experience. Haven't we learned anything (from the COVID crisis)? All this talking about being a tourist in your own town.'

As these quotes show, the reasoning that emerges is that the operators working in the sector have suffered the most from the COVID-19 crisis and should be the ones who have learned the most. Such learning is linked to the practice of sustainability, especially when considering the customer to target.

The second aspect of the project's sustainability that emerges from the project co-leader's stories and is strictly related to the previous one concerns a reconsideration of the category of collaborators. This is evident in fact that the chefs travelling to Tromsø are considered as both collaborators and guests. It is not rare for the chefs to be shown the town and surroundings by the project co-leader and colleagues, as 'we would do with friends visiting us up here (in northern Norway)'. The chefs are reported to appreciate the opportunity to visit an Arctic town, which is an exotic destination for most of them. They are particularly valuable guests who, passionate about their job, travel to the Arctic and expand their knowledge about food and the challenges and potentials of extreme contexts.

The third and fourth aspects of the sustainability of the Vulkana Supper Club BM are the use of local ingredients from regional producers when possible and the adoption of zero-waste principles. The latter is commented on by the project co-leader in relation to most of the chefs and the suppliers of the ingredients adhering to circular economy thinking. This aspect relates to the sustainable practice of procurement and preparation discussed by Huang and Hall (2023) and, especially for procurement, to the literature about regional development through food tourism (e.g. Henderson, 2009; Hall & Gössling, 2016; Everett, 2019; Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2022). The quality of some of the local products is considered excellent, and this, together with a few cases of producers and restaurants in the Tromsø area, makes the co-leader believe that the region has great potential to be a unique high-level food destination.

The second theme that emerged from the data regards luxury, which is understood as time for inspiration, self-care and as coherence. In the story targeted at the tourists, it appears that although the meals are not presented as cooking classes, the tourists meeting the chefs,

observing when the plates are prepared and spending time around the same table is considered a potential source of inspiration to prepare food 'with care'. This relates to Huang and Hall's (2023) sustainable practice of presentation, as well as to the idea of luxury food experiences as a way to educate people about sustainable practices. The time spent in close contact with the chefs is considered important to 'pass a lesson' about, for example, using ingredients that are usually considered food waste. Although learning is a dimension of the tourism experience, the main dimension emerging from the story targeted at tourists is one of self-care. This reflection expands on the idea of luxury food experience and well-being (Talukdar, 2022), understanding the latter not only in terms of healthy eating but also wellness. This resonates with the idea of luxury experiences as 'third places', with the main meaning concerning hedonism and the possibility of slowing down and enjoying some time in a relaxing environment (Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016; Bessiere, 1998; Richards, 2002; Everett, 2019; Roy & Gretzel, 2022). Self-care relates to self-esteem and is understood as rewarding and pampering oneself, which Correira et al. (2020) found to be among the main dimensions of the luxury tourism experience. Self-care is evident in the experiencescape of the Vulkana Supper Club: an elegant, redesigned vessel that includes a Turkish-inspired *hamam* and a zen lounge.

Inspiration and self-care are features related to the way luxury is understood, and the third element concerns coherence in terms of experience and sustainability. The coherence of the experience is considered of paramount importance to a greater extent than the exclusiveness that is central to the VIP Club BM by Freytag and Hjalager (2021), and it is linked to the importance of details. As explained by the project co-leader:

> 'Luxury is absolutely not about "*sfarzo*" (i.e. pomp, magnificence) … or getting what other people can't get. Luxury is … an idea that can be pursued … also with simplicity … it is a coherent idea … you need to be consistent with what you tell to the customers and how, and also with your commitment to sustainability. Sustainability must be viewed … in the long run … and in a broad sense: food packaging and transport … considering all the challenges that we have here. … You need a "real" concept back your business, to be authentic… and then, luxury becomes sustainability and ethics. The "red thread" of your work must be clear for you and all those that relate to you… partners, customers and so on. Details are essential.'

Comments were made regarding the details of the design and planning of each meal event. They are crucial key factors for high-quality offerings, as evident in the project co-leader's story about herself and the destination: 'I'm a perfectionist … probably annoying for someone … and I sometimes face the situation in which … details are forgotten or overseen'. This relates to what is considered a major limiting factor with regard to the profile of the destination as a gastronomic destination and to the tendency to 'accontentarsi', i.e. to settle for what is relatively easy to achieve, explained as minimising the effort to arrive at an acceptable or good standard without aiming at excellence. Such an attitude was partly explained by the project co-leader as being due to the fact that the region belongs to a rich country, resulting in the lack of a perceived need to survive economically and innovate; however, this attitude does not apply to all operators, especially the project leaders and their colleagues and partners who are exceptionally ambitious.

The social dynamic dimension of the BM narrative

The overarching narrative of the Vulkana Supper Club BM is a story whose main characters are strongly motivated to deliver high quality as an expression of their commitment to sustainability and luxury, the two themes discussed in the previous section. This is particularly evident in the feeling of being 'a voice out of the choir', in constant search for excellence. Such strong motivation and commitment relate to what is observed in the literature about luxury restaurants and the role of chefs (Batat, 2021; Mrusek et al., 2022). The social aspect of such a commitment is evident in the project's leader, who often speaks using 'we' when talking about the project and the various events, where 'we' includes all the individuals and organisations working towards the same shared vision, namely project members as well as the chefs and the local producers and partners. This is in line with what is observed in the literature about BMs evolving through social interactions (Mason & Spring, 2011). Interestingly, 'we' is also used to refer to the customers when sitting around the dinner table during the event in a convivial atmosphere of sharing food and ideas. The BM largely relies on the relationships among like-minded people across the standard categories of leader, employee, partner and customer (tourist and local).

Regarding the dynamic dimension of the BM, the data do not show the existence of any major turning point, as is typical of stories, in general and in relation to sustainability (Fischer et al., 2016; Veland et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2019). COVID-19 was mentioned as an episode from which tourism operators should learn, but no major change as a result of the pandemic was identified for the specific BM, which has maintained its coherence with the ideas of primarily targeting residents and aiming at top quality, or for the sector. Instead, each event seems to be considered a minor turning point that, on the one hand, confirms the success of the main features of the project and, on the other hand, encourages the continuation of the project. In the project co-leader's words: 'The bookings tend to come only few days before the events … we wait and wait, typical for Tromsø, but very stressful. And then the event takes place and we get our strength back … for the next event'.

Dynamism can also be related to the description of Tromsø as a changing destination and the way the BM is legitimised within such a context. During the interview, Tromsø was described as a mass tourism destination. The possibility of developing Tromsø into a luxury gastronomic destination is considered a challenge due to a limited vision and long-term planning that, despite the existence of various projects, would require closer collaboration among the various actors. In the tourism context, it has been recognised that there is a dominant tendency to prioritise quantity over quality, in general and in terms of the food offers available, for example, on most tours. Considering this trend, the co-leader explained:

> 'To turn Tromsø into a luxury gastronomic tourism destination, we must avoid thinking about … tourism, paradoxically! You have to create a gastronomic offer that is authentic … then it will become an attraction … for its authenticity and innovativeness, not because it is targeting the tourists'.

The limited production of local ingredients is recognised as a general challenge in the region, in addition to the limited availability of products due to poor infrastructure. The BM is centred on a niche and is not negatively impacted by such limitations.

Following the reasoning of Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009), it can be said that the Vulkana Supper Club is a good story that is effectively communicated and contributes to legitimising the project. In public fora, for example, in the section 'Northern Norway on the plate' of the conference Arctic Frontiers (2023), in which the co-leader participated, the BM is communicated, referring to traditional primary sectors and local terroir and to the ambition to build a lively urban environment. This corresponds to the balance between tradition and modernity noted by Freytag and Hjalager (2021) for the VIP Club BM configuration. Its distinctiveness contributes to making Tromsø more cosmopolitan and broadens its appeal with offerings that satisfy affluent tourists. In this sense, the project is considered one of the few cases of a restaurant or project that innovates within a gastronomic landscape that has not developed at the same tempo than the destination.

Conclusion

This study adopted the perspective of BMs as narratives and explored what story drives, communicates and legitimises luxury food BMs in relation to tourism and sustainability. The empirical part focused on the case of a food project of a tourism company located in Arctic Norway and conducted an investigation from the perspective of one of the project leaders. The findings suggest that the luxury food BM is a story that revolves around two major themes: sustainability as an integrated part of quality and luxury as time for inspiration and self-care and as coherence. The exploration of such themes allowed for the uncovering of the main sustainable perspectives and practices, which include several aspects and confirm and expand on what has been discussed in the extant literature about luxury consumption. Specifically, these perspectives and practices are a reconsideration of the categories of tourist, resident and collaborator, the commitment to local ingredients and zero-waste principles and a fundamental coherence in the experience design and implementation as well as in the commitment to sustainability.

This study's objective was to empirically explore the potential of the perspective of BM as narrative in relation to the investigation of the social dynamic dimension of businesses. With regard to this, the findings about the overarching BM narrative highlighted that this dimension was particularly important in relation to commitment to quality. In particular, this commitment was linked to the people working directly with the project and their partners and, to a certain extent, the customers. These people are the main characters of the story. Moreover, such a commitment is thought to be the engine that powers the project and legitimises it in relation to its contribution to a destination that, despite its growth, is rather static in terms of gastronomic innovativeness.

This study has two main contributions: the identification of the major themes characterising the luxury gastronomy BM in tourism, including their exploration with regard to various aspects relevant to business perspectives and practices, and the adoption of a seldom-used perspective on BMs, namely the one of BMs as narratives. Regarding the first contribution, it is important to recognize this study's limitations that stem from being an in-depth case study: the findings may not be generalizable. Future studies could investigate multiple cases to uncover the extent to which the results can be transferred across companies and contexts. Such studies could also explore the possibility of peculiarities deriving from expatriate entrepreneurs.

With regard to the second contribution, the adoption of the perspective of BMs as narratives, strengthened by a methodology based on the stories about the project co-leader, the destination and the story targeted at the tourists, helped capture the social dynamic aspect of the BM. Interestingly, unlike most sustainability stories, no specific major turning point was identified in the investigated BM narrative, and the findings suggest that coherence is valued more than reactive changes that occur in response to shocks, such as in the case of the COVID-19 crisis, and are not necessarily destined to last long. This point deserves more attention, as the idea of a turning point is quite central in the literature on sustainability and stories.

Based on the findings of the current study, it is recommended that innovative entrepreneurs showing commitment to quality and sustainability be supported by industry organisations and public agencies in their endeavours, especially in creating and sustaining collaborative networks with similar businesses and food producers at the local and international levels. As observed by the co-leader of the project investigated in this study, it is particularly important to adopt a holistic approach to sustainability in the formation of these networks. Such an approach, in addition to socio-cultural and economic sustainability, should include a comprehensive consideration of the environmental sustainability of food (local production, production methods, packaging, waste management, etc.), which is sometimes simplistically represented in the presentation of local traditions and products as the best option.

References

Amatulli, C., De Angelis, M., & Stoppani, A. (2021). The appeal of sustainability in luxury hospitality: An investigation on the role of perceived integrity. *Tourism Management, 83*, 104228. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104228

Athwal, N., Wells, V. K., Carrigan, M., & Henninger, C. E. (2019). Sustainable luxury marketing: A synthesis and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *21*(4), 405–426. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12195

Baden-Fuller, C., & Morgan, M. S. (2010). Business models as models. *Long Range Planning*, *43*(2–3), 156–171. https:// doi: 10.1016/j.lrp.2010.02.005

Baiocco, S., & Paniccia, P. (2023). Integrating the natural environment into tourism firms' business model for sustainability. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-023-27730-7

Balderas-Cejudo, A., Gavilan, D., & Fernandez-Lores, S. (2022). Michelin-starred restaurants and its contribution to luxury gastronomy tourism. In A. S. Kotur & S. K. Dixit (Eds.), *The Emerald Handbook of Luxury Management for Hospitality and Tourism* (pp. 321–334). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83982-900-020211016

Bharwani, S., & Mathews, D. (2023). Sustainable luxury: From an oxymoron to a tautology–the case of the Indian luxury hospitality industry. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 15*(3), 231–248. https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-01-2023-0013

Batat, W. (2020). Pillars of sustainable food experiences in the luxury gastronomy sector: A qualitative exploration of Michelin-starred chefs' motivations. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *57*, 102255. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102255

Batat, W. (2021). The role of luxury gastronomy in culinary tourism: An ethnographic study of Michelin-Starred restaurants in France. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *23*(2), 150–163. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2372

Batat, W. (2022a). *The rise of positive luxury: Transformative research agenda for well-being, social impact, and sustainable growth*. Routledge.

Batat, W. (2022b). Transformative luxury research (TLR): An agenda to advance luxury for well-being. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *42*(4), 609–623. https://doi.10.1177/02761467221135547

Bertella, G. (2023). Small tourism providers' stories about sustainability. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*, *4*(1), 100085. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2022.100085

Bertella, G., & Legernes, M. (IN PRESS). Green entrepreneuring in tourism experience for behaviour change. In H. Ramkissoon (Ed.), *The Handbook of Tourism and Behaviour Change* (pp. xx–xx). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bertella, G., Brall, V., & Berti, L. (IN PRESS). A hands-on framework for the design and implementation of plant-based food experiences. In G. Bertella & C. Santini (Eds.). *Plant-Based Food Consumption: Products, Consumers and Strategies* (pp. xx–xx). Elsevier.

Bessière, J. (1998). Local development and heritage: Traditional food and cuisine as tourist attractions in rural areas. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *38*(1), 21–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9523.00061

Bjørkhaug, H., & Rønningen, K. (2014). Crisis? What crisis? Marginal farming, rural communities and climate robustness: The case of northern Norway. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, *21*(11), 51–69.

Bocken, N. M., Short, S. W., Rana, P., & Evans, S. (2014). A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *65*, 42–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2013.11.039

Bocken, N. M., & Geradts, T. H. (2020). Barriers and drivers to sustainable business model innovation: Organization design and dynamic capabilities. *Long Range Planning*, *53*(4), 101950. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2019.101950

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Bruni, E., & Comacchio, A. (2023). Configuring a new business model through conceptual combination: The rise of the Huffington Post. *Long Range Planning*, *56*(1), 102249. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2022.102249

Cavalcante, S., Kesting, P., Ulh'i, J. (2011). Business model dynamics and innovation: (Re)establishing the missing linkages. *Management Decision*, *49*(8), 1327–1342. https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741111163142

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Correia, A., Kozak, M., & Del Chiappa, G. (2020). Examining the meaning of luxury in tourism: A mixed-method approach. *Current Issues in Tourism*, *23*(8), 952–970. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1574290

De Albuquerque Meneguel, C. R., Mundet, L., & Aulet, S. (2019). The role of a high-quality restaurant in stimulating the creation and development of gastronomy tourism. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *83*, 220–228. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.10.018

Di Gregorio, D. (2017). Place-based business models for resilient local economies: Cases from Italian slow food, agritourism and the albergo diffuso. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-02-2015-0016

Doganova, L., & Eyquem-Renault, M. (2009). What do business models do?: Innovation devices in technology entrepreneurship. *Research Policy*, *38*(10), 1559–1570. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2009.08.002

Everett, S. (2019). Theoretical turns through tourism taste-scapes: The evolution of food tourism research. *Research in Hospitality Management*, *9*(1), 3–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/22243534.2019.1653589

Everett, S., & Slocum, S. L. (2013). Food and tourism: An effective partnership? A UK-based review. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *21*(6), 789–809. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2012.741601

Fischer, D., Lüdecke, G., Godemann, J., Michelsen, G., Newig, J., Rieckmann, M., & Schulz, D. (2016). Sustainability communication. In H. Heinrichs, P. Martens, G. Michelsen, & A. Wiek (Eds.), *Sustainability Science* (pp. 139–148). Springer.

Franzidis, A. (2019). An examination of a social tourism business in Granada, Nicaragua. *Tourism Review*, *74*(6), 1179–1190. https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-04-2017-0076

Freudenreich, B., Lüdeke-Freund, F., & Schaltegger, S. (2020). A stakeholder theory perspective on business models: Value creation for sustainability. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *166*, 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04112-z

Freytag, P. V., & Hjalager, A. M. (2021). The coextension of food and tourism business models. *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, *5*(3), 163–175. https://doi.10.3727/216929721X16105303036517

Furnari, S. (2015). A cognitive mapping approach to business models: Representing causal structures and mechanisms. In C. Baden-Fuller & V. Mangematin (Eds.), *Business Models and Modelling* (pp. 207–239). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi: 10.1108/S0742-332220150000033025

Gurung, D. J., Brahma, P., & Goswami, C. (2022). Sustainable luxury tourism: Promises and perils. In A. S. Kotur & S. K. Dixit, S.K. (Eds.), *The Emerald Handbook of Luxury Management for Hospitality and Tourism* (pp. 353–378). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83982-900-020211018

Hall, C. M., & Gössling, S. (2013). *Sustainable culinary systems. Local foods, innovation*. Routledge.

Hall, C. M., & Gössling, S. (2016). *Food tourism and regional development. Networks, products and trajectories*. Routledge.

Henderson, J. C. (2009). Food tourism reviewed. *British Food Journal*, *111*(4), 317–326. https://doi.org/10.1108/00070700910951470

Hjalager, A. M., & Madsen, E. L. (2018). Business model innovation in tourism: Opportunities and challenges. In Cooper, C., Volo, S., Gartner, W. C. & Scott, N. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Tourism Management* (pp. 373–390). Sage.

Huang, Y., Hall, C. M., & Chen, N. C. (2023). The characteristics of Michelin-starred restaurants in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 100673. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100673

Huang, Y., & Hall, C. M. (2023). Locality in the promoted sustainability practices of Michelin-Starred restaurants. *Sustainability*, *15*(4), 3672. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043672

Huang, T. C., Lee, T. J., & Lee, K. H. (2009). Innovative e-commerce model for food tourism products. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *11*(6), 595–600. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.731

Johansen, I. G. (2023). *For å få ned mengden kjøtt vi spiser, må jordbruket omstilles – ikke avvikles (To reduce the amount of meat we eat, agriculture must be restructured – not discontinued)*. ITromsø. https://www.itromso.no/meninger/i/bgoz8v/for-aa-faa-ned-mengden-kjoett-vi-spiser-maa-jordbruket-omstilles-ikke-avvikles

Lee, H. J., & Ko, J. Y. (2022). Culinary capital of Michelin restaurants consumers: A netnographic analysis. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, *51*, 415–423. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.04.011

Madeira, A., Palrão, T., Mendes, A. S., & Ottenbacher, M. C. (2022). The culinary creative process of Michelin Star chefs. *Tourism Recreation Research*, *47*(3), 258–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.1958170

Magdalina, A., & Bouzaima, M. (2021). An empirical investigation of European airline business models: Classification and hybridisation. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, *93*, 102059. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2021.102059

Manniche, J., Larsen, K. T., & Broegaard, R. B. (2021). The circular economy in tourism: Transition perspectives for business and research. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, *21*(3), 247–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2021.1921020

Martins, L. L., Rindova, V. P., & Greenbaum, B. E. (2015). Unlocking the hidden value of concepts: A cognitive approach to business model innovation. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *9*(1), 99–117. https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1191

Mason, K., & Spring, M. (2011). The sites and practices of business models. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *40*(6), 1032–1041. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.032

Menon Economics. (2018). Økonomiske effekter fra reiselivet i Tromsø. Retrieved from: https://www.menon.no/wp-content/uploads/2018-90-%C3%98konomiske-effekter-fra-reiselivet-i-Troms%C3%B8.pdf

Michael, N., & Fusté-Forné, F. (2022). Marketing of luxurious gastronomic experiences on social media: The visual storytelling of luxury hotels. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, *24*(6), 827–838. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2548

Moscardo, G. (2017). Sustainable luxury in hotels and resorts: Is it possible? In M. Gardetti (ed.) *Sustainable Management of Luxury. Environmental Footprints and Eco-design of Products and Processes* (pp. 163–189) Springer.

Mrusek, N., Ottenbacher, M. C., & Harrington, R. J. (2022). The impact of sustainability and leadership on the innovation management of Michelin-starred chefs. *Sustainability*, *14*(1), 330–351. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14010330

OECD. (2021). *Policies for the future of farming and food in Norway*. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/177645e6-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/177645e6-en

Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y., & Tucci, C. L. (2005). Clarifying business models: Origins, present, and future of the concept. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, *16*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.01601

Osterwalder, A., & Pigneur, Y. (2010). *Business model generation: A handbook for visionaries, game changers, and challengers*. John Wiley & Sons.

Perić, M., Vitezić, V., & Badurina, J. D. (2019). Business models for active outdoor sport event tourism experiences. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *32*, 100561. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2019.100561

Podoynitsyna, K., Snihur, Y., Thomas, L. D., & Grégoire, D. A. (2020). Creating meta-narratives: How analogues and metaphors support business model innovation. In K. J. Sund, R. J. Galavan, & M. Bogers (Eds.), *Business models and cognition* (pp. 135–167). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2397-521020200000004007

Poljak Istenič, S, & Fakin Bajec, J. (2021). Luxury food tour: Perspectives and dilemmas on the "luxurification" of local culture in tourism product. *Acta Geographica Slovenica*, *61*(1), 169–184. https://doi.org/10.3986/AGS.8960

Presenza, A., Messeni Petruzzelli, A., & Natalicchio, A. (2019). Business model innovation for sustainability. Highlights from the tourism and hospitality industry. *Sustainability*, *11*(1), 212. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11010212

Regjenringen. (2015). *Food security*. Retrieved from: https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/food-fisheries-and-agriculture/mat/innsikt/matsikkerhet/id2357158/

Reinhold, S., Zach, F. J., & Krizaj, D. (2017). Business models in tourism: A review and research agenda. *Tourism Review*, *72*(4), 462–482. https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-05-2017-0094

Reinhold, S., Beritelli, P., & Grünig, R. (2019a). A business model typology for destination management organizations. *Tourism Review*, *74*(6), 1135–1152. https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-03-2017-0065

Reinhold, S., Zach, F. J., & Krizaj, D. (2019b). Business models in tourism–state of the art. *Tourism Review*, *74*(6), 1120-1134. https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-02-2018-0027

Reinhold, S., Zach, F. J., & Laesser, C. (2020). E-business models in tourism. In Z. Xiang, M. Fuchs, U. Gretzel, & W. Höpken (Eds.), *Handbook of e-Tourism* (pp. 1–30). Springer. https://10.1007/978-3-030-05324-6_71-1

Richards, G. (2002). Gastronomy: An essential ingredient in tourism production and consumption. In A.-M. Hjalager & G. Richards (Eds.), *Tourism and Gastronomy* (pp. 1–18). Routledge.

Roy, N., & Gretzel, U. (2022). Marketing gastronomic tourism experiences as luxury. In A. S. Kotur & S. K. Dixit (Eds.), *The Emerald Handbook of Luxury Management for Hospitality and Tourism* (pp. 183–197). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Sahebalzamani, S., Jørgensen, E. J. B., Bertella, G., & Nilsen, E. R. (2022). A dynamic capabilities approach to business model innovation in times of crisis. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2022.2107560

Schaltegger, S., Hörisch, J., & Freeman, R. E. (2019). Business cases for sustainability: A stakeholder theory perspective. *Organization & Environment*, *32*(3), 191–212. https://10.1177/1086026617722882

Talukdar, N. (2022). Luxury food experiences: A proposition of a conceptual framework for food innovation and well-being. In W. Batat (ed.), *The Rise of Positive Luxury* (pp. 192–213). Routledge.

Teece, D. J. (2010). Business models, business strategy and innovation. *Long Range Planning*, *43*(2–3), 172–194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2009.07.003

Teece, D. J. (2018). Business models and dynamic capabilities. *Long Range Planning*, *51*(1), 40–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2017.06.007

Yeoman, I., & McMahon-Beatte, U. (2016). The future of food tourism. *Journal of Tourism Futures*, *2*(1), 95–98. https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-12-2015-0051

Veland, S., Scoville-Simonds, M., Gram-Hanssen, I., Schorre, A. K., El Khoury, A., Nordbø, M. J., ... & Bjørkan, M. (2018). Narrative matters for sustainability: The transformative role of storytelling in realizing 1.5 C futures. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *31*, 41–47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.12.005

Vulkana Supper Club (n.d.). *Vulkana Supper Club*. Retrieved from: https://www.vulkanasupperclub.com/

Wall, T., Rossetti, L., & Hopkins, S. (2019). Storytelling for sustainable development. In W. Leal Filho (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sustainability in Higher Education* (pp. 1532–1539). Springer. https://doi.10.1007/978-3-030-11352-0

Wirtz, B. W., Pistoia, A., Ullrich, S., & Göttel, V. (2016). Business models: Origin, development and future research perspectives. *Long Range Planning*, 49(1), 36–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2015.04.001